

# University of Kent

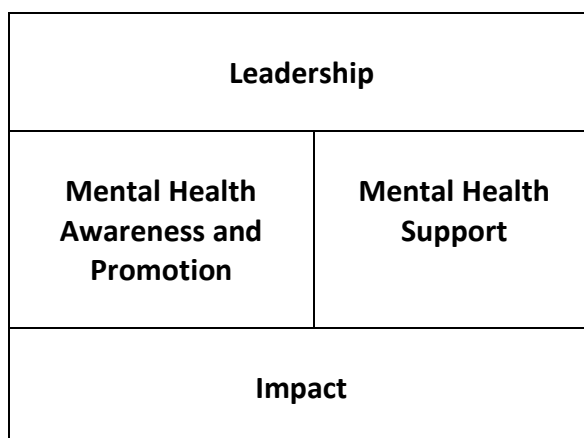
## Student Mental Health Strategy (2022-2027)

### Contents

Background .....	2
Vision.....	3
Leadership.....	5
Mental Health Awareness and Promotion .....	6
Mental Health Support .....	8
Impact .....	10

# Background

Following a recent Stepchange (Mentally Healthy Universities) assessment report produced by an independent consultant Dr Andrew West, a decision was taken to revise the Student Mental Health Strategy, adopting a new structure and streamlined format. The structure of the revised strategy is set out on the following pages will reflect the four priorities depicted below:



Our strategic priorities Leadership; Mental Health Awareness and Promotion; Mental Health Support and Impact will drive the actions necessary to achieve the outcomes to which we aspire. The updated strategy is supported by an aligned action plan, which will include steps for monitoring progress and evaluating impact. The action plan will be an evolving live departmental document. The strategy is in line with the aims and objectives of the Student Services Vision Statement.

# Vision

The University of Kent aims to be a community that inspires students from a wide range of backgrounds to find and shape their place in the world - our award-winning support and inspirational teachers make sure students are at the heart of everything we do.

Our Kent 2025 strategy highlights our ongoing aim to offer one of the best education and student experiences in the UK: we aim for a supportive and inclusive culture conducive to good mental health and wellbeing.

About one in four people in the UK will experience a mental health problem each year; around three-quarters of adults with a mental illness first experience symptoms before the age of 25 and today's generation of young adults is more likely to experience mental illness than previous generations.

Levels of mental illness, mental distress and low wellbeing among students in higher education in the UK are increasing, and students can be at added risk of experiencing poorer mental health and wellbeing, due to factors relating to academic, financial and social pressures. This is evident in the high levels of mental distress reported by students, and the extent to which UK universities have experienced increases in the number of students seeking support, and in the proportion of students who disclose a mental health condition.

The number of students accessing counselling and mental health support at Kent has risen from 2087 in 2017/18 to 2684 in 2020/21. Data from the OfS shows that the challenges of dealing with poor mental health are compounded by other factors, such as ethnicity and sexuality, and that there is a need to understand and address the unique challenges faced by underrepresented groups. Student Minds also recently reported that 74% students have seen a negative impact of the pandemic on their mental health over the last year (2021). In recent years there has been increased recognition of the importance of local partnerships between universities, the NHS and local authorities to improve the design and delivery of services for students.

Concerns about student mental health have been acknowledged in higher education at a national level and Universities UK has put forward a 'mentally healthy universities' framework which we are using to inform our work at Kent.

We have developed this student mental health strategy to focus on four priority areas for the University: **Leadership; Mental Health Awareness and Promotion; Mental Health Support; and Impact**. For each area we have included a short explanation setting out our aims and intentions, followed by information on the University's existing activities and

planned future developments. We will track our progress in implementing the strategy, and will research a range of indicators that will enable us to measure effectiveness and impact.

# Leadership

*We aim to establish effective governance and leadership arrangements to support implementation of this strategy. We aim to encourage collaborative leadership in the whole University community to support student mental health and wellbeing, aiming for a sector-leading approach. We aim to strengthen academic input to foster strong connections into the University's education and research portfolios.*

## **What we are currently doing**

- Our Deputy Director of Student Services and Head of Student Support and Wellbeing provides a coordination point for taking forward actions aligned to our student mental health strategy. They are supported by the Director of Student Services and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Student Experience) to ensure appropriate consideration of Student Mental health is addressed at all levels of University governance.
- We are developing a student mental health action plan to focus activity and help to track progress. The action plan will be an evolving document over the term of this strategy.
- We have completed a restructure of Student Services to enhance the leadership and support available.
- We have reviewed key policy areas with improved mental health in mind.
- We have commissioned an external review to propose a refreshed strategic direction and to guide future planning for student mental health.

## **What we want to do in future**

- We will publish a revised student mental health action plan aligned to this refreshed strategy, and informed by external review.
- We will strengthen senior oversight for implementation through regular reporting to the Student Experience Committee and Education and Student Experience Board.
- We will develop cross-institution working on student support, with post-pandemic priorities in mind.
- We will work with Kent Union and ensure that student involvement is intrinsic to the delivery of our mental health strategy.
- We will build on connections with the University's plans for equality, diversity and inclusion, to foster collaborative working on student mental health.
- We will work towards achieving the University Mental Health Charter.
- We will ensure that Student Mental Health is adequately considered as part of the development of all Student related policies

# Mental Health Awareness and Promotion

*We aim to work proactively - and in partnership with Kent Union - to promote improved mental health and wellbeing and to campaign against stigma. We aim to integrate healthy behaviour and promote positive mental health within the university's educational and research mission, within the curriculum and in our co-curricular activities.*

## **What we are currently doing**

- We promote a wide-ranging programme of activities and events supporting mental health awareness and improved wellbeing, working in partnership on student communications and drawing in teams across the University, including Kent Union (eg University Mental Health Day/Awareness Week and other national campaigns alongside internal campaigns like Exam Calm).
- We have developed a range of resources to encourage awareness of wellbeing and to facilitate self-help and peer support.
- Our College and Community Life team has been established to encourage student sense of belonging, with improved mental health in mind.
- We have developed a range of supportive links with local mental health and voluntary sector services external to the University, some of which provide online or in person drop-in services specifically for our students (Forward Trust Drug and Alcohol Service and East Kent Rape Crisis Centre)
- In partnership with Canterbury Christ Church University, we have developed a Suicide Safer University strategic framework.
- We have developed and expanded our support for students reporting incidents of sexual misconduct and assault, harassment (non-sexual), assault, bullying, discrimination and hate incidents including an online reporting tool and plan further improvements and recruitment to support existing staff in this area.

## **What we want to do in future**

- We will develop our annual calendar for student communications, with collaborative contributions from across the University to cover a wide range of issues relevant to student wellbeing.
- We will seek the right balance in our student mental health services across the proactive/responsive spectrum.

- We will tailor additional guidance and support for students at key transitional points during their University Career. identify key transitional points for students and tailor additional guidance and support.
- We will lay out a plan for how student wellbeing will be promoted within the University's educational activities and look at wellbeing in the curriculum activities
- We will develop our student residential support to foster best practices into the future.
- We will build on and develop our Suicide Safer University strategy through implementing and reviewing our ongoing goals and activities.
- We will develop our collaborative partnership working with Kent Union to identify specific issues for priority shared action.
- We will work with our Graduate and Researcher College to enhance and develop new student wellbeing initiatives as a key element in their work with research students.
- We will work with Kent Union in establishing peer led initiatives to support students in loneliness and isolation issues

# Mental Health Support

*We will aim to provide effective student support services which are easy to access and meet a wide range of student needs. We aim to support improved mental health and wellbeing at key points of student transition. We aim to provide effective training and support for staff relating to student mental health and wellbeing. We aim for effective collaborative working within the University and strong partnerships with external organisations to support mental health and wellbeing. We aim to learn from national and international best practice, aspiring to a sector-leading approach.*

## What we are currently doing

- We provide an extensive range of high-quality student mental health support services, including on the day appointments and out of hours mental health support and crisis management in conjunction with an external partner (Spectrum Life),
- New divisional student support teams are in place and we have established a student support managers' forum to foster good practice among staff with student support responsibilities.
- We have put case referral and escalation arrangements in place to support staff to help students in distress. This includes a refresh of the Support to Study Policy, a weekly review in SSW of students who are a cause for concern, Monthly Multidisciplinary Team Meeting that includes representatives from NHS, SSW, Security and CCL.
- We have established student support protocols for students at our overseas campuses in Brussels and Paris.
- Our staff development provision aims to help staff to support students with mental health difficulties.
- Our local HE/NHS partnerships deliver additional specialist mental health support and improved risk management for our students through agreed referral pathways.
- We share good practice through our involvement in regional and county wide HE and NHS collaborative partnerships (Southeast Student Mental Health Collaborative and Kent and Medway Student Wellbeing Collaborative) with the aim of improving our student mental health offer.
- We have agreements in place for on campus visits from external organisations to offer support and wellbeing appointments to students and this includes specialist alcohol addiction support and specialist sexual assault meetings (East Kent Rape Crisis Service)



## **What we want to do in future**

- We will build on the University's revised student support structure, to deliver improved support for student wellbeing based on effective connections between central services and divisional teams.
- We will continuously review our student support model to ensure service provision is fit for purpose and clearly articulated.
- We will continue to strengthen case referral, escalation and management arrangements within a 'whole university' approach to student mental health.
- We will enhance mental health support at key points of student transition, building on improved student induction/orientation support.
- We will review staff development relating to student mental health, aiming for improved role-focused training – and coherence across the range of provision.
- We will progress our work with NHS partners, seeking ongoing support for students in the light of the pandemic and ensuring the maintenance of effective care pathways.
- We will work with the University Medical Centre, including Nursing Services, to ensure there is appropriate provision of relevant clinical support.

# Impact

*We will aim to use data and research effectively to support student mental health and wellbeing, helping us to monitor trends, track progress, evaluate impact and plan improvements.*

## **What we are currently doing**

- Student support services employ a range of monitoring and evaluation methods, including service usage and satisfaction ratings alongside impact measurement.
- We commission specific evaluation/research projects to inform service development.
- We use regular student surveys to obtain feedback on student support provision.
- We report on student mental health to the Education and Student Experience Board via the Student Experience Committee.

## **What we want to do in future**

- We want to introduce a 'baseline' wellbeing measurement to enable us to track trends in student mental health over time and benchmark against sector averages.
- We want to further develop our feedback mechanisms to enable students to provide feedback at all times
- We will work to further understand the specific mental health needs of the postgraduate student community and how the strategy may be refined to meet those needs.
- We will carry out work with groups less likely to report difficulties or access our services, to assess how our provision can be more culturally appropriate.
- We will draw on academic research to support improved student mental health services.
- We plan to review our approach to reporting on student mental health within the University's governance and committee structure with effective monitoring and improved impact in mind.
- We will identify and use a range of indicators to demonstrate progress and impact in implementing this strategy.