



Student Mental Health Agreement

May 2024 - June 2026



Student Mental Health Agreement

As part of the Scottish Funding Council's outcome agreements, all colleges and universities are advised to create an agreement in partnership with their Students' Associations that commits both parties to supporting student mental health and wellbeing. Think Positive, a project from NUS Scotland, is leading an initiative backed by the Scottish Government to encourage Further and Higher Educational Establishments in Scotland to sign up to the Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA).

Edinburgh College and its Students' Association have signed up to this agreement previously, but not this academic session. There has been some positive partnership working in the past and both parties have agreed that the aim of the SMHA this year should be to embed this partnership working further. This includes focusing on working together around the area of mental health and creating a College environment that supports community building across each of our campuses.

The aim of the SMHA is to bring together the good work that is taking place across the College and to make this information available to staff and students. Student Experience and EC Students' Association will work together to evidence the good quality activity taking place and identify areas for exploration and action. This year, we have streamlined the SMHA into five pledges, around which the College and EC Students' Association will evidence good practice. The five pledges will also allow the partnership to engage with students in a simplified manner, to ensure we are working on the areas where students are most in need of support.

This work will be driven forward by two leads, Craig Hughes, Safeguarding & Welfare Lead (Edinburgh College) and Genevieve Fay, Representation & Impact Coordinator (EC Students' Association). There is also a wider group of colleagues supporting this activity through the SMHA Working Group which is chaired by the Assistant Principal Student Experience. Nationally, Think Positive provide the leads institution specific support and there is also an SMHA Forum that all institutions can attend.

The SMHA provides both the College and EC Students' Association with an opportunity to work collaboratively to support the mental health needs of our students. The partnership provides information and evidence that allows the College to make informed decision making about mental health provision. The SMHA is also an opportunity to evidence the good quality work that is going on across the College, and in every team, around the mental health and wellbeing of students.

Timescale

- Planning: June 2023 to March 2024
- Presented to SMT in April 2024
- Launch May 2024
- Active May 2024 to June 2026

Leadership

Student Mental Health Agreement (SMAH) Steering Group

- Chair: Anna Vogt – Assistant Principal Student Experience
- College SMHA Lead: Craig Hughes – Safeguarding & Welfare Lead
- EC Students' Association SMHA Lead: Genevieve Fay – Representation & Impact Coordinator

Research Sources

- Think Positive Resource Hub
- College Student Satisfaction Survey 2023
- College Induction Survey 2023
- Class Rep Feedback 2023
- Previous EC Students' Association & Wellbeing Team research

Student Mental Health Agreement

Our Five Pledges

1) Promotion & Prevention

We pledge to provide information to all students about the resources available to support with their mental health and wellbeing. By raising awareness through proactive promotion, we hope to increase our chances of intervening early, whenever students feel their mental health is not good.

2) Direct Mental Health Support

We pledge to provide direct mental health support for those in need, including tailored support to priority groups of students, based on their backgrounds, experiences and needs.

3) Spaces & Places

We pledge to enhance the provision of physical places on campus and safe spaces such as groups and societies, where students can connect with each other socially to enhance their wellbeing.

4) Training & Knowledge Exchange

We pledge to create an open, inclusive and supportive community of both staff and students, sharing best practice, knowledge, and resources around Mental Health and Wellbeing.

5) Student & Staff Shared Activities

We pledge to create opportunities for both students and staff to be involved in; fostering an environment of mutual respect and making Edinburgh College a supportive environment for students' mental wellbeing.

Promotion & Prevention

We pledge to provide information to all students about the resources available to support with their mental health and wellbeing. By raising awareness through proactive promotion, we hope to increase our chances of intervening early, whenever students feel their mental health is not good.

Promotion and prevention are a key focus area because they are all about signposting the resources and support that is available to all Edinburgh College students, but that not everyone is necessarily aware of. Making sure students know how to access this support and making that information as accessible as possible, using multiple communications techniques and platforms, is the first step towards breaking down barriers, and encouraging students to seek support when they need it.

As part of this pledge, we will:

- Deliver multiple Wellbeing Fairs held throughout the academic year at each campus and Mental Health & Self Care stalls taking place on campus each semester. These include the College and the Students' Association working together, to promote the mental health and wellbeing support that is available for students on campus and online. For our Wellbeing Fairs, we aim to invite external partners along who can support students with a variety of issues. These external partners range from nationwide charities such as Nightline and Samaritans, to small, hyper-local charities that are rooted in the communities each of our campuses serve.
- Continue to distribute our monthly Wellbeing newsletter that includes activities, events, wellbeing support, and crisis contacts. These will be sent out to every student who accesses the Wellbeing Service and any who opt in.
- Deliver various Wellbeing Workshops throughout the academic year (Five Ways to Wellbeing; Born To Run; Benefits of Time Spent in Nature, etc.)

- Create new Wellbeing activities to be available at each campus on a weekly basis such as Podcast Club, Music Club, Walk and Talk, Painting Group, Lego and Board Games, Rap Writing and Beat Making.
- Increase participation in physical activity through our Active Campus Coordinator. The Active Campus Coordinator will initially focus on our English for Speakers of Other Languages department, the Milton Road Halls of Residence, and our Midlothian campus; with an emphasis on providing a positive and accessible link to physical activity for those who are currently inactive or lack confidence in getting started with exercise.
- Continue to advertise our Wellbeing & Counselling services on campus via a large-scale QR code poster and business card campaign.
- Ensure The Wellbeing Hub, with external resources and support, continues to be easily accessible via a link through the My EC app/desktop page and Microsoft Teams Student Services Hub.
- Run Mental Health publicity campaigns, e.g. during Mental Health Awareness Week and World Mental Health Day.
- Continue to embed Wellbeing Wednesdays on the College's social media channels.
- Ensure our Wellbeing Essentials Guide is available online and at induction.

We will measure the success of these interventions by monitoring the usage and attendance of each service, carrying out student surveys and speaking to Class Reps to receive qualitative analysis on the services offered. We will also analyse click-through stats from student newsletters and WordPress stats for the Wellbeing Hub, to see how successful different modes of communication are for promotion.

Direct Mental Health Support

We pledge to provide direct mental health support for those in need, including tailored support to priority groups of students, based on their backgrounds, experiences and needs.

The provision of direct mental health support is a fundamental aspect of our Student Mental Health Agreement. We have a Wellbeing Team which is dedicated to supporting students across all four campuses through activities such as wellbeing one-to-ones, counselling and group workshops. The team also offer Therapet sessions, enrichment activities and a fully embedded safeguarding process. We also provide tailored support to priority groups of vulnerable students and have positive relationships with external partner services.

As part of this pledge, we will:

- Continue to deliver our Counselling Service
- Continue to provide a wide range of support services both on course and on campus, including:
 - Wellbeing one-to-ones
 - An up to date Wellbeing Hub on MS Teams
 - Regular Wellbeing activities and events
 - Signposting to external services such as NHS Services, Penumbra, Rape Crisis, Beira's Place, Rock Trust, Andy's Man Club and Edinburgh Women's Aid
 - Provide access and encouragement for physical activity through the Wellbeing Team's Active Campus Coordinator
 - Provide in-depth support for Care Experienced or vulnerable students through our STAY Project Support Worker
- Ensure that Learning Development Tutors continue to support students and signpost them to relevant mental health and wellbeing resources and information.

- Ensure our robust Safeguarding process remains in place, and that all staff are fully trained and aware of our safeguarding procedures and flowchart through Continuing Professional Development.
- Continue to provide tailored support for priority groups of vulnerable students, e.g. Care Experienced, Young Carers, Unaccompanied Young People, Estranged and Veteran students.
- Develop a better understanding of the specific needs of ESOL and International students and groups and explore opportunities for a more tailored support offer.

To measure the success of this pledge we will continue to monitor the usage of our direct mental health support services, and where relevant, ask for feedback from students once they have used the service. While gaining direct feedback from students who use our wellbeing services can be difficult to obtain (particularly for short-contact 'pop-up' activities), we are keen to explore ways other colleges and universities track their success in these areas and hope to embed different feedback-gathering mechanisms going forward, e.g. follow-up appointments.

Spaces & Places

We pledge to enhance the provision of physical places on campus and safe spaces such as groups and societies, where students can connect with each other socially to enhance their wellbeing.

Recent research in this area, including from discussions with Class Reps, shows that students feel that the facilities available to them play a huge part in their sense of belonging and their general wellbeing on campus. Currently, while our facilities for learning, such as classrooms, computer rooms and libraries tend to be rated highly by students, there is scope for improvement in the social spaces. Even small adjustments to the design of spaces, such as introducing comfortable seating and warmer lighting, can help spaces feel more welcoming for students.

The alternative spaces we provide, such as quiet rooms and prayer rooms, also tie into our Equality Outcomes, as they can make a huge difference on whether students with different protected characteristics feel safe and welcome at Edinburgh College. The same applies to different activities and clubs being provided for a range of students, so that Edinburgh College can be a place where students make strong connections with others, which in turn helps to counter loneliness and isolation.

As part of this pledge, we will:

- Enhance the Quiet Rooms provided on campus. We aim to bring the Quiet Rooms at every campus up to the standard of our Sighthill campus Quiet Room, by arranging for alternative accommodation if necessary. We also aim to ensure these spaces are protected for their intended use as they can be a valuable resource for any of our students who are feeling overwhelmed but also our neurodivergent students or those experiencing anxiety on campus.
- Continue to deliver Therapet sessions on campus. Therapets are a volunteer-led organisation who bring therapy dogs on to campus to meet our students. Sessions with the Therapets can be beneficial for student wellbeing, particularly around stressful times of the year.

- Continue to run support groups for particular student groups, such as Young Carers, LGBT+ Society, and look to establish further peer support groups e.g. for autistic students and student parents
- Provide further quiet on-campus activities (e.g. Lego, board games etc).
- Develop opportunities for students to get involved with our on-campus community gardens at Milton Road and Sighthill. Develop a link between the Halls of Residence students and the community garden at Milton Road.
- Conduct a review of campus indoor and outdoor public spaces through a wellbeing and community building lens, researching under-utilised areas on campus which could be converted into comfortable areas for small groups to relax and socialise quietly.
- Increase student awareness of local areas to walk or enjoy nature at each campus during break times, publicising through the College's social media, and Wellbeing newsletters.

To measure the success of this pledge we will: continue to ask our Class Reps for feedback on facilities, identifying problem areas and working in partnership to fix issues as they arise. We will monitor usage of the enhanced spaces (e.g. quiet rooms) and gather feedback from the users, we will monitor the student participation in quiet on-campus activities such as societies, support groups, Therapet sessions and community garden activities to see if they are being well utilised.

Collecting feedback through short surveys, and inviting our participating students to take part in focus groups will also be a key way to see if they believe the spaces provided have improved over time.

Training & Knowledge Exchange

We pledge to create an open, inclusive and supportive community of both staff and students, sharing best practice, knowledge, and resources around Mental Health and Wellbeing.

This aim, to build a supportive community where knowledge and best practice is shared and celebrated, ties directly into Edinburgh College's strategic aim to 'Invest in Our People'. Part of creating that inspirational environment is allowing for both staff and students to learn from each other, and take the opportunity to undergo additional training, making sure our approach to mental health and wellbeing is up-to-date and connected with the latest developments in the sector. This collaborative approach will also allow students to feel actively involved in the college's wellbeing approach.

As part of this pledge, we will:

- Continue to signpost to internal and external services such as:
 - Crew2000
 - Penumbra
 - Rape Crisis
 - Beira's Place
 - Edinburgh Women's Aid
 - Andy's Man Club
 - Breathing Space
 - Samaritans
 - Beat
 - Fast Forward
- Provide easy access to a detailed and up to date Mental Health Directory and Crisis contacts list, accessible to all students via the college's Wellbeing Hub.

- Deliver wellbeing workshops and mental health awareness training at College, either in-house or by external partners. For students this will cover a wide range of wellbeing topics such as resilience, gambling awareness, time spent in nature, and physical activity. The Wellbeing team will continue to provide NHS Mental Health Awareness training for staff, in collaboration with the Organisational Development team. The Safeguarding team will continue to provide Safeguarding Awareness training for staff.
- Post regular 'spotlight' articles on Staff and Student Newsletters that highlight the provision being offered to both staff and students.
- Deliver Mental Health Awareness workshops for Class Reps and other student groups – this training will go beyond the regular Five Ways to Wellbeing workshops and will be aimed at increasing awareness for those in Class Rep positions or for certain courses that have a mental health element.
- Establish a Community of Practice forum for Mental Health First Aid trained staff and explore opportunities to maximise the impact of their skills, knowledge and experience.
- Celebrate and share good practice to highlight wellbeing work going on across the College. Throughout the College, staff in varied roles are already providing excellent wellbeing initiatives and we aim to highlight these further by sharing them through our communications platforms as well as our Newsletters and Wellbeing Hub.
- Continue to explore opportunities for trauma-informed working practices and service design by increasing the number of College staff who have completed relevant trauma-informed training.

To measure the success of this pledge we will monitor the uptake of training opportunities provided to students and staff, ensuring training opportunities are followed up with evaluation. We will also aim to increase the number of staff who have completed both our Mental Health Awareness and Safeguarding Awareness training. We will ensure that knowledge about a wide range of specialist wellbeing topics is accessible for students and staff via drop-ins, talks, and online resources. We will also keep in regular contact with external providers to ensure that any referrals are appropriate, and services are well utilised.

Student & Staff Shared Activities

We pledge to create opportunities for both students and staff to be involved in; fostering an environment of mutual respect and making Edinburgh College a supportive environment for students' mental wellbeing.

As part of this pledge, we will:

- Increase the visibility of senior staff on campus at key points in the academic session.
- Research instances where curriculum-based activities allow students and staff to collaborate and promote these opportunities more widely to both students and staff.
- EC Students' Association will continue our 'reverse shadowing' schemes, which allow for Board Members to join the Students' Association for a 'day in the life' of students at Edinburgh College. This scheme enhances opportunities for those in senior leadership positions to see what issues are impacting the student experience at Edinburgh College.
- Continue to hold lunchtime events for all, around special events in the College and wider calendar, such as International Women's Day and mental health awareness events.
- Continue to promote activities that are available for both staff and students using a variety of communications approaches and methods, from poster campaigns to website articles, newsletters and social media promotion.
- Explore opportunities for campus public spaces to be utilised as places for staff and students to relax and socialise.

To measure the success of this pledge we will increase the number of events aimed at both students and staff. We will continue to track and monitor engagement and participation at events and opportunities on campus, delving further into the proportion of students to staff taking part in these events. We also will seek qualitative feedback from attendees at our events and activities.



A. Lumberford

**Signed on behalf of Edinburgh College by
Audrey Lumberford, Principal**

[Signature]

**Signed on behalf of EC Students' Association
by Skye Marriner, President**