# EDI Forum Minutes

## 18 May 2022

Chair: Josie Caplehorne

24 in attendance (online)

### 1.0 Welcome and Introductions

JC welcomed everyone to the meeting

### 2.0 Discussion Topic: Menopause Support for Staff and Students.

JC gave a presentation to the Forum which provided an introduction to the menopause and perimenopause and an overview of the more common symptoms. It was stressed that the menopause and perimenopause impacts everyone, but that people can be affected at different times and in different ways. Symptoms are also compounded by the current shortage of HRT and common misdiagnosis of symptoms.

The Forum was opened up for a discussion and feedback. Additional feedback was also received before and after the meeting, and this has been included in the summary categories below for ease:

#### University Data Monitoring

* Lack of monitoring and options for effective data monitoring categories.
* Noted that in recent weeks there has been a subcategory added to Staff Connect (under gynaecological issues) for menopause.
* An amendment to Foundations can be made to include information on the reasonable adjustments process for staff and the Inclusion Passport.
* Identifying the menopause with the protected equality characteristics is helpful, especially given the medical impact. Ageism, sexism and disablism are all relevant to the menopause.

#### Career Development

* Questions around how menopause impacts professional development.
* Highlighted that at the moment menopause related absences can hit absence trigger points which can feel tantamount for disciplinary action being taken.
* Need to increase awareness and treat as an ongoing condition and apply our equalities statements to menopause.
* Recruitment processes, interviews in particular can be highly challenging processes for people with brain fog.
* There can be benefits of offering questions, or a portion or the questions, in advance of an interview.
* Discussion as to whether or not menopause has a detrimental impact on people experiencing the menopause in management positions. Contested that it could be more cultural and gender related in Universities rather than menopause related as other (female-identifying dominated) sectors do not have the same drain pipe blockage in terms of females in management positions. It could be a factor and could compound other issues that impact progression in the workplace.
* There is a concern that the impact of the symptoms on the ability to write research papers have forced people experiencing the menopause out of their careers.
* The timing and wording of performance targets/meetings/presentations needs to be considered. When someone is already struggling with menopause symptoms, and already highly alert, confused and anxious about how their symptoms are affecting work, then it can be even more debilitating to receive emails that say things like "if you have not met your targets, you might be put on an action plan".
* In large meetings, it can be hard to find your words when put on the spot. The embarrassment can be massive. Then having to explain it as 'menopause-brain' is even more embarrassing.
* If you suffer from brain fog, memory-loss, concentration issues then the time it takes to write is longer. This needs to be acknowledged.
* Flexibility around meeting attendance would be appreciated, especially if someone is more effective in working in the morning or afternoon.

#### Kent Policy Development

* If Kent were to develop a Policy then what should it cover.
* Should it be a combined staff and student policy, or one policy with separate staff and student annexes?
* Agreed that a Policy was important.
* Highlighted that a policy and awareness of a policy will be needed before adequate reporting will start to embed.
* Any policy should also include andropause as well a perimenopause and menopause as well as being inclusive of all individuals with a female reproductive system of all ages.
* There should be several Institutions who have policies in place that could be learned from when developing our own.
* Hybrid working is very helpful and should continue with an acknowledgement that some days are impacted more than others
* Time off needs to be given to people experiencing the menopause where there are menopause related systems that require hospital investigations and treatments (e.g. cysts or fibroids)
* Policy development and roll out needs to be thought through
* Staff have expressed an interest in being involved in the development of the policy.

Thoughts that the policy should include some of the following areas:

* + Training and awareness for line managers
	+ Mental and physical health implications
	+ Absence logging
	+ Support for students where menopause symptoms may impact academic commitments
	+ Support for transgender staff and students
	+ Accessibility implications
	+ Impact of menopause on staff progression
	+ Safe spaces for conversations

#### Mental Health Impact

* Highlighted that, for academics, the symptoms around menopause, particularly those that affect memory, brain-fog and hormone related headaches are debilitating and distressing
* Sleep can be affected and that also adds to the brain fog and headaches. Importantly, also, there is psychological fall-out from the loss of one's brain normally working quickly
* Saying 'my brain is affected' is a very difficult thing to raise in an academic environment. It takes tremendous courage. It shows openness, honesty and integrity that should be valued and celebrated by employers.
* Flexibility around priority work and work allocation where possible would be appreciated to best use an individual’s skills at that time and would help to increase an individuals’ own confidence in their own ability to perform an aspect of their job well.

#### University Support

* Noted that the intersection of menopause and neurodiversity is particularly challenging.
* Menopause Café:
	+ A Menopause Café was highlighted as a valuable safe space for people experiencing the menopause to discuss the impact of menopause and perimenopause and seek support. Explore re-establishing this (ensuring that Medway is included).
	+ Potential for it to be run termly
	+ Ensure that we reach people experiencing the menopause in Estates and Hospitality as well, ensuring that they have the ability to take the time away from their primary role to attend.
	+ SSPSSR / LLSJ are also looking to establish a Menopause Café and have received over 40 expressions of interest. A joined up approach with staff from the EDI team would be valuable.
* The need for the ability and permission to talk, and ask questions, is important to demystify the menopause, particularly for line managers.
* The conversations can be challenging and emotive and a respectful space for this is important.
* Being able to highlight to a manager when symptoms appear to be in a worsening stage or where they are particularly impacting on an aspect of a role would be useful.
* Tracey Allport, from [Moth Therapies in Whistable](https://moththerapies.co.uk/) was recommended as being a useful contact for the University to look to develop work-place support initiatives
* Having the conversations for students was highlighted as also valuable
* SSW should investigate having the menopause available as an option for an ILP
* More support events catered to mature students, which also focused on menopause support would be valuable
* Keep the awareness of menopause symptoms in the public domain
* Targeted emails to female students would open up SSW to mature students who may not believe that their services are for them, particularly those who live off campus.
* It is important that management, OH, and other colleagues see menopause as being medical symptoms that do not affect people experiencing the menopause in exactly the same way. It is a very individual impact of medical symptoms.
* Occupational Health needs to be better equipped to support staff who are struggling with menopause symptoms. Noted that simply signposting to HRT is not good enough as HRT does not work for everyone, there is a shortage, and prescribing a time frame in which it should take effect and ‘fix’ someone is not acceptable.
* Quiet spaces on campus for people to retreat to when symptoms being unmanageable would be valuable
* Activity sessions (Pilates, Yoga, Step) are known to be beneficial for alleviating menopause symptoms. Any programme of activity would need to be duplicated across both sites.

#### University training

* Concerns raised that any training implemented will not make it down the line to academic line managers due to time constraints and resource availability.
* The menopause eLearning programme covers trans staff and andropause
* The leadership programmes also include ethical and inclusive leadership modules.
* All programmes are advertised on the T&OD teams channel and will be communicated with the Deputy Directors of Division’s and also the Directors of Operations’ and Heads of Professions.
* Highlighted that the promotion and advertising of these is crucial to engage effective take up.
* Training also need to be sent to the Directors of EDI for Schools.

### 3.0 Race Equality Charter Student Survey

As part of the REC the University is required to run a staff and student survey. The BAME Staff Network have been active on the staff survey front. The REC team are leading on the student survey for all under and postgraduate students. The [survey](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=VvqpUTI_mkSnIT4_Sapemt--6s9WyvJOqXwMjHOK_8JURVlQQktESDJKRzFMVU9PNVJWRU8xU0hCWC4u) is live from the 9th May – 17th June. There is a hard launch next Monday (23rd May) with a stall outside of the library. Responses so far are predominantly undergraduate, would like more postgraduate (especially PGR) engagement with it. The survey has a prize draw of 3 x £50 vouchers. The survey responses will feed into the action plan created by the Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team.

### 4.0 Harassment Systems, Structures and Reporting (Discussion)

The discussion was asked to focus on what the gaps in the current reporting systems and structures were, and what was and was not currently working for staff and students.

* Correspondence and awareness about harassment reporting in general needs to be better
* It was agreed that there was a need for a mechanism to be in place for people who are not necessarily the victim but witness to an issue.
* Need for a softer touch approach
* Processes to be introduced that aren’t as formal or difficult which are off putting or too difficult to navigate.
* There is a gap between the informal conversation and the formal complaint, especially where there is nothing someone can do to support without a formal complaint – some process that can be done to address the issue that has been raised without a formal route.
* Noted that the time it takes to progress through our procedures can take far too long and be very off putting. Comment that there is no real benefit for the people going through a lengthy process. The processes for addressing perpetrator behaviour is not always satisfactory either.
* The new Staff Induction Checklist (which is also mandatory training every 3 years for all staff) does cover a wider remit of subjects, including Unconscious Bias and other EDI related sessions.
* Noted that there was an aim centrally to completely review how we support staff and students who have been subjected to harassment.
* Comment that there is a need to move away from categorising staff members as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ and move towards enabling staff (and students) to develop sensitive methods of communicating with others that takes diversity into account and normalise someone’s awareness of how they communicate.
* It was noted that we have some mediation support apparently available at the University, but that the [webpages](https://www.kent.ac.uk/mediation/) were last updated in 2013 so it is unclear how accurate this information still is.
* The need to properly reward and recognise staff who volunteer and engage with supporting other staff and students needs to be re-evaluated, alongside appropriate support for the Chairs of the Diversity Networks, First Aiders and other similar roles.
* Explore adopting the Sexual Assault Responder model for harassment first responders for immediate support before being triaged into long term support.

#### Harassment Contacts

* The need to publicise and explain the role of the [Harassment Contacts](https://www.kent.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusivity/harassment/harassment-contacts), particularly in relation to their ability to support in an informal context, was highlighted.
* It should be made clear that the Harassment Contacts have different approaches available to them that they can take.
* Queried as to how often the Harassment Contacts meet. Clarified that they have a Teams channel and they should meet once a term like the other networks.
* The current lack of diversity in the Harassment Contacts was highlighted as a potential barrier for people looking to access them.
* It was requested that the Harassment Contacts be connected more clearly to the Staff Diversity Networks, e.g. by attending their meetings?

### 5.0 Staff and Student Network updates

[LGBTQ+ Staff network](https://blogs.kent.ac.uk/lgbtstaff/)

* Yesterday (17th May) was IDAHOTBI day. Noted that the first openly gay footballer in the Premier League came out this week
* 11th June is Canterbury Pride.
* 20th August is Medway Pride and includes a community event at Rochester Cathedral
* Lambeth Conference is the Anglican Communion Conference that happens on the Canterbury campus once every 10 years. Occurs at the end of July. Messages about what it taking place will be submitted. A Rainbows in Religion mini conference will be taking place with invited speakers from around the country. Some of the Bishops and spouses will be attending. There will be a Lambeth Walk around campus (likely the 27th July). All are welcome to attend as a show of visibility and solidarity.
* A Rainbow Pathway is being developed for on campus
* All staff and student Rainbow Lanyards have now been delivered and will be available from next week at main reception desks with links to online information on [how to be a good ally](https://www.kent.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusivity/effective-allyship).
* The Network would like people to complete a [survey on Effective Allyship](https://www.kent.ac.uk/equality-diversity-inclusivity/effective-allyship/allyshiptraininglanyards/we-stand-with-you)

No further Network updates

### 6.0 Any Other Business

* Mid Kent Mind at Business Vision Live have approached the University They have offered to host some free suicide prevention training for students and staff on campus if interested. If anyone thinks that this would be of interest to staff in their Division or Department, please contact Claire Chapman
* [EDI Awards nominations](https://staff.kent.ac.uk/news/31426/2022-kent-staff-equality-diversity-and-inclusion-awards) are now open. These awards are open for any staff member or student to nominate a staff member who have made a difference through their EDI work this year. Nominations close at 8am on the 24th May with a celebration event taking place on the 8th June.
* A concern was raised that the erosion of allocated time for staff to be able to complete CPD training (both compulsory and optional) is impacting awareness and understanding across the board, not just in relation to EDI training and awareness.
* Noted that the EDI Policy has just been updated and will be added to the webpages after approval at ASPPB and JSNCC

If anyone would like to volunteer to Chair the next meeting, or has a discussion topic that they wish to raise, please email Becky Lamyman.

These minutes have been checked for accessibility and are accessible to all.