

**New College Durham  
Mental Health and Wellbeing  
Strategy  
2023-2026  
(including action plan for 2023-24)**

## 1. Introduction

Andrew Broadbent – Principal and CEO

*“At New College Durham we are committed to supporting and developing the mental, emotional, social and physical health and wellbeing of our students and staff.*

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

*The College aims to be an organisation that promotes positive health and wellbeing and aims to engage and empower individuals to thrive and that students can reach their academic and individual potential.*

*This strategy shows our commitment to support staff and students, to have a whole college approach where students can learn and staff can work in an environment where they feel valued.”*

## 2. Background and Context

Supporting the mental health of students and staff has become a key focus for our college. For many, learning and work is a major part of life. The Mental Health Foundation identified that workplaces with high levels of mental wellbeing are more productive and it is important to us as a college that we have a workforce that feels supported and are healthy, to be able to ensure our students have a positive and nurturing environment in which to learn.

The World Health Organisation (WHO), describes mental health and wellbeing as.

*“A state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realise their abilities, learn well, work well, and contribute to their community. It is an integral component of health and well-being that underpins our individual and collective abilities to make decisions, build relationships and shape the world we live in. Mental health is a basic human right. And it is crucial to personal, community and socio-economic development.”*

Mental Health of students has been a growing concern both locally and nationally, with several studies showing a worsening trend in student mental health over the last decade. Durham County Council - Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-28 identified these trends which reflect an increase of students presenting with anxiety, low mood, suicidal ideation and self-harming behaviours. Locally we know:

- Children and young people are now more likely to have a mental health disorder compared with before the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 430 children and young people aged between 10-24 in County Durham were admitted to hospital as a result of self-harm in 20/21.
- Around 9000 children and young people in County Durham aged between 5-17 have a diagnosable mental health condition.
- Deaths by suicide have been rising over time across the North East, including County Durham.

New College Durham recognises the growing challenges with mental health and wellbeing, not just for our students, but also for their parents, carers, grandparents, guardians and our staff.

### 3. College Context

The College is committed to social, economic and environmental well-being and to providing an environment which actively promotes the positive health and wellbeing of staff and students by:

- Changing lives for the better by enabling people of all abilities to fulfil their potential.
- Celebrating achievement in learning for all.
- Fulfilling our commitment to equality and diversity and the rights of others.

Mental health and wellbeing are complex and often it is a combination of varying factors both work, study and home related that can have an impact.

Mental health and wellbeing can have an impact on the quality of life, ability to work and sickness levels at work. Good mental health and wellbeing can also be a protective factor for good health in general.

The College has signed up to the AOC's Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter and the Mental Health at Work Commitment. Our strategy complements the College Mental Health Charter and recognises the impact of mental health and wellbeing on staff and students. Mental and physical health are completely entwined, our mental health has an impact on our physical health.

Through strengthening our staff mental and physical health and wellbeing we want to ensure that our staff have the support their need to create positive learning environments and the skills to support and develop our students.

The aims of the College's strategy are to:

- Make mental health and wellbeing a priority for all.
- Create an environment and culture that promotes and supports healthy behaviour and wellbeing in all aspects of College life.
- Build and strengthen partnerships with organisations locally and nationally to develop comprehensive support that meets our students' needs.

We will achieve these aims by:

- Ensuring mental health and wellbeing are a strategic priority for the Principal and the Board of Governors.
- Highlighting the importance of positive mental health and wellbeing and how to maintain it.
- Preventing mental health where possible;
- Tackling the stigma associated with having or discussing poor mental health; encouraging open conversations about mental health and wellbeing and the support that is available when staff are struggling.
- Train and support our staff so that they are equipped in their role in supporting student mental health and wellbeing.
- Use information and research to develop our mental health and wellbeing offer, listening to the needs of our staff and students and looking ahead to what they might need in the future.

#### 4. **Make mental health and wellbeing a priority for all.**

The scope of this strategy is to develop practical, actionable approach that the College can implement to promote positive mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

##### **For staff**

The strategy is underpinned by the 10 mental health standards (6 were recognised for all organisations and a further 4 as an enhanced that all public sector organisations or those companies that employ more than 500 staff, should also consider) as set out in 'Thriving at Work' (2017). 'Thriving at Work' was an independent review of mental health and employers commissioned by the UK government and led by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, Mind's Chief Executive. The college has used the standards as a bench mark and steps towards developing our support this has included;

1. **Produced, Implemented and communicated our commitment to mental health** that promotes good mental health of all employees and outlines the support available for those who may need it.
2. **Developed mental health awareness among staff** by making information, tools and support accessible.
3. **Encourage open conversations about mental health and the support available when employees are struggling**, during the recruitment process and at regular intervals throughout employment, offer appropriate workplace adjustments to employees who require them.
4. **Provided employees with good working conditions** and ensure they have a healthy work life balance and opportunities for development.
5. **Promoted effective people management** to ensure all employees have a regular conversation about their health and well-being with their line manager, supervisor or organisational leader and train and support line managers and supervisors in effective management practices.
6. **Routinely monitor employee mental health and wellbeing** by utilising our annual staff survey to provide data on key themes and talking to employees, and understanding risk factors.

We want to ensure that as we now fall under public sector that we:

1. **Increase transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting**, to include a leadership commitment and outline of the organisation's approach to mental health.
2. **Demonstrate accountability** by nominating a health and wellbeing lead at Senior Leadership level, with clear reporting duties and responsibilities
3. **Improve the disclosure process** to encourage openness of declaring of Mental Health history/diagnosis during recruitment and throughout, ensuring employees are aware of why the information is needed and make sure the right support is in place to facilitate a good employer response following disclosure
4. **Ensure provision of tailored in-house mental health support and signposting to clinical help**, including digital support, employer-purchased Occupational Health or Employee Assistance Programmes, or NHS services, amongst other sources of support.

We want to ensure that;

- wellbeing and mental health at work is led by senior management;

- a Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy is accompanied by a clear implementation action plan which is monitored regularly and reviewed annually;
- we create an open and inclusive College ethos which includes respect for those with mental ill health;
- we promote fairness, respect, equality, diversity, inclusion and engagement, challenging mental health and promoting wellbeing through curriculum teaching and staff training.

### **For Students**

The strategy is aligned to our Mental Health Charter (March 2020) which outlines how we will ensure that our staff and students are supported whilst studying and working at New College Durham. As a signatory to the AOC's Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter our strategy sets out to address mental health and wellbeing across our college communities. We are committed to:

- producing, implementing and communicating our commitment to mental health that promotes good mental health of all students and outlines the support available to those who need it;
- developing mental health awareness amongst our student body, making information, tools and support accessible;
- encouraging and collecting student views on mental health and wellbeing through the relevant forums;
- encouraging open conversations about mental health and the support available when students are struggling;
- providing a wide range of opportunities for students to develop their confidence, knowledge and skills to support others with mental health and well-being;
- ensuring a consistent and positive approach to wellbeing;
- providing targeted individual mental health support to students who require it and ensuring that all students have information as to how to access this support;
- provide clear and relevant information to parents and carers;
- establishing effective links with all key stakeholders;
- carrying out regular auditing and evaluation of all College wellbeing and mental health services.

## **5. Create an environment and culture that promotes and supports healthy behaviour and wellbeing in all aspects of College life.**

Staff and student engagement is integral to the College being able to progress and demonstrate that we are fully committed. The College has continued to develop its offer of support and culture, examples are given below of our progress to date.

### **For staff**

The College recognises that staff are very much a valued resource, and their health and wellbeing is critical to the effective operations of the College.

It is important that staff are encouraged to have voice and that they can influence change and development. We have ensured that;

- there is provision of an on-site Counselling Service;
- the College funds up to five external counselling sessions where a need is identified;
- we have signed up to being a Mindful Employer as well as signing the Mental Health at Work Commitment;
- returns to work from long-term absence are carefully managed, in line with the College's sickness absence procedure;
- referrals are timely to the on-site Occupational Health Nurse for a mental health related absence, to ascertain whether any support/adjustments are required;
- there is a programme of activities and interventions to promote mental health and wellbeing;
- dedicated wellbeing budget;
- we have termly staff development days with workshops focused on mental health and wellbeing;
- we have an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing Steering Group.
- We use the results of our "You Said We Did" staff survey to further develop our offer of support.

### **For students**

A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is a key priority for New College Durham because we want to create an environment where our students can thrive and are supported.

Student voice is essential to understanding and reflecting on the experiences of our students, and by doing so, we continue to ensure that students shape mental health and wellbeing support. We have ensured that we;

- involve students in College surveys to capture views and feedback on services enabling students to have a voice and influence our decisions;
- deliver a Personal Development Framework that embeds mental health and wellbeing, and has a focus on building resilience, dealing with exam stress and challenging the stigma of mental health issues;
- deliver targeted workshops and talks throughout the year about mental health, such as keeping safe, healthy relationships, drug and alcohol, and health promotion;

- maintain an open-door approach so that students feel able to approach a range of staff to request support, including Personal Development Coaches, Personal Learning Coaches and Additional learning Support;
- promote awareness and access to the Counselling Service, who provide 1 to 1 counselling and mental health support;
- have Designated Safeguarding Lead and Deputies that provide support and appropriate responses when there are concerns about safeguarding risks to students;
- dedicate support for students in care and students who have recently left care
- have an Enrichment Programme of activities which supports positive mental health and wellbeing;
- Make referrals to appropriate external agencies;



## **6. Build and strengthen partnerships with organisations locally and nationally to develop comprehensive support that meets our needs.**

Key to achieving the aims of this strategy is our partnership working. We can't create a positive working and learning environment that supports staff and student mental health and well-being, creating a culture of openness by lifting the stigma surrounding mental health on our own.

We need to ensure that our Governors, Staff and Students recognise the importance of embracing mental health and wellbeing and that it is the responsibility of everyone.

Working with partners will enhance the support available to staff and students increasing the awareness of and participation in wellbeing activities and initiatives. This will help to create an environment and culture that promotes and supports healthy behaviour and wellbeing in all aspects of College life for our staff and students.

### **For staff**

Working with the Pioneering Care Partnership to achieve Better Health at Work maintaining excellence which is an annual framework of criteria that we are measured against;

Ensuring Occupational health supports and promotes a range of wellbeing activities;

Our annual staff survey allows us to capture staff opinions on what we are doing well and areas where we can improve. The survey allows us to collect broader themes across College and gives us evidence of where we need to focus resources;

The Human Resources Department will primarily focus their support for the mental health of staff but achieving good mental health is everyone's responsibility;

In supporting the implementation of this strategy, the HR department will work with colleagues across the College and with external groups recognised for best practice in enhancing staff mental health;

This strategy will support and complement the College's HR strategy, the College's Mental Health Charter.

### **For students;**

Promoting the range of support services available in College, NHS and other partner organisations so that students know where to go for support;

Work with external partners to provide bespoke workshops and talks about mental health and wellbeing;

Work with and support parents, carers and guardians to promote students' mental health and wellbeing;

Listen to and support our students to make informed choices about developing new partnerships so that these strengthen the support available;

Working with the Children and Young People's Mental Health Partnership group to support children and young people across County Durham to achieve their optimum mental health and wellbeing.

## 7. Roles and responsibilities in delivering the strategy

The following have roles and responsibilities in ensuring that the strategy is fully embedded and part of the College culture.

**The Board of the Corporation (and/or sub committees)**, in conjunction with the College's **Senior Leadership Team** will seek to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy.

**Senior Managers are responsible for** providing a safe and healthy environment for all employees at work ensuring that there are safe systems of work to safeguard employees' health and wellbeing and understand that the College is accountable for the organisation's health, behaviour and performance. Senior managers need to ensure that they have a strong understanding of mental health and wellbeing issues and ensure that there is a positive and proactive approach to support staff mental health and wellbeing.

**Managers are responsible for** engaging with staff to promote and enhance employee mental health and wellbeing by ensuring that they risk assess work stress and implement necessary control measures to prevent harmful stress and consider appropriate support mechanisms.

Ensuring that recruitment is effective, relevant, and purposeful staff development and training and supported to create a culture where should problems arise, they are quickly identified, and solutions considered against an individual's needs.

Implementing the monitoring of workloads in relation to health and work and should a member of staff be absent that the College return to work process is followed.

**Staff are responsible for** engaging with management to work together to enhance employee wellbeing by ensuring that stress and ill health are reported to management as early as possible.

Staff should ensure that they develop and maintain a working environment which is supportive of individuals mental health and wellbeing and engage with training and development opportunities. Staff must ensure that they are clear on their responsibilities and the guidelines in place for students as set out in the student mental health and wellbeing strategy which complements the staff strategy.

**Students are responsible for** engaging with support services to work together to enhance everyone's wellbeing and accessing appropriate resources either online or in College for additional support where required and where applicable with any projects that aim to develop positive health and well-being. We are determined that positive mental health and wellbeing must be an integral part of the culture of New College Durham and this must be promoted and embedded across curriculum.

**Trade Union Representatives** will help the College promote this strategy and encourage full participation by all staff. They will support the monitoring and review of this strategy and provide feedback from members where appropriate.

### **Partnership and Engagement**

The College actively supports and encourages staff to collaborate with students and external groups and networks and recognises the key role they play in promoting and supporting mental health and wellbeing across the College. The College will make available such resources as is reasonable to ensure the effective implementation of this strategy.

## **8. Measuring Success**

Our strategy considers key areas which incorporate work streams for tackling healthy workplaces and wellbeing. To understand the impact the strategy is having, and direct our efforts accordingly, our focus goes beyond what we have spent, and considers the intent, impact and 'outcomes' (what has changed).

The desired outcomes include a healthy environment in which to study, and a strong, active staff and student community who live active, healthy, and safe lives, and who can positively manage their own mental health and wellbeing.

It must also be considered that we may directly never see the impact as our students may not be required to call on these lessons or information until after they have left the College and are in work or further study, that does not mean that the work done here at College is not impactful, it just means that we are not in a position to measure the future impact of the work done.

## **9. Monitoring, review, and evaluation**

This strategy is underpinned by annual action plans (Annex A details Action plan 2023-24). The action plans and the strategy will be reviewed annually by Governors to ensure effective monitoring and that the strategy and plan continues to be fit for purpose and seeks to respond to the challenges and difficulties faced by individuals in their day to day lives.

The Board and the Joint Consultative Committee will receive annual report(s) which will enable them to evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy and the actions plans.

The Equality, Diversity, Inclusion, Health and Wellbeing Steering Group will monitor the objectives and impact of this strategy and ensure that appropriate actions are taken to fulfil our responsibilities under legislation and that all aspects of staff mental health and wellbeing are monitored and actions are taken to address areas for improvement.

## Annex A - Action plan our key priorities of this strategy

	Strategic Aim		Priorities	Actions for 2023/24	By
1	Create an environment and culture that promotes and supports healthy behaviour and wellbeing in all aspects of College life.	Staff	<p>Highlight the importance of positive mental health/ wellbeing and how to maintain it.</p> <p>Tackle the stigma associated with having or discussing poor mental health; encouraging open conversations about mental health and wellbeing and the support that is available.</p> <p>Consider the impact of other policies/practices on staff mental health and wellbeing and look to provide support accordingly.</p>	<p>Achieve gold Better Health at Work award.</p> <p>Submit portfolio for Better Health at Work maintaining excellence.</p> <p>Issue annual staff survey to collect feedback on health and wellbeing initiatives to date and how we can improve.</p> <p>Increase the number of staff who complete the survey to 60% of our workforce.</p>	<p>September 2023</p> <p>May 2024</p> <p>January 2024</p> <p>January 2024</p>
		Students	<p>Promote positive mental health and wellbeing across our student community</p> <p>Encourage students to engage in enrichment, promoting the range of opportunities available to support positive mental health.</p>	<p>Increase the number of students who participate in enrichment activities to 35% (waiting for confirmation of enrichment budget to see if this is possible)</p> <p>Develop and roll out a Young Carers Support Group</p> <p>Continue to collect feedback about mental health support in College from student surveys and forums</p> <p>Develop student resilience through anxiety awareness workshops delivered by the Counselling Team</p> <p>Support students with the rising cost of living by offering access to a Student Pantry</p>	<p>July 2024</p> <p>October 2023</p> <p>June 2024</p> <p>October 2023</p> <p>October 2023</p>

2	Make mental health and wellbeing a priority for all.	Staff	<p>Ensure mental health and wellbeing are a strategic priority for the Principal and the Board of Governors.</p> <p>Ensure New College Durham is a healthy and safe place to work, promoting mental and physical wellbeing.</p>	<p>Have a clearly defined health and wellbeing plan to support staff working in partnership with Human Resources, Health and Safety and Occupational Health that is implemented across college.</p> <p>Develop and roll out to staff online training of wellbeing support in partnership with LearningCurve.</p> <p>Review mental health and wellbeing offer for leadership and management training programmes.</p>	<p>September 2023</p> <p>December 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>
		Students	<p>Ensure mental health and wellbeing are a strategic priority for the Principal and the Board of Governors.</p> <p>Ensure New College Durham is a healthy and safe place to study, promoting mental and physical wellbeing.</p>	<p>Develop and deliver our Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, providing clear annual action plans and communicate progress to our student community.</p> <p>Deliver an annual mental health and wellbeing programme which promotes positive mental health through awareness raising activities and events</p>	<p>September 2023</p> <p>July 2024</p>
3	Build and strengthen partnerships with organisations locally and nationally to develop comprehensive support that meets our students' needs.	Staff	<p>Demonstrate our commitment to investing in mental health and well-being through the implementation of key activities and initiatives.</p> <p>Ensure staff are appropriately trained to understand mental health and wellbeing issues; to offer support and guidance and to signpost staff as appropriate.</p>	<p>Ensure <b>all</b> managers receive training in being able to support the mental health of their staff within the workplace.</p> <p>Utilise services offered through partnership working to deliver a innovative and engaging CPD offer for staff support mental health and wellbeing.</p> <p>Engage all staff in mental health awareness campaigns in line with Better Health at Work Award i.e. mental health</p>	<p>March 2024</p> <p>November 2023</p> <p>February 2024</p> <p>May 2024</p> <p>December 2023</p>

				awareness week, walk and talk, cancer awareness campaigns.	
		Students	Maintain and strengthen our links with external services to help students to access the support that is right for them	<p>Strengthen our relationships with existing external mental health services and continue to build new partnerships. Through this we will continue to help students access the support that is right for them.</p> <p>Continue to represent student needs by working in partnership with the Durham County Council Children and Young People's Partnership meetings</p>	<p>July 2024</p> <p>July 2024</p>