

West Lothian College & West Lothian College Student Association Student Mental Health Agreement 2022-2024

Overview

The Student Association and West Lothian College continue to work in partnership to create a shared vision and commitment to improve Student Mental Health and Wellbeing. This work will be directed by the creation of our Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA).

The SMHA has been created in such a way that this will not only direct the work but bring together all the work that is happening across college to support students, improve their chances to succeed and improve student mental health and wellbeing.

This piece of work is integral to ensure that we are continuing to evaluate the impact of what we already do, introduce projects that support students, react to the everchanging landscape, and provide an opportunity to share best practice nationally and highlight all the excellent work that is already taking place within the College.

Commitment

We recognise that attending college can create many exciting opportunities for students but there can also be challenges along the way. As a result of the global pandemic, economic crisis, and general life pressures, both the College and Student Association recognise that the availability of support services to students is crucial.

As such, we were incredibly keen to continue be involved in the NUS (National Union of Students) Think Positive initiative for 2022-23 and have created a longer-term agreement from 2022-2024, to continue to evaluate existing strategies and develop new ones to support our students.

We have created a partnership group whose sole purpose is to report on Health and Wellbeing activity within the SMHA. We want to ensure that we have at least one member of staff from each faculty, support staff, and the Student Association involved in this group to ensure that a true partnership approach is at the heart of our work.

We are committed to



- Create a definition of a mentally healthy college
- Reduce stigma and discrimination
- Provide training and peer support for students
- Find out about what students need support with within this academic year
- Empower students to look after themselves

We have created five objectives within our SMHA which include:

1. We will define what a mentally healthy college is and what that means for students
2. We will create safe environments for students to access support; we will educate students through events and training opportunities and encourage staff and peer support. We will evaluate and strengthen communication for mental health and wellbeing
3. We will evaluate and strengthen communication for mental health and wellbeing
4. Use student data and demographics to inform our work on supporting mental health and wellbeing
5. Create a central space where all health and wellbeing activities can be reported, evaluated and best practice shared

Reporting progress

We have developed a detailed working action plan as a mechanism to progress these objectives. Specific actions outlined in the action plan will be held by relevant leads across the college.

We will use data analytics, evaluations, and student feedback to evaluate progress. Self-evaluation will take place in May 2023. Future year's SMHA planning process will begin in October 2023 after Elected officers are in post to ensure there is a strong student voice.

Progress will be reported quarterly to the Equality and Widening Access (EWA) Committee.

An annual report on progress including achievement against the success measures will be provided to the EWA Committee, which will also oversee development, monitoring and review, and report progress to the Board.

Objective1

We will define what a mentally healthy college is and what that means for students

- Run Consultation focus groups with staff and students to create an accessible and widely understood definition
- Share this vision through a series of communications and engagement opportunities.
- Work towards making WLC a mentally healthy college by their definition
- Implement suggested feedback from consultation and change practice in relation to student feedback

How we will measure the impact

We will measure the impact by ensuring that the focus groups include cross college students from all faculties. We will ensure that staff from both support and academic areas are able to feedback.

We will combine meanings and gain feedback regarding the final definition with students, staff, student association and senior leadership team.

The definition will be widely shared across social media, MS Teams channels, Plasma screens, physical posters, and leaflets and within the update for students and staff.

Objective2:

We will create safe environments for students to access support; we will educate students through events and training opportunities and encourage peer and professional support.

We want to create safe environments, where all students feel comfortable discussing their mental health and can easily access support services. This means that there needs to be several activities and support on offer to ensure we are meeting the needs of students.

- Ensure there is an appropriately trained Safeguarding Team in line with statutory regulations
- Create safe physical and online spaces this will include a dedicated room which will be used as a mindful space for students called Headspace. Our student counselling service will have a dedicated room in the main building, which is accessible and not on full view for all students. Online safe spaces will be created on the Student Association Teams channel for LGBT club and Break and a Blether.
- Create spaces for students to feel part of a student community, have fun and provide peer support which include games and activities
- Create several in person and online events and campaigns throughout the year. Some of these will be student led by our Student Association Team which includes our Executive Officers and Ambassadors. Others will be led by staff and lecturers for class activities, ensuring that students are always at the centre of every activity.
- Offer training and courses to students which will include WRAP (wellness recovery action plan), Student Mental Health First Aid and others to encourage peer support
- Work in Partnership with external partners such as See Me to develop campaigns and events to challenge stigma, celebrate diversity, educate students, and offer support

- Dedicate diverse Student Support team available throughout the year, 5 days a week when the college is open, offering support with both practical and emotional support
- Offer Student Counselling service where students can self-refer, by email, or through a member of staff. Up to 6 sessions will be provided for students, free of charge to support students
- Launch Student clubs and activities to encourage peer support, create a sense of community and encourage cross college activity.
- Evaluate current resources and provision
- Signpost to external supports which include [Think Positive Website](#), [Nightline Listening Service](#), Children 1st, Action for Children, Citizens Advice Bureau Recharge resources and others.

How we will measure the impact

We will measure the impact in several ways which will include evaluating the number of students accessing services, evaluation of services (pre and post evaluations), engagement in clubs, usage of physical spaces, data and analytics from online spaces and the outcome from the Education Scotland review relating to Safeguarding.

Objective 3:

We will evaluate and strengthen communication for mental health and wellbeing

Due to the introduction of blended and remote learning for students during the pandemic, we felt it was more important than ever that the College and SA (Student Association) were visible and available for our students.

Initially, the aim of this was to tackle feelings of isolation or loneliness due to the increase in working from home; create a social space and develop an active and aware student community. Due to the success and engagement of these channels the Student Association have continued to use these channels as an important and accessible method to communicate. However, in person methods of communication are recognised to be an integral method too.

Other communication that will be used going forward include:

- Moodle
- Plasma Screens
- Posters
- Toilet Doors
- Website
- Social Media
- Teams Channels

We will review previous mental health and wellbeing communications, listen to Students, and establish what methods are preferred.

We will evaluate methods of how we communicate for example, text, video, and other methods.

We will ensure that the accessibility of our methods is considered, and the sensitive nature of the messages are reflected on to ensure students are supported.

How we will measure the impact

We will measure the impact by evaluating the analytics and data, and monitor interaction and feedback from Teams, Website, Moodle, social media.

Data on the number of students who access these channels allows us to evaluate if they are active and effective.

Objective 4

Use student data and demographics to inform our work on supporting mental health and wellbeing

Students will be offered the opportunity to complete a WEMWEB evaluative tool at enrolment stage to establish how they feel about coming to college and provide an opportunity to disclose information about their health and wellbeing.

We will use WEMWEBS data collected at enrolment using the College Power Bi system, to evaluate student demographics, intersectionality and establish student mental health. This will provide data and inform decisions and support provision and activities available to support students

We will use PowerBi our data analytics system to compare results between declared mental health and WEMWEBS declarations

Other data gathered can include equalities data, care experienced, carers through enrolment data gathering which is stored on the College Power Bi system.

Evaluate the effectiveness of other's events and activities to share best practice and learn from one another

A training session will be available for Student Association team to understand Power Bi and how to use data to inform choices.

The Student Association is at the heart of the College and a lot of informal and formal day to day discussions help to enable a plan of activities. This includes more formal meetings such as the Equalities and Widening Access Committee, Board of Governors meetings, Health and Wellbeing working group, as well as more informal

partnerships. These include staff signposting students to the Student Association for poverty or health related support, ensuring students have an accessible way to communicate with the Student Association and share ideas, comments or thoughts and informally have an opportunity to speak to staff and student association team members.

How we will measure the Impact

We will use WEMWEBS data collected at enrolment to evaluate student health and wellbeing we will also use equality data to establish our student demographics and intersectionality of these demographics to establish student mental health and compare results from previous years. We can use this data to establish trends and understand the needs of our students to inform variation of activity if required. In addition to internal data, we also consider local and national data to inform our decisions.

The College and Student Association will work in partnership to obtain this information and understand what the data means and what can be proposed to support these students, if needed.

Objective 5

Create a central space where all health and wellbeing activities can be reported, evaluated and best practice shared

We have created a Student Health and Wellbeing group which includes staff from all four faculty areas, support staff and Student Association officers

- Computing, Engineering and Built Environment representation
- Assisted Programmes, ESOL, Employability, Schools and The Trust Project representation
- Business, Creative and Enterprise representation
- Care, Health, and Sport representation
- Student Support Manager
- Student Association President and Development Officer
- Learning Assistant- Gym
- Equalities and Widening Access Officer

The aim is for this cross-college group is to feedback to their teams and report on any activity that is taking place within their areas. In addition, it is a way that as a group we can discuss the objectives, share ideas, and best practice, to bring all Health and Wellbeing activity together in one place.

How we will measure the Impact

This information will be measured by achieving objectives and actions within the SMHA which will be reported to the Equalities and Widening Access EWA Committee.

We will measure the impact by evaluating the use of folders from faculties, support areas and the Student Association and establish what best practice has been shared across the college.

We will gather feedback one/twice a year from those who sit on the group to help highlight the impact the group is having, what is working well and what could be developed further.

Our Student Presidents are part of the Student and Staff Health and Wellbeing group and sit as Equality and Widening Access committee members. The Student Association Presidents will meet regularly with the Executive Officer for Health and Wellbeing and Ambassadors to ensure that students are integral to shaping this work

Conclusion

The Student Association and West Lothian College continue to work in partnership to create a shared vision and commitment to improve Student Mental Health and Wellbeing.

The SMHA objectives have been established focusing on external research, which includes the research commissioned by Think Positive, internal research and feedback from both staff and students.

Research commissioned by Think Positive, an NUS Scotland project funded by the Scottish Government, included a student survey of over 3,000 college and university students in Scotland, alongside in-depth analysis of the mental health and wellbeing services of eight case-study institutions across Scotland.

Findings of the research included:


- Almost half of students surveyed (49.9%) cited lack of money or financial pressures as negatively impacting on their mental health
- Students are most likely to have concerns about mental health at the start of their studies with 72% citing their first year of study as a time when they had concerns about their mental health and wellbeing
- Students cited a range of factors associated with study as impacting negatively on their mental health: almost half (48.7%) cited coping with course workload
- Of those students surveyed who used a support service, institutional or external (e.g., NHS or third sector), more than half of respondents (59.6%) had to wait to access the support they needed. For those students who had to wait just over half (53.8%) waited more than a month, and 20.8% waited more than three months
- Institutions that took part in the research reported the practice of 'backfilling' NHS services because of under-capacity in the health service


- Around four times as many higher education (78.4%-81%) than further education students (19%-21.6%) were aware of mental health and wellbeing support available to them.

Recommendations in the report include:

- Consideration given to further improvements that could be made to student cost-of-living support, especially in the context of Covid-19
- Consideration given to ensuring equity of access to counselling services among all students, so that no student is disadvantaged because of the institution they attend
- Steps to improve waiting times for NHS mental health services, and action to reduce the difficulties students experience in accessing them
- Embed mental health and wellbeing in learning and teaching practice and curriculum designed, alongside the availability of training for teaching and student-facing staff
- Alignment of student mental health strategies with Student Mental Health Agreements (SMHAs)

West Lothian College and West Lothian College Student Association have considered the importance of data and external research and created this agreement in such a way that this will not only direct the work but ensure students health and wellbeing are at the forefront of our culture, to improve wellness and increase chances and opportunities to holistically succeed.

Signed: 
Name: KARINE BOURDARIAS
Position: Student Association President
Date: 15/12/22

Signed: 
Name: JACKIE GALBRAITH
Position: Principal and Chief Executive
Date: 15/12/22