

**New College Durham**

**Mental Health**  
**and**  
**Wellbeing Strategy for Effective Learning**

**2020-2023**

## 1. Introduction

The Mental Health and Wellbeing strategy 2020-2023 outlines our mission to ensure that the New College Durham student community will have improved health and wellbeing. The strategy sets the direction of travel, provides a framework for future decisions, and has been designed to fit New College Durham's history, culture, and student characteristics.

Our Mental Health Charter (March 2020) outlines how we will ensure that our staff and students are supported whilst studying and working at College.

The charter has been written with guidance from the Association of Colleges and complements the wide range of research that has already been conducted and that which continues into mental health and wellbeing.

The strategy sets out our parameters and priorities for the next three years:

- **Wellbeing:** We will create an organisation where students want to study because they feel valued and part of a supportive community
- **A healthy study environment:** We want students to work in an environment where injuries and illness are prevented, and those with chronic illness or disabilities, are supported and accommodated
- **An effective strategy:** Our strategy is one that adopts a holistic approach to health and wellbeing, and its close association with sustainability, equality, inclusion and business performance

## 2. Context

Locally about 6,500 children and young people in County Durham are estimated to have a mental health disorder (2015). The most common mental health disorders for those aged 5-16 years old in County Durham are conduct disorders. Locally we know:

- Around 1 in 10 of children and young people in County Durham have a mental health disorder. (2015)
- The rate of death by suicide for the period 2016-18 is statistically higher in County Durham (12.8 per 100,000) than England (9.6 per 100,000) and the North East (11.3 per 100,000)
- 2.6% of school children have additional social, emotional and mental health needs which equates to over 1,000 children
- There are thought to be at least 8,000 16-24 year olds with an eating disorder
- Around 8,500 children and young people are estimated to have ADHD
- Almost 400 children aged between 10-24 years old were admitted to hospital as a result of self-harm last year
- Nearly 100 under 18s were admitted to hospital for mental health conditions in 2018.
- In County Durham deaths by suicide are significantly higher for men than women, a trend reflected regionally and in England
- Male deaths by suicide in County Durham are similar to the regional rate but statistically significantly higher than the rate seen in England

This strategy is fundamentally about promoting positive mental health and wellbeing. It draws on lessons from other sectors and identifies a holistic, proactive approach to managing mental health and wellbeing amongst students. It changes the focus from absence to wellbeing initiatives and connecting this to the health of New College Durham as an organisation.

If an organisation only manage absence, cases of illness and under achievement and retention, our focus will always remain on reactive responses or enquiry after the fact. It is more beneficial to link the health and success of the education of others, instead, to the health and wellbeing of all our community.

Issues such as mental ill health have a negative impact on the institution, the individual and those around them. When people take responsibility for their own wellbeing - and are supported in this in their place of study, their wellbeing improves and the likelihood of prolonged ill health and consequent absence and students' risk of withdrawal and failure is reduced. Awareness of these issues and recognising these in others will also lead to a culture of mutual support. Our strategy will enable our students to perform to the best of their ability, every day, by helping more of them to develop their wellbeing, resilience and positive mental health. This will, in turn, enable stronger student performance, increased productivity, improved results and reduced sickness absence, all of which translates to better outcomes for students at New College Durham.

The ultimate outcome of developing and implementing a strategy would be the improved mental health, wellbeing and resilience of students, leading to improved academic outcomes, as outlined by the research below:

- resilience is highly correlated with academic achievement and educational success (Werner and Smith, 1992 in Hart et al, 2007 p85).
- "...well-planned and well-implemented opportunities for supporting the social-emotional development of students can positively affect academic outcomes" (Dix, Slee, Lawson and Keeves, 2012 p45).

### **3. Responsibilities**

Key to successfully planning and delivering the strategy are:

- Vice Principal Student Support
- Head of Inclusion
- New College Durham teaching and support staff
- Student Support Services
- Learner Support
- Learning Development Service
- Wellbeing champions, who identify with, and demonstrate commitment to, positive mental health and wellbeing for all who study at New College Durham
- Students' Union

#### **a. Senior managers are responsible for:**

- Providing a safe and healthy environment for all
- Implementing safe systems to ensure health and wellbeing for all
- Accountability for the organisation's health, behaviour and performance
- Having a strong understanding of mental health issues and ensure a positive and proactive approach to support mental health and wellbeing across the College
- Engaging with outside agencies to agree strategies to move mental health and wellbeing forward with the College environment

#### **b. Managers are responsible for:**

- Engaging with staff to promote and enhance student health and wellbeing
- Effective relevant and purposeful staff development and training to ensure staff are able to support and enhance student health and wellbeing
- Engaging with any outside projects that aim to develop positive health and wellbeing as directed by Senior Managers
- Creating a culture where problems arise, they are quickly identified, and solutions considered against an individual's needs
- Ensuring staff have the support mechanisms to deal with student health and wellbeing

#### **c. Curriculum Staff**

- Engaging with students and other support services to work together to enhance everyone's wellbeing
- Referring students to the appropriate resources, either online or in College for additional support where required
- Engaging with training and development opportunities
- Engaging with any outside projects that aim to develop positive health and wellbeing as directed by Senior Managers

We are determined that positive mental health and wellbeing must be an integral part of the culture of New College Durham, and that managers at all levels will take a lead in making this happen.

#### **4. Priorities**

The strategy is designed to improve both organisational and individual performances that maintain positive mental health and wellbeing.

Our overall objective is to build the capacity of individuals throughout the New College Durham student community to achieve better mental health and wellbeing.

For our student community, this strategy focuses on building awareness and confidence of the issues which impact on our students' ability to learn and achieve, and providing the appropriate information and signposting for support or self-help.

The strategy has seven main priorities. These are listed in the following sections.

We will promote the wide range of health and wellbeing services already available to staff and students within New College Durham.

##### **4.1 Priority 1**

Key Outcomes:

- To create a supportive environment for mental health and wellbeing improvement opportunities
- To recognise that every mental health care contact is a mental health improvement opportunity and that we all have a role to play, with our managers and corporate stakeholders having specific responsibilities.

Commitment:

We will:

- Use multi-strand approaches to promote and enhance mental health and wellbeing and include a combination of lifestyle and behavioural approaches
- Develop effective partnerships with specialists across local, regional and national organisations
- Continue to develop links with other agencies to support awareness raising and training for students in mental and emotional health and wellbeing.

##### **4.2 Priority 2**

We will promote mental ill-health prevention and early help with mental wellbeing, and will develop coping strategies that enable students to return to study after an incident.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved levels of mental health awareness
- To minimise student absences due to stress or anxiety
- To have healthier students and reduce levels of sickness absence
- Improve students' chances to achieve

Commitment:

We will:

- Ensure that we provide supportive mental health work environments and improve the retention and recruitment of students with mental health problems and mental illness
- Promote the practical support of mental illness and mental health problems, and their prevention, if possible

#### **4.3 Priority 3**

We want to empower students to recognise and support others who might need help.

Key Outcome: To promote a culture where it is easy to seek help.

Commitment:

We will:

- Involve students in promoting mental health, to increase their awareness of mental wellbeing and to give them the motivation and skills to support their peers, where appropriate
- Support students to identify their own social and emotional skills, strengths, and areas they are interested in developing

#### **4.4 Priority 4**

We must listen to students, and direct people to knowledgeable, experienced specialist services, as necessary.

Key Outcome: To foster a culture of wellbeing.

Commitment:

- We will improve overall performance with engaged and motivated students who are encouraged to achieve their full potential.
- We will provide online, reliable, interactive mental health services for students to access at any time.

#### **4.5 Priority 5**

At New College Durham, we are committed to reducing the stigma that poor mental health carries

Key Outcome: To increase the retention of students with poor mental health.

Commitment:

We will:

- Help students to remain on their studies by proactively addressing causes of mental ill-health at College, and encouraging a cultural change on the stigma of poor mental health
- Actively seek to recruit from hard-to-reach groups to maximise opportunities for those with poor mental health conditions

#### **4.6 Priority 6**

Our aim is to promote positive mental health and wellbeing, which have a positive impact on the general health of the student community.

Key Outcomes:

- Improved health-related behaviours and lifestyle choices
- Increased uptake of sport, physical fitness and wellbeing activities among the student body

Commitment:

We will:

- Help the student improve their work-life balance and effectively reduce stress levels
- Enable individuals to actively manage their own wellbeing
- Support positive mental health and wellbeing of all our students
- Develop and support College wide initiatives which encourage staff and students to emotionally recharge/ switch off from work and study.

#### **4.7 Priority 7**

A key priority is to improve the capability teaching and support staff to tackle issues relating to stressors, rehabilitation and 'signposting' for their students.

Key Outcome: To equip relevant staff to be effective in managing mental wellbeing at College.

Commitment:

We will:

- Clarify the staff, in teaching and support role in preventing stress
- Help with identifying early the key risk categories associated with stress college
- Support staff in their support of their students
- Provide students with information to help them resolve issues relating to stress using a referral network

#### **4.8 Making It Happen**

The team set up to deliver the strategy will review the effect of initiatives, and the process for generating new ideas to excite and motivate students.

There is a separate funding stream for the strategy and delivery is not dependent on business-as-usual investment.

The strategy will be implemented as a series of discrete sustainable projects, building on the success of each earlier project.

We will encourage student participation in the development and evaluation of health and wellbeing strategies, through 'learner voice' and student conferences, enabling New College Durham and students to work in partnership.

### **5. Measuring Success**

Our strategy considers key areas which incorporate work streams for tackling healthy workplaces and wellbeing, taking into account our listed priorities. These work streams will be published in our Implementation Plan 2020 - 2023

To understand the impact the strategy is having, and direct our efforts accordingly, our focus goes beyond what we have spent, and considers the 'outputs' (what we have done) and 'outcomes' (what has changed). The desired outcomes include a healthy environment in which

to study, and a strong, active staff community who live active, healthy and safe lives, and who can positively manage their own mental health and wellbeing.

### **5.1 Evaluating Interventions**

The Mental Health Steering Group will oversee performance monitoring, and performance information will be presented to the New College Durham Board annually. This will include reports of performance against the Implementation Plan, and how we are performing against indicators set out in framework documents such as business plans and annual reports.

## **6. Action Plan**