

STUDENT-LED MENTAL HEALTH & WELL-BEING STRATEGY 2020-2022



FOREWORD

Student mental health is a matter of great importance for everyone in the Higher Education sector. At Bangor University, we want to ensure our students feel both supported and enfranchised, and so their involvement in the development of our approach to mental health is crucial. Our ethos of partnership working is at the heart of everything we do.

This new strategy has been developed using a year-long consultation process with both students and staff at the University, in order to generate a vision that is relevant and meaningful to everyone in our community. This innovative strategy is therefore student-led, and will be reviewed and guided by the student body in subsequent months and years. As such, the strategy will always be a 'work in progress' – responsive to changes in students' needs and good practice in the sector. It has also been vital to ensure that our ideas take into account other relevant strategies, guidelines and examples of best practice, both internally and across the HEI sector. Therefore, the strategy also aligns with HEFCW's Well-being and Health in Higher Education Policy Statement, and Universities UK (UUK)'s #stepchange and Suicide Safer Universities guidelines. Several of our agreed commitments relate to the recommendations in these documents.

The five main themes of our future work together are:

Clear Communication

Promoting health and well-being

Building our community

Enhancing our knowledge

Getting help when it's needed

Our vision is to work together to deliver a whole University approach to students' mental health and well-being. We will promote positive mental health as well as provide excellent support services for students requiring help to address mental health issues. Good mental health and well-being is essential to students' academic achievement and career success after graduation, and we want to provide the best possible experience for students while at University.

I would like to thank everyone who has been involved in developing this strategy. It is an excellent example of the partnership working here at Bangor University and demonstrates very clearly the benefit of approaching big issues together.



Carol Tully

Pro-Vice Chancellor
Education and Student Experience



INTRODUCTION

Student mental health and well-being affects every aspect of student life, which makes it a key priority for your Students' Union Officer team. Placing student mental health and well-being at the forefront of University decision-making, and working in partnership with our student body to shape policies is crucial to creating a representative Bangor community.

The stress of studying, academic attainment, finances, balancing work and study, and living independently, are just some aspects of student life that can impact upon mental health and well-being. Everyone experiences mental health differently, and therefore we need an approach which caters for and supports students with a diverse range of needs. Indeed, mental health is an area about which students feel passionately. It gets discussed annually by students putting themselves forward to be a Sabbatical Officer, commonly being their number one priority. As a result, we intend to harness this passion and enthusiasm to generate a vision that is relevant and meaningful to everyone in our diverse University community.

We are pleased to have worked collaboratively with the University, and importantly with students, on this strategy. The process of developing this strategy was completely student-led, which was in itself a major step forward in that it encouraged wider student interest and generated ideas. In addition, it gave students a sense of responsibility and ownership of the project, and, indeed, of the importance of nurturing their own mental health and well-being.

The Students' Union wanted the student body to have an input into the direction and implementation of this strategy. We made sure students had the opportunity to contribute to the work of developing the strategy, and that their priorities were included, such as encouraging well-being and healthy living, developing a sense of community, and recognising the different needs of our diverse student body.

A steering group made up of key staff and Students' Union representatives was formed, and a student internship post created to lead on the student consultation and development of the strategy. We held student focus groups, and an online questionnaire allowing students to give feedback on current services and support available relating to their personal experiences, as well as coming up with new ideas for the development of the new strategy.

There will be an action plan to complement the strategy, and we will continue to work with the University to ensure this is carried out to the benefit of students. We are proud to be part of this strategy, and look forward to continuing to improve the overall student experience here at Bangor.



Undeb Bangor
Sabbatical Officer Team

2018-19/2019-20

WHAT WE DISCOVERED

From the student and staff groups, five main themes emerged. These encompassed: improving communications; encouraging well-being and healthy living; developing a sense of community; the need for preventative work and education; the availability of timely support. Much of the student narrative was more about a 'well-being' agenda rather than concerns about serious mental ill health (i.e. severe and enduring conditions). In contrast to this, support services and academic staff are often concerned about the more complex presentations, risk assessment and prevention.

Both of these vantage points are relevant in informing what our next steps will be, and this led us to name our strategy a 'mental health and well-being' strategy



Mental health advisors do a brilliant job and they try to improve students' well-being

I particularly like the iCan workshops as I believe it is easier to problem solve and find solutions by sharing ideas from different perspectives'

Continue doing all that you are doing

hugely beneficial

(the appointment of a full-time Welsh speaking counsellor)

Make it a little more accessible and try to address people that are not accessing support;- encourage students to put themselves out there

Some Societies are really good at dealing with mental health



WHAT WE PLAN TO DO NEXT

Bangor University already has an excellent reputation for its pastoral support, as does Undeb Bangor, (our Students Union) for its clubs, societies and volunteering projects. We plan to build on existing provision through five key themes.

The themes of our new strategy also address many of the recommendations made in UUK guidelines. We already have in place many examples of existing good practice as suggested in #stepchange- for example; the robust evaluation of current practice; the deployment of evidence based interventions; providing learning and tools for self-care and positive mental health; ensuring effective signposting of support; allocating time and resources to staff support for student mental health.

All aspects of our strategy involve collaborative partnership working across and between departments, schools and colleges. In addition, this strategy aligns with UUK's 'Suicide Safer Universities' recommendations such as providing a range of easily accessible and culturally appropriate support for those experiencing difficulties, as well as providing an evidence-based treatment for those deemed to be at highest risk. Our HEFCW funded project 'Improving mental health and well-being support for students through the medium of Welsh', with its development of online resources in particular, addresses issues around prevention, early intervention and transition.



VISION

Our vision is to work together to deliver a whole University approach to students' mental health and well-being that is grounded in the lived experience of our students.

Because good mental health is essential for students' academic and career success, we will work to ensure that the promotion of positive mental health and provision of excellent support services are central to the student experience at Bangor.

STRATEGIC AIMS

The five main themes of our future work together are:

**CLEAR
COMMUNICATION**

**PROMOTING HEALTH
AND WELL-BEING**

**BUILDING OUR
COMMUNITY**

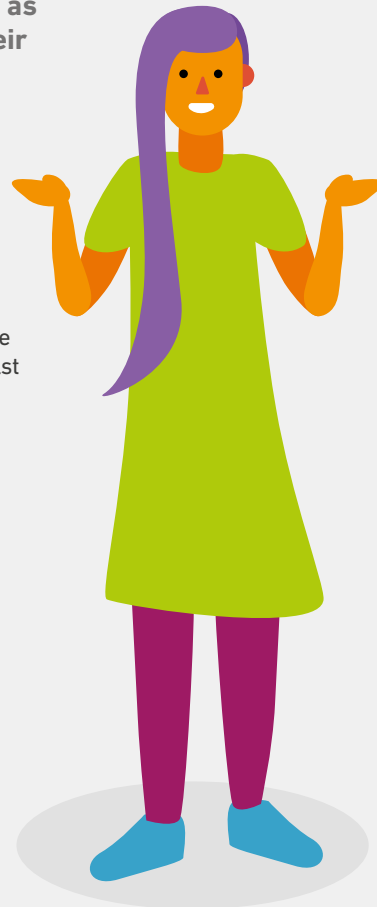
**ENHANCING OUR
KNOWLEDGE**

**GETTING HELP WHEN
IT'S NEEDED**

CLEAR COMMUNICATION



We are committed to providing clear and appropriate information and communication to students on how to access mental health and well-being help and support. We will encourage students to be proactive at key points in their academic journey, such as points of transition, when their mental health support may need to be reviewed.



What's important to our students

Students highlighted the importance of being able to access the information they need for timely and appropriate support. Whilst the University has a wealth of information and signposting available in a variety of formats, this was sometimes experienced as overwhelming, with students being unsure about where to start and not being aware of services that are already in existence (such as same day appointments for counselling, and 24/7 online resources).

What we already do

Bangor University has a comprehensive system of pastoral support for its students, which they often cite as one of the reasons they chose to study here. The challenge for us now is to raise awareness of these resources in a way that is easy for students to understand.

To make this a reality we will:

Ensure support is **well signposted** throughout students' studies, with particular efforts made at potentially stressful times

Promote the **positive** and **developmental** aspects of what Student Services can offer

Ensure the mental health support services offer is **very clear in student recruitment information**, with emphasis on **positive mental health support**

Ensure **personal academic tutors and professional staff** are aware of the available resources within the University that **promote and support student mental health and well-being**

Celebrate our successes and examples of **good practice**

PROMOTING HEALTH & WELL-BEING



We will integrate healthy behaviour and promote positive mental health within the University's educational mission and extra-curricular activities, as well as encourage the recognition of mental health as being as important as physical health.

What's important to our students

Students wanted more help in developing their skills in achieving a balance between academic and other activities, in living healthier lifestyles and in enhancing physical as well as emotional well-being. The student feedback highlighted the importance of thinking holistically about mental health and well-being, and of not seeing the mind and the body as two separate entities.

What we already do

Bangor University is renowned for not only its beautiful surroundings, but its expertise in the field of Sports Sciences, its work with and in the natural environment, and its commitment to healthy living through Undeb Bangor's many clubs, societies and volunteering projects. In addition, the University hosts the Centre for Mindfulness Practice and Research, and Student Services offer a wide variety of supportive projects to enhance well-being. Our aim is to better utilise these areas of expertise so we have a whole University approach to the promotion of positive mental health.



To make this a reality we will:

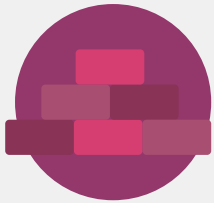
Create academic communities that **support well being**

Champion the role of **activities and sports** and encourage participation in **sport and physical activity**

Offer an **open and varied programme** that provides **social opportunities**

Review and enhance our online well-being resources

BUILDING OUR COMMUNITY



We will create a University community that supports positive mental health by supporting the members of our community to develop their knowledge, understanding and behaviours. The University will work to ensure that all members of our community feel included, supported, respected and valued.



What's important to our students

Students highlighted the importance of a sense of belonging and community in their feedback. This chimes with work undertaken at many HEIs over the last decade and shows that feeling part of a community is hugely important to student well-being and positive mental health.

What we already do

Much of the good practice already in existence comes from the work done through our Campus Life social programme in Halls, the International Education Centre and Undeb Bangor's clubs, societies and volunteering projects. We were also awarded Best University in the UK for Clubs and Societies at the 2019 'What Uni' Student Choice Awards for the third year running. We want to further increase the inclusivity of our University community, creating new and innovative ways for our diverse range of students to connect, participate and contribute.

To make this a reality we will:

Consider the particular needs of **diverse student groups** and offer **easy-to-access support** for students from a range of backgrounds

Continue to work for equivalence of provision for **Welsh speaking students**

Organise **opportunities** for people to meet and chat to **promote mental well-being**

Build a '**community of support**' through regular activities during University holidays

Ensure that students are **equal partners** in shaping our **mental health support**

Work with schools to build **supportive communities** for students' mental health support

ENHANCE OUR KNOWLEDGE



We will provide appropriate information, education and training to our staff and students to enable a knowledgeable community to function and respond appropriately to all aspects of mental health and well-being.

What's important to our students

The student and staff feedback highlighted the importance of increasing understanding of mental health issues, in both student and staff populations.

What we already do

The University has a longstanding commitment to staff development, and student support services have good links with academic schools. For many years, mental health first aid training has been delivered across the University by our mental health advisors, and support has been offered through reflective practice groups, through contact with a duty counsellor, and via e-learning packages. But we also need to ensure that what we offer is effective and appropriate, so our commitments focus not only on expanding existing provision but on evaluating the efficacy of these interventions.



To make this a reality we will:

Expand our **education and training** for student leaders and Halls Mentors on how to **identify and respond** to mental health and well-being concerns among their peers

Increase the **resources and education opportunities** for students on life skills and study skills

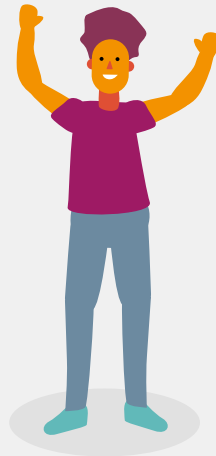
Widen the range of **mental health and well-being training** provided to staff

Review and evaluate existing mental health / suicide awareness trainings for efficacy and outcomes

GETTING HELP WHEN IT'S NEEDED



We will encourage students to feel able to seek appropriate and timely help, which also involves us working to reduce stigma, removing unnecessary barriers to support and ensuring that staff are given the best training and support for their pastoral roles. Getting help when it's needed also refers to the importance of the University working strategically with external statutory/voluntary agencies and funding bodies to gain maximum resources to help us to support our students and staff through their academic endeavour.



What's important to our students

Being able to access help and support was a recurring theme in students' feedback. Students were concerned about waiting times, and wanted to feel that their concerns were being taken seriously. There was also some confusion about which services to access first in a student's help seeking journey.

What we already do

Bangor University's counselling and mental health services compare very favourably with many other UK-wide universities, both in terms of resources allocated and outcomes. We promote our provision to prospective students, and our Disability Service contacts all students who tick the 'mental health condition' box on their application form. Our unique PLSP app ensures that Personal Learning Support Plans for disabled students are shared in confidence. Through our Counselling Service we provide a very wide variety of helping interventions including individual/group counselling and psycho-educational resources, and we will continue to provide specialist support and assistance to students experiencing emotional, psychological, behavioural or interpersonal problems. We have been successful in working with the local health authority, BCUHB, to employ an on-site local primary health practitioner, to ease referrals into the NHS system for mental health care. We are currently leading on the HEFCW funded project to develop Welsh medium mental health resources for students across the whole of Wales. We are committed to looking at further ways in which we can highlight points in a student's journey where they may be most vulnerable, and provide a diverse range of help and support.

To make this a reality we will:

Produce guidelines for prospective students about how they, and any mental health professionals involved in their care, can **ease the transition** into university

Work with attendance monitoring systems to build a system of **proactive support for students** who are not engaging

Develop a **suicide-safer strategy and action plan** which aligns with UUK's 'Suicide Safer Universities' guidelines

Continue to seek out sources of additional **funding to enhance provision** of the counselling service, mental health advisers and other student support services in sustaining accessible support for students

Maintain **existing links** with external stakeholders and providers

NEXT STEPS

This strategy is an overview of our future plans. A full implementation plan listing the variety of actions referred to in this strategy will be reviewed regularly by the Student-Led Mental Health and Well-being Implementation Group in collaboration with Undeb Bangor. Implementation of this University wide strategy will be overseen by the Student Experience Strategy Group.

Student Led Mental Health Strategy Steering Group:

Undeb Bangor officers and staff

Chloe Brindley
Student Intern

Carolyn Donaldson-Hughes
Head of Disability

Thandi Gilder
Senior Lecturer / Director of Undergraduate Studies Psychology

Cheryl Parkinson
Mental Health Advisor

Fiona Rickard
Mental Health Advisor

Kate Tindle
Head of Counselling

