



University of
Nottingham

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

Staff Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy

2024-2026



Foreword



by Helen McNamara, Director of Organisation and People Development

“People are at the heart of everything we do here at the University of Nottingham; in our research, in our teaching and in our support for each other. The wellbeing of our staff is central to how we feel and how we engage with our work, and with our colleagues. I am therefore excited and proud to be able to introduce to you the university’s first wellbeing and mental health strategy for staff, which is a fantastic development in showing my commitment, as Director of Organisational and People Development, and our university’s commitment to our greatest asset: our staff.

Our People and Culture Strategy rightly emphasises supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of all our people as a priority and this strategy builds on that promise. This strategy will be the starting point for a number of important workstreams to turn our commitment to staff wellbeing and mental health into tangible support services which will help us all to thrive in our work and in our interactions with each other as a university community. I have personally experienced how helpful policies and employer support services can make a huge difference to how I feel at work and how I can balance my work with the demands of my personal life and family. I want to help every member of staff feel supported by our university and that they do not have to ‘go it alone’.

The mental health of every single member of staff is important: we cannot work effectively alone. We must work together and communicate effectively, not only as university colleagues but also as members of the higher education sector, which is why we have begun collaborating with other higher education institutions on wellbeing, in preparation for our University Mental Health Charter Award submissions. I hope that this strategy gives us a useful way of being able to discuss together our wellbeing and mental health and a structure for thinking about what helps to build ‘good’ mental health at work, whose responsibility that is, and what we will work collectively on to achieve our goals over the next few years.

We have Human Resources team members who are genuinely and sincerely committed to ensuring your wellbeing at work and we welcome your ideas on this strategy, to build our shared future of good mental health at work together.”





Introduction

This wellbeing strategy ('this strategy') sets out the vision, mission, themes and goals of the University of Nottingham ('our university') for prioritising the best wellbeing and mental health of all university staff over the next three years, from 2024 to 2026.

This strategy has been created for staff, by staff in the Organisational Development team, further to the vision in the People and Culture Strategic Delivery Plan 2023 – 26 of "supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of all our people", in consultation with key staff stakeholders in the Wellbeing Steering Group and across our university. It builds on the:

- i. **Staff Wellbeing Delivery Plan 2020;**
- ii. **Staff Wellbeing Gap Analysis Recommendations 2022;**
- iii. **People and Culture Survey 2023; and**
- iv. **Workplace Stress and Wellbeing Audit 2023 / 2024**

the results of which will be set out in the supporting wellbeing and mental health framework documents ('our framework').

Definitions

Wellbeing

We may each have an individual view of what it is to feel a sense of wellbeing and various definitions of this word exist. To help develop a common understanding of wellbeing for this strategy and in our discussions, building on the Oxford English Dictionary definition of the word, our university's suggested definition is:

An individual's state of health and happiness, which may be enhanced by our university experience, lifestyle choices and community ('wellbeing').

Our state of health, which underpins our feelings of wellbeing, has two components, outlined below.

a. Physical health

Our physical health relates to our bodies. It can be impacted by our genetics, lifestyle choices and environment, amongst other factors, many of which are outside of our control. We each have a responsibility to ourselves to maintain the best physical health which we can achieve through our lifestyle choices, although our university acknowledges that there is not equality in physical health, either at birth or as we develop, and

access to healthcare can vary according to geography, finances and other means. Good physical health if achieved can, however, improve our mental health and vice versa.

b. Mental health

Our mental health relates to our brains and minds. Our university's suggested definition, building on those of the World Health Organization ('WHO') and the charity Mind, is:

The state of an individual's ability to think, feel, react and do ('mental health').

This definition in isolation is neutral. 'Good' or 'positive' mental health might therefore be defined as:

A state of an individual's ability to think, feel, react and do that is helpful for our work at the university and which allows us to live our lives as we wish ('good mental health').

'Poor' mental health might be defined in the reverse as:

A state of an individual's ability to think, feel, react and do that prevents us from being able to manage our work at the university and which interferes with our ability to live our lives as we wish ('poor mental health').

Mental health conditions, such as (though not limited to) depression and anxiety, can make it more likely that we experience periods of poor mental health, although one may experience poor mental health even without a mental health condition. Similarly, those of us living with mental health conditions can also experience good mental health, in the right conditions.

Our university acknowledges that being employed and having the right challenges at work can enhance our mental health and thereby improve our wellbeing, if we avoid overwhelm and stress. Job quality (in particular, feeling a sense of control over, and variety in, our work tasks and career progression) can also enhance these positive feelings.

Scope

Whilst this strategy applies only to staff working at our university's Nottingham campuses, the vision and mission below have been agreed jointly between staff and student-facing teams in the UK, to reflect our university's commitment to our shared collective wellbeing and mental health, both as individuals and as a wider community. 'Community', for the purpose of this strategy, is intended to mean our university community.



Our vision

Our wellbeing and mental health 'vision' is to be a university which values and supports the wellbeing and good mental health of all our students and staff, works together as one community and empowers us to:

1. take care of our health and wellbeing, and that of our peers and colleagues;
2. create a caring, respectful and inclusive culture with our words, actions and choices; and
3. reach our full potential, realise our ambitions and help us to thrive both at the university and beyond.

Our mission

Our wellbeing and mental health 'mission' is to enable our student and staff community to reach our vision by:

- embedding wellbeing in every area of university life by providing opportunities for social connection;
- taking a cohesive and holistic approach to our wellbeing, and the development of positive mental health, in the design of our systems, policies, spaces and learning and development resources; and
- providing timely and proactive support to each other which is evidence-based, continuously reflective and founded on our university values.

Our remit

Our university is committed to achieving our vision and mission to ensure that, as staff, we thrive in our work over the long-term and help to contribute sustainably to our university's success and longevity. To this end, it is useful to consider our university's locus of control. Our university cannot control national and international events (for example, the Covid-19 pandemic) or instances such as ill-health, both acute and chronic, or bereavement which can, understandably, cause distress in our personal lives and impact our mental health and overall wellbeing. As a result, our university cannot guarantee anyone's daily state of mental health or wellbeing.

What our university can support us with is improving our university experience, including helping us to achieve a healthy work-life balance, which can be particularly important as we encounter challenging events during our time here. It should also comply with its legal requirements (for example, but not limited to: its duty of care as an employer; managing work-related stress, currently measured by risk assessments; putting in place reasonable adjustments for those

working with a disability; conducting equality impact assessments to consider all protected characteristics in decision-making; attending to display screen equipment and other health and safety requirements; and considering flexible working requests). Remit is therefore built into the themes below, so that we are clear on what is our university's responsibility to improve, what is our own, and what is a joint effort.

Our university understands that with the right information and support, we are more likely to enjoy good mental health and wellbeing, which will improve the quality and creativity of our work, reduce costs from sickness absence, presenteeism and staff turnover (as evidenced by Universities UK's 'Stepchange: mentally healthy universities' framework) and enhance our overall university experience.

Wellbeing and mental health themes

There are three overarching wellbeing and mental health 'themes', the development of which are essential for improving our, and our colleagues', wellbeing and promoting good mental health. The component 'elements' are listed below each theme so that we can understand what contributes to them and who is responsible for improving each of them.

This strategy's success will be underpinned by us all working together effectively and is therefore dependent on our combined efforts to understand the benefits of these themes and bring them to life in our thoughts, words and actions towards our colleagues.

1. Our university experience

The experience we have at work can have a significant impact on our wellbeing and mental health. Our **university therefore takes responsibility for this theme** and its elements, below, which interlink, and commits to helping us to achieve a positive university experience throughout our careers.

a. A balanced workload:

With too much strain, we can become stressed and with too little to do, we can become bored. Finding the right workload, which helps us to perform at our best, is one of the key responsibilities of line managers. Our university will help us to achieve a work-life balance by ensuring that our leaders are trained in appropriate prioritisation and delegation, provide opportunities for us as colleagues to improve our ability to have effective open conversations about workload and help us to communicate our experiences clearly with our colleagues.



b. A learning journey:

The right challenges which move us into our learning and growth zones are essential for us to enjoy our work. Our university will support the Learning and Development ('L&D') strategy and its learning organisation work to aid the development of our university-wide learning culture, which will help to realise the potential of our people.

c. A culture of compassionate leadership:

We need the right role-models to which we can aspire and who lead compassionately and by example. Our university will provide improved recruitment, promotion and learning and development opportunities and equip us with tools, which may include wellbeing and mental health assessment tools, for those of us with line-management or other leadership responsibilities. This will help us both to manage and support others, when necessary, and to lead our university community authentically and helpfully, inspiring trust in others, communicating transparently, managing change and taking responsibility and accountability for our work and our actions. Our university values the wellbeing of line managers and understands how pivotal they are in nurturing positive wellbeing cultures; it will therefore create a collaborative approach with line managers across our university.

d. A culture of living our university values:

Our values of inclusivity, ambition, openness, fairness and respect should underpin each of our actions and reactions. Communication of these values, and communication between each other, is key. Our university will thus support the Human Resources ('HR') department to assist in the practical implementation of these values, underpinned by our Organisational Development portfolio. HR will also be supported to develop and promote effective policies, such as the Dignity at Nottingham policy on harassment, bullying and victimisation and its related policies. Our university will help us as colleagues to: communicate with each other effectively; develop our feedback, listening and empathy skills; and facilitate us to have meaningful open conversations with each other. Our university will also support our learning around how to create a psychologically safe environment for each other, particularly line managers, so that our team members feel comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work and sharing relevant lived experiences. Our university will continue to support our equality, diversity and inclusion ('EDI') priorities, create processes which take into account protected characteristics and ensure that we are inclusive by design.

e. A safe and comfortable environment:

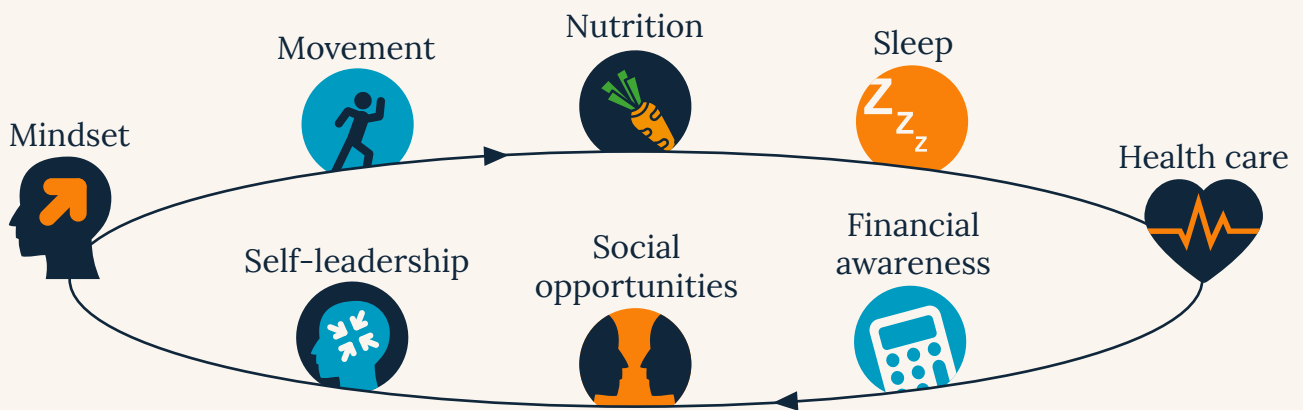
Safe campuses, which give us a sense of mattering or belonging and are comfortable, accessible and appropriate for enjoyable, distraction-free work, are vital. Home-working, where possible, should also comply with health and safety and other legislative requirements. Our framework will explore the importance of lighting, temperature, noise and zoning in our workspaces, as well as the impact of healthy catering options. Environmentally sustainable 'green' spaces in which to work, which provide access to nature, can also benefit our wellbeing and mental health, as well as have a positive impact on our local and global environment. Our university will support our Health and Safety and Estates and Facilities teams to ensure these benefits for us, which will include building support from the Health and Safety Executive's Management Standards.

f. An agile way of working:

The agile working initiative supports us as colleagues to work flexibly to meet our objectives, empowering us to work when and where it is most effective, whether on Campus, at home or in a tertiary environment, to perform our roles and deliver our outcomes. Feelings of clarity of role (and of how our work connects to the university's success), trust, empowerment and motivation will help us to deliver outstanding work and balance autonomy with accountability.

g. A clear pathway to support:

Easy-to-navigate, clear and accessible HR systems, L&D resources and university pathways to wellbeing and mental health support, such as occupational health ('OH'), will enable us to find the help we need early so that we can manage our work effectively and address any barriers to our wellbeing or mental health before a crisis develops. Should we already find ourselves in crisis, help should be accessible quickly and easily. These will be explored in more detail in our framework.



2. Our lifestyle choices

Positive lifestyle choices also provide a solid foundation for our wellbeing and good mental health. As colleagues, **wherever possible, we should take individual responsibility for the above elements of our lifestyle choices**: for the sake of our individual wellbeing and good mental health and for the collective benefit of our work, students and colleagues. These eight elements of our lifestyle choices will be explored in more detail in our framework.

Our university, in turn, commits to creating a proactive environment which encourages us to look after ourselves; for example, by signposting us to useful information on these elements of our lifestyle choices, sharing helpful resources and, when possible, providing us with access to services and tools to support us to help ourselves.

3. Our community

This final theme is crucial for our wellbeing and mental health in our working environment. Forming a supportive university community in which we all thrive is everyone's joint responsibility: **as colleagues, we should work collaboratively with our university on the following community elements**, the growth of which our university will facilitate by providing us with opportunities for social connection wherever possible.

a. Collegiality:

We cannot always control who we work with, any more than we can control the families and neighbours we have at home, but we can influence the quality of the relationships we build with those around us at work. Assuming the positive intent of those around us, offering to help colleagues during difficult periods, managing conflict effectively and dealing with unacceptable behaviour in a timely manner can help to build a supportive environment in which we take it in turns to help each other during the ebbs and flows of work each academic year.

b. Staff voice and networks:

Feeling heard within our university and connecting with colleagues with whom we share things in common are important. We have multiple staff networks and communities of practice for colleagues with common interests, in addition to Staff Engagement Champions who support teams by passing on their feedback on organisational change and taking co-ordinated action. Staff should feel empowered to create and join networks which are relevant to them as a way of connecting to a wider set of colleagues and, in some cases, forming more meaningful connections with those they already know, whether or not they work in the same faculty, school or department. Some partnerships with external bodies, such as the NHS, also impact our community; these relationships should therefore be invested in, too.

c. Giving back:

Acts of altruism, for example, volunteering for charitable or local community causes, can be a way both to improve our own wellbeing and to improve the lives of those around us, at the same time. Giving our time to others, whether for our university or other local initiatives, can be one way of helping us to feel connected to our community. When coupled with other elements such as access to nature in activities like community gardening, or group sports and activity initiatives, the benefits to our health – both our mental health and overall wellbeing – can be exponential. Our university will therefore explore opportunities for us to engage in meaningful volunteering opportunities.

d. Celebrating achievements:

Recognising and celebrating the achievements of our colleagues can help to build a university which we are all proud to work in together. We are all responsible for fostering a sense of pride in each other's work and for role modelling the behaviour which we would like to see more of within our university. Expressions of gratitude, which may be as simple as saying 'thank you', can make all the difference to a colleague's day



and can help build strong relationships in our teams, developing a community in which we are happy to work for years to come.

e. Buddying and mentoring:

Providing opportunities for all members of staff to be able to find a buddy or mentor is not only an important source of learning and career development relevant to our university experience but also a powerful form of community-building, which allows us to build our networks and make long-lasting connections. Our university will explore ways for staff to find a buddy or mentor at all levels and in schools and departments across the institution to ensure that we have support from others with whom we can build trust for the long-term.

Goals

To achieve our vision and mission over the next three years and beyond, our university commits to shorter-term goals (our ‘goals’), the path to which will be set out in more detail in our framework, which align to the above themes:

1. To develop, share and facilitate enhanced, proactive, staff support packages and learning and development opportunities which are aligned to each element of **our university experience**.

Our framework will set out the current wellbeing and mental health support in place for staff at our university, to be reviewed, including:
 - crisis and intervention-basis support, such as access to counselling services and employee assistance programmes;
 - prevention and solution-focused workplace support, such as OH;
 - peer support, such as Mental Health First Aiders, and supporting-the-supporters provision; and
 - self-help resources, such as learning, development and other guidance currently provided by our L&D department and third-party service providers.
2. To signpost more effectively to information, such as e-learning, wellbeing and mental health news and University Mental Health Charter best practice guidance, to help staff to improve elements of **our lifestyle choices**.
3. To review, and suggest improvements for, how we foster a stronger sense of belonging within each element of **our community**.

4. To support Mind’s Mental Health at Work Commitment and Student Minds’ University Mental Health Charter Award submission process and to collaborate with other higher education institutions and the NHS on wellbeing and mental health.
5. To seek best practice from, amongst others: the WHO; the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence; Universities UK; and Healthy Universities, and to share best practice across our university.
6. To work with HR to review and update policies and guidance relating to wellbeing and mental health, ensuring that they are up-to-date and fit for purpose.
7. To agree ‘success indicators’ to enable future wellbeing and mental health data evaluation, annual review and evidence-informed interventions and approaches to improving staff support.

Reaching these goals will require inter-disciplinary collaboration amongst multiple working groups including, but not limited to: the Wellbeing Steering Group; the Mental Health Charter Steering Group; Heads of Schools and other senior leadership teams; HR, in particular, the Pay and Reward department; the EDI team, the Department of Sport; the Agile working and Getting in Shape teams; and staff networks. This may also involve procurement and tender exercises with third party suppliers, where needed, to ensure a streamlined provision of current staff support.

This will help our university to take the “whole-university” approach needed to create the “environment and culture that reduces poor mental health, as well as supporting good mental health” to provide us as colleagues with the skills to “manage and maintain [our] own wellbeing”, as recommended by Student Minds for the University Mental Health Charter Framework.

Moving forward

Our framework will set out the wellbeing and mental health journey for staff, including the touchpoints with our support services and related staff case studies. It will also contain a more detailed framework of next steps to address how we will action the above goals to support our university in accomplishing its wellbeing and mental health vision and mission, the achievement of which will depend on the co-operation of colleagues across our university.



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This strategy was authored and developed by Louise Benski and produced by the University of Nottingham's Organisational Development department after consultation with the university's Wellbeing Steering Group.