

Student Mental Health Agreement

2022-2024

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Overview

Since 2018 both the College and the Student Association have been committed to supporting student mental health by working with Think Positive to create our Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA). Each year we work together to identify the concerns that could impact on student mental health and look at ways to combat the effects, such as student poverty. This document outlines what activities and impact these initiatives have had and what we hope to achieve in Academic Years 2022-2024. This SMHA will remain active until a new SMHA is created.

For further details on the College's commitment to supporting student mental health, visit our dedicated webpage by clicking [here](#). This webpage also provides links to important documents such as the College's Mental Health Strategy and Supported Pathways to Wellness.

Commitment

At SLC, we know that starting college can be an exciting time, but it can also be challenging. There are many external events that can impact on a student's time at college, such as the cost-of-living crisis, the pandemic or other personal life circumstances. College can play a key role in supporting students to access mental health resources, as well as create opportunities for dialogue to break down the stigma surrounding mental health. As such, we are proud to be involved in the NUS Think Positive initiative for 2022/24 to review and build upon our existing mental health support strategies.

By talking openly about mental health and promoting strategies surrounding positive mental health, we hope to create an environment where all students feel comfortable discussing their mental health and can easily access the College's support services.

Student support services within the College include the following:

- ✓ Free student counselling. Further details are available by clicking [here](#).
- ✓ Weekly mindfulness classes
- ✓ Free weekly yoga classes
- ✓ One to one support from Student Services and Guidance Tutors
- ✓ Student Association support available in-person or by emailing studentassociation@slc.ac.uk
- ✓ Dedicated Student Support email at student.support@slc.ac.uk
- ✓ Student Teams page for various activities. Click [here](#) to join our SLC Student Health and Wellbeing group
- ✓ Report and Support software available to report a mental health concern or other wellbeing matter. Visit the webpage by clicking [here](#).

Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiatives

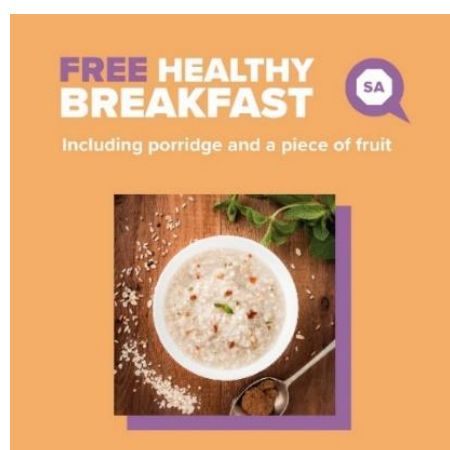
1. Tackling Student Poverty

Free Soup & Sandwich Initiative

As highlighted in the NUS research paper, 'Broke: How Scotland is failing its students', "a third of students (35%) have considered dropping out of their course due to financial difficulties." And "around two thirds (64% have experienced mental ill-health as a result of financial pressures..."¹. The link between student poverty and mental health has never been clearer than during the current cost of living crisis. As such, the College and SA have had the priority of tackling student poverty for several years. One initiative that was launched was the SA and the College providing our students with free soup and a sandwich at lunchtimes.



Following positive student feedback, we have expanded promotion of the service to include free breakfasts in 2023, as well as increasing the provision of both offerings to two times per week. We have provided more regular signposting on social media, as well as displaying the dates on the large video screen in the Atrium. Additionally, the SA team have created monthly posters which outline the various dates that soup and sandwich and breakfasts are available. These posters are shared on the channels mentioned above, as well as physical posters being displayed outside the SA office and main public areas.



The SA has also successfully applied for two allocations of additional funding from the SLC Foundation to allow us to expand provision to two times per week for both breakfast and soup/sandwich. Provision takes place on different days each week on a rotational basis, thereby allowing as many students as possible to have access to a healthy breakfast and healthy, free lunch. Commitment has also been provided by the SLC Foundation to cover the start of AY 2023/24.

¹ <https://www.nus-scotland.org.uk/alarms-research-on-student-poverty>

Alongside this provision, we launched a SA Food Larder that students can access anytime they are on campus. Located in the SA office, the Student Larder was established solely for students and launched as part of Christmas Jumper week, with generous donations being provided across the College from staff and students alike. No application forms are required so students can access it without any barriers or embarrassment. Sustainable SLC bags are also provided for students to use and help provide discretion for anyone who wishes to use them. It was agreed that the Larder would continue for the remainder of AY 2022/23 due to the ongoing cost of living crisis and acute impact this was having on students. The Larder has been well received with students regularly visiting the office to access food and toiletries. We would be keen for this service to continue into AY 2023/24



We promote this service via SA Student News4U, as well as social media and continue to receive donations from both staff and students. Additional funding of £500 has allowed us to continue to top-up the products available for students to collect. The feedback of this services has been overwhelmingly positive, and we aim to continue to provide it for as long as it is required.

Measures of Success

- By working in partnership with Inspire Catering we have been able to provide over 4,120 servings of soup and sandwich and 8,178 servings of breakfast to date in academic year 2022/23. Further funding is available for the start of 2023/24.
- The Student Association collated the following student testimonials:
 - *“I think the free soup and sandwich and the breakfast is a great idea, it is a massive help. Money is tight for all students, especially being a mature learner buying breakfast and lunch is too expensive every day. It is a struggle having enough time to make breakfast before coming out as I am getting my daughter sorted for school whilst getting ready myself and taking her to school before coming to college, so the days the free breakfast is on is great as I know I don't need to worry about trying to grab breakfast before I go or going without and having to decide between lunch or breakfast. It is also the same for the soup and sandwich as I don't then need to spend time making lunch the night before, which relieves stress and money worries.”*
 - *“Free soup and a sandwich helped me out when I was not able to buy anything from the cafe”*
 - *“Many students struggle with funds here at South Lanarkshire College and the food larder provides students with food and essentials. During my break and lunch, I have been able to comfortably use the food larder*

without feeling any stigma, the food larder also includes a variety of different foods and snacks including vegan options and more”.

- *“I think the food larder is a great way for students to feel comfortable with getting something to eat while not being able to afford lunch money. Or even forgetting money or packed lunch, it's a good way to help give that energy boost during the days of college.”*
- *“The food larder has helped me multiple times when I have forgot my lunch or money for the cafe, I am very comfortable using the food larder as it is located in an office out the way from everything else and the college provide bags so I can walk home without everyone being able to see what I have took.”*

Job Vacancy Advertisements

Promoting part-time job opportunities for students continues to be a priority, both to tackle student poverty and add experience and skills to a student’s CV. These adverts take place on the Student Wellbeing Teams page and are regularly signposted via the Student Newsletter. We highlight the importance of meeting new people who could help with employment opportunities in the future or provide a reference, as well as how temporary employment can sometimes lead to permanent posts. Alongside this we direct students to the My World of Work SDS website and advise students to make an appointment with the SDS Careers Advisor within the College for further guidance. Finally, we provide links to different sector opportunities, such as Christmas temporary posts, hospitality work, delivery opportunities and retail posts, including vacancies at the local shopping centre.

The SA also works very closely with the Student Services team to raise awareness that the Student Services team are there to assist with financial support and guidance whilst looking for job opportunities or awaiting funding. This includes providing support via bursary, discretionary and crisis funds as needed. We also signpost students to external advice agencies such as Citizens Advice, Money Matters and Home Energy Scotland. Alongside this we promote Money Matters free online webinars for students to access directly.

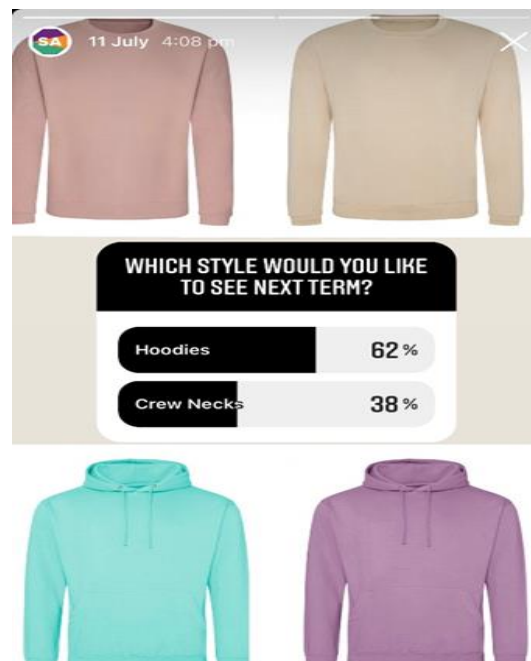
Measures of Success

- Consistent and ongoing posting of part-time job vacancies by the Student Services and SA team with positive interactions on these posts by students.
- Increase partnership working opportunities through local businesses and charities who frequently contact the Student Services team to highlight volunteering/job opportunities that specifically match student skills, i.e., events organising, hospitality, photography.

College Hoodies

Affordability for students is important and having access to high quality warm clothing is something the College and SA provide through our College Hoodies initiative. As in previous years, the SA provide high-quality hoodies from a local supplier at the low subsidised cost of only £5 for students. For 2022/23, the SA decided to include new hoodies, based on student opinion. They posted a question on social media channels about what students would prefer and they decided to change colours. As a result, they chose peppermint, nude, rose and black. They also asked if they would prefer a hoodie or crew necks, students voted for zipless hoodies, and this is what was ordered.

The SA held another stall promoting the older style of hoodies during the cold weather with most of them selling out nearly instantly! Due to the cost-of-living crisis they decided to sell these at a more reduced cost of £3 per hoodie and students were glad of the opportunity to purchase the garments.



Measures of Success

- Sold over 80 zipper hoodies from our previous year's stock at the new price of only £3.
- Current allocation of new hoodies sold out in first half of academic year.
- Empowering the student voice by engaging them in the purchasing process and creating ownership of the product. Students regularly wearing hoodies to college which increased demand of item and reduced stigma of low-price, high-quality clothing.
- Close working partnership with local supplier to encourage sustainability and investment in local community.
- Ability to continue to provide this service in AY 2023/24, depending on costs. Ongoing partnership working with the student voice to ensure garments are created in co-operation.

2. Peer Support through Games & Activities

A priority for the SA is to work in partnership with the College to create a feeling of community for all students and encourage engagement, particularly as we continue to move forward from the pandemic. The last couple of years have had a real impact on engagement, which in turn can impact confidence levels and increase feelings of anxiety within new settings. To address these issues, we focus on creating peer support through various activities and events, as outlined below:

Creating a Supportive College Environment

The Student Association and 12 student volunteers went along to the ESOL Christmas Party. We embraced all cultures from music, food, and dancing. This was a great opportunity for all. The aim of the event was to help the ESOL students' progress their language skills. We now have some ESOL students wanting to help the SA with their events. One student had commented that in doing this it has helped him progress his English skills. We would look to continue this partnership working between the SA and our ESOL classes going forward.



With new students joining each January, the SA want to be more visible by hosting fun games and activities on the third floor. Students are able to meet with the SA and their peers, resulting in new friendships being created and increased confidence.



Measures of Success

- Engagement with student volunteers and creating awareness of SA and different support networks. SA to continue this engagement work in AY 2023/24.
- Recruitment of student volunteers to work with the SA to improve students' skills.
- Highlight the values of the College of inclusiveness and diversity.
- Games and activities continuing without the organisation of the SA and being peer led by students themselves.

Festive Closure Support

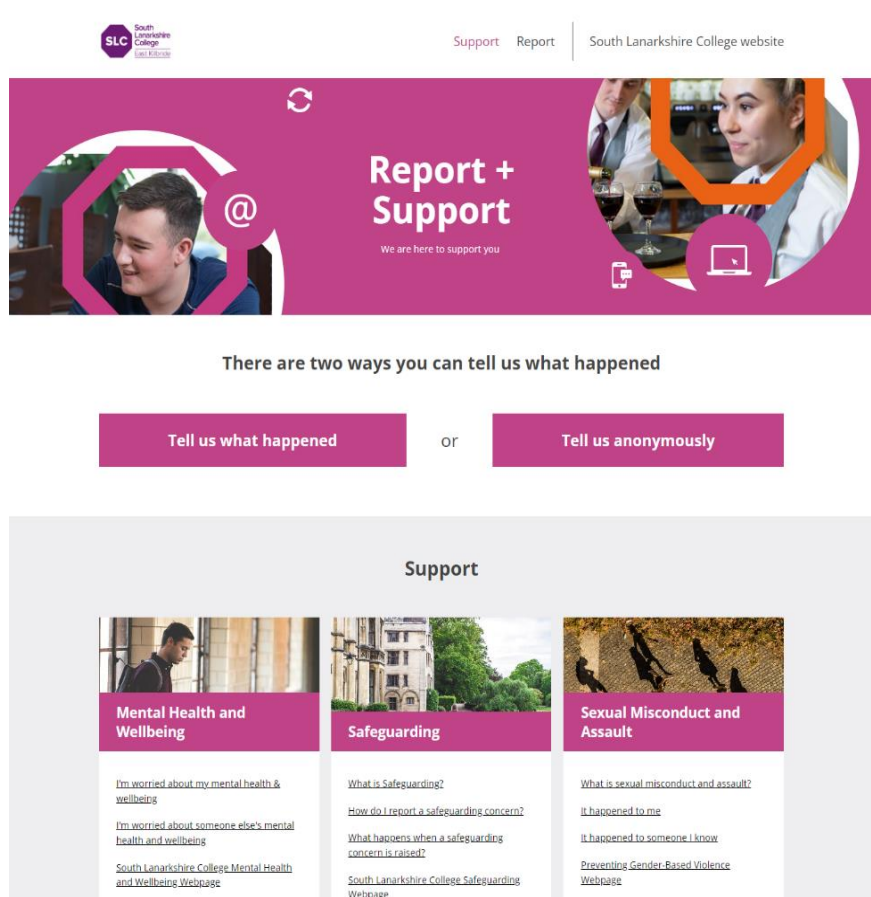
Over the festive holidays, we are keen to highlight to students that we appreciate the festive period can be a challenging time for some and to reiterate that student wellbeing is a key priority for both the SA and the College throughout. For AY 2022/23 We created a tailored student newsletter highlighting the support that is available within the local community over the holidays. This practice will be repeated going forward.

Links were provided to the dedicated support webpage, as well as signposting to online support such as Togetherall and other community contacts. This was sent to all students and highlighted on social media.

<https://www.slc.ac.uk/more/news-and-events/festive-support/>

Launch of Report & Support

In March 2023, the College launched a new reporting system for all students to access via the Student Portal. Report and Support, created by CultureShift, allows students to report a mental health and wellbeing concern, amongst other things, to a member of college staff. They can do this either anonymously or by leaving contact details for a member of the team to contact them. Alongside the Reporting webpage, there are various support sections that students can access. These pages highlight the support available at college, as well as signposting to external agencies. We will be continuing to launch and promote Report and Support, with a focus on the new academic year to re-launch for all staff and students.



Partnership Working

Throughout academic year 2022/23, the SA and the College have worked closely to create partnership and volunteering opportunities for our students to build engagement and foster confidence. Below are some examples of the events that have taken place:

Step Into STEM – October 2022

SLC hosted the Step into STEM event on Wednesday 12th October 2022, in partnership with DYW. This event saw over 150 secondary school pupils visit the campus to learn more about the STEM subjects that are taught at the College. As part of the event, 26 students volunteered as STEM Ambassadors along with the SA to welcome the pupils to the campus. This was a great opportunity for our students to learn more about STEM subjects and careers, as well as work together and represent the College. We organised a Thank You ceremony for all the Student Ambassadors to celebrate the excellent work they were involved in.



16 Days of Action against GBV

Each year the College and SA take part in the national 16 Days of Action campaign to tackle GBV. Working closely together, the SA and student volunteers hosted a stall in the Ground Floor Atrium and gave away free personal alarms and anti-spiking items to raise awareness of the national campaign. We also hosted a drop-in ‘Coffee, Cake and Chat’ event for students who wanted to learn more about the support available at the College and in the local community. The mental health impact of events such as this is important as it creates peer support networks and encourages talking about wider activities and issues, such as GBV. By students being able to volunteer at events such as this and host information stalls then it creates opportunities for discussion and confidence building.



LGBT History Month - Coffee, Cake, and Chat mornings



Following the success of the 16 Days of Action events, the College and SA agreed to host more Coffee and Chat events for students. Working in partnership with our Hospitality team, the Student Services team and SA arranged two of these events with Hospitality students serving tea, coffee, and cake to students on campus in The Study restaurant. Again, both events were a great success with student volunteers and Student Services staff in attendance to provide information and advice as needed.

Step into Future Careers & International Women's Day – 8 March 2023

Our SA Student Ambassadors once again were involved in welcoming visitors and employers to the Step into Future Careers event held at the College. They had the opportunity to take tours around the Low Carbon House to showcase the sustainable technologies and skills available to learn at the College. They also had the opportunity to meet with employers for their own future careers. After the event we arranged a thank you session for the students and gave them each a certificate for volunteering.



Alongside this, the College also celebrated International Women's Day with student volunteers handing out positive messages to staff across the College, celebrating the amazing work they do!

Measures of success

- Providing co-creation opportunities for students, such as the events outlined above, has fostered inclusive and supportive environments that students can thrive in. It helps boost confidence skills with feedback being provided as follows:
 - *"..I wanted to say thank you very much for letting me take place in the Open Evening time, it gave me a lot of confidence and helped me make new friends as well."*

- *“After struggling with my confidence for so long this has been a major confidence boost for me! This isn’t something I would normally do or take part in. However, I have taken part in two so far and I will continue to do small things like this to boost my confidence.”*
- Since starting the new term we have seen a huge increase in social media interaction over Facebook and Instagram in particular, with our Instagram reach now at 22,093! We have also launched a new TikTok channel to increase engagement with all student demographics. The engagement we are receiving over the different social media channels has been incredibly positive. This type of engagement is an area we will continue to grow.
- The events all listed above are repeated on an annual basis and we will continue to engage with them all, with a view to increasing engagement with the student community.

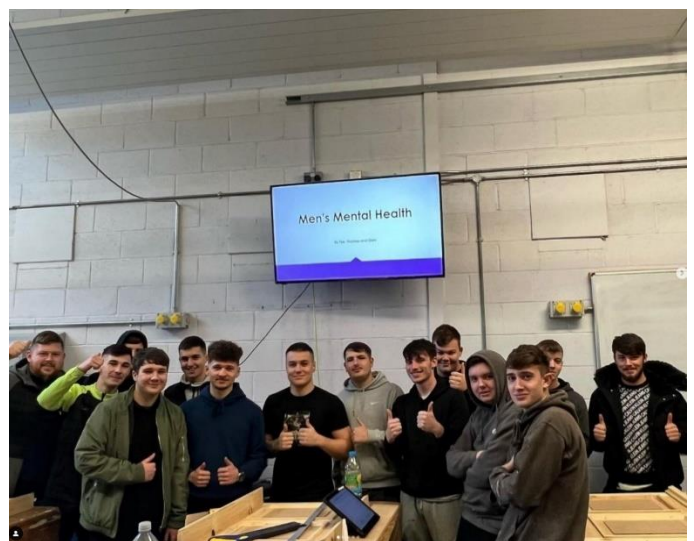
3. Supporting Men’s Mental Health

Promoting and supporting men’s mental health has always been important to the College and the Student Association. During academic year 2022/23, the following activities took place, and we will look to continue and build on these going into the next academic year and beyond.

Student Class Presentations

As highlighted by the student presentations on men’s mental health there continues to be a stigma surrounding discussing feelings and accessing support services for poor mental health. A study carried out by the Samaritans found that 75% of all suicides are carried out by men.²

To tackle this stigma, our Student Officers and volunteers created their own men’s mental health Powerpoint and spoke with 25 class groups to talk about this. They highlighted the reasons why it’s important to talk, as well as the support available and suggested activities such as exercise, eating healthy, socialising, etc. They talked about how it’s important to normalise asking for help, seeking therapy, prioritising self-care, sharing feelings, and making mistakes.



² https://media.samaritans.org/documents/Suicide_Stats_Scotland_2021_WEB.pdf

The students really engaged with the Student Officers and were interested in learning more about coping mechanisms. As a result, many of the students visited have asked for support details and have been directed to our student services department.

Movember

Alongside the important work carried out by our students, the College and SA are always keen to promote Movember throughout the month of November to highlight the mental health and wellbeing support available to students.

During 2022/23, we promoted Movember and their partnership with Togetherall. Going forward we will continue to highlight the annual Movember campaign and will continue to use social media channels and the newsletter to raise awareness of men's physical and mental health.

**2/5 MEN
ADMIT TO
FEELING LOW
OR WORRIED,
REGULARLY**



Resilience Workshops

During 2020 our Counselling and Wellbeing team created Covid Resilience Workshops for delivering to students. During AY 2021/22, the workshops were rebranded as Stress and Resilience workshop to highlight the changing situation coming out of the pandemic. These hour-long workshops were designed to address the shared anxieties around coping with college education and suggested ways to cope, develop and maintain self-compassion, as well as increase resilience whilst attending a course.

An additional benefit of this class is that it breaks down the barriers of accessing mental health support services by introducing the Counselling and Wellbeing Team in an informal manner and creating opportunities for engagement. It also continues to break down the stigma of discussing mental health in different environments.

Measures of success

- Statistics for AY 2022/23 will be collated soon; however, we have seen a positive trend in recent years of more male students accessing support. As recorded in our Annual Counselling Report, the ratio of female to male students seeking support has shifted from approximately 3.1/1 to 2.4/1. It is noted that women are generally three times more likely to seek mental health support than men, so this increase is a great success. We will review our most recent statistics for the current and forthcoming academic years to monitor if this positive trend continues.

- Our Stress and Resilience workshops were delivered to 39 individual student classes at the start of term, with an increase in the delivery to our Construction classes. More workshops will be scheduled for AY 2023/24.
- Increased engagement with the SA from our Construction classes to participate in open events, games, and activities.
- Our Student Officers and volunteers spoke with 25 class groups about men's mental health. Directly from these visits we have had male students speak with the volunteers and SA directly to request support and signposting to Student Services. We also saw an uptake in student volunteers joining our Student Officers to raise awareness of mental health.

If you require any further details about any of the above support services then please email studentassociation@slc.ac.uk or student.support@slc.ac.uk.

Signed by:

Stella McManus
Principal & CEO

Rahela Calin
SA President

Date Signed: 12/12/2023