



# Student Mental Health Agreement

The College's Mental Health Strategy is currently being developed. A steering group consisting of support, teaching and student body representatives including representatives from the Students' Association, has been established in order to develop and drive forward a range of initiatives that link to the Mental Health Strategy, including the Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA). The College is committed to making a positive difference to the lives of all students who experience mental ill health and to build resilience skills and capacity for students to manage their mental wellbeing. This is with the aim of ensuring that all students are able to achieve their full potential as successful learners in an environment free of stigma and discrimination and ready to transition to future learning, life and work. This Agreement acknowledges the role that students, as peers, have in delivering mental health support and in helping to shape and feedback on services.

- 1. To hold mental health events and activities which challenge stigma and discrimination.**
- 2. To promote support services available to students in a variety of ways throughout the year. Highlighting support on campuses, locally and nationally.**
- 3. To enhance the capacity of students and staff to identify and provide support and signposting, where there are concerns around student and staff mental health, by rolling out a number of training opportunities.**
- 4. To explore the possibility of enhanced partnerships with external organisations including the Third sector.**
- 5. To identify vulnerable student groups and give them the opportunity to give feedback on support services available, highlight any barriers they may face and shape services.**
- 6. To ensure that the aims of the SMHA are made known to the whole student population including part time and distance learners and staff members.**

- 1. To hold mental health events and activities throughout the year to challenge stigma and discrimination.**

The ambition is that College, students, the Students' Association and our external partners work together to deliver events that are relevant to our staff and student demographic and to encourage staff and students to engage in these activities.

The Students' Association through its Calendar of events and activities and by participation in the Healthy Body; Healthy Mind awards aims to deliver targeted events to support the Mental Health Strategy and ensure that both staff and students can participate fully in and feel able to contribute to and shape these activities.

#### **Actions to be taken:**

- Capitalise and grow the main Calendar events offered by the Students' Association as a platform and focus for related activity - Freshers' week, Health and Wellbeing Fairs, TogetherNES-Equality and Diversity Fairs.
- Ensure systems are in place so that both staff and students are involved in informing what these events should look like e.g. using existing internal and external channels of communications.
- Plan when the events will happen and populate events Calendar for publishing at the beginning of an academic year.
- Contact organisations and individuals who will be able to support these events and activities and maintain records in line with GDPR.
- Ensure that feedback is captured and activities are evaluated to inform future events.
- Through the Partnership Agreement, SEAG (Student Engagement Action Group) and Mentally Healthy College initiative steering group ensure that mechanisms are in place for the College to support the Students' Association in the delivery of their events and promote student engagement in these.

## 2. To promote support services available to students in a variety of ways throughout the year. Highlighting support on campuses, locally and nationally.

The newly created Academic Tutoring role and Student Advice and Support Team play a crucial role in helping to deliver a positive student experience. The Academic Tutor role (over 300 in place) provides the opportunity for effective relationships and trust to be built between staff and students, and signposting to online resources available through the student portal and where required to relevant external support agencies. Additionally, the Mentally Healthy College initiative steering group is currently exploring possible enhanced partnership working with Third Sector organisations. The Students' Association should be informed of support services available so they are able to effectively signpost students to sources of support both on and off campus. The Students' Association will develop networks to enable them to deliver robust events and activities. Additionally, students should also be given the opportunity to give feedback on the Student Mental Health Strategy and the services that are in place to support this.

### Actions to be taken:

- Ensure all FE and HE students are made aware of their allocated Academic Tutors during induction sessions, timetabled AT slots for all FE students and identification through Blackboard, Class Representatives to remind students as part of their class contact time.
- To continue to advertise the Student Advice Centres and other support services via all promoting channels e.g. posters, plasma screens, student portal, inductions, academic tutoring slots, social media etc. being cognisant of the periods of the academic year when these services may in greater demand i.e. exams, Christmas period.
- Continue to develop the Mental Health Toolkit available on the student platform pages.
- Continue to ensure all staff are fully aware of the College's Mental Health First Aid guidelines and Safeguarding procedures/ policy via mandatory staff training and intranet portal e.g. aim for a distinct tab on the main page.
- Ensure Students' Association / students are represented and involved in shaping services and materials and have the ability to feedback on the same.
- Develop Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit which includes signposting to external organisations locally and nationally ensuring that students and staff have ready access to this i.e. student portal, Organisational Development department.
- Follow progress of Scottish Government Mental Health Guidance on the provision of counsellors in further education colleges.



**3. To enhance the capacity of students and staff to identify and provide support and signposting, where there are concerns around student and staff mental health, by rolling out a number of training opportunities.**

The Mentally Healthy College initiative steering group has identified several gaps in staff training and has created an action plan in order to start upskilling key members of staff, including Students' Association staff, in the first instance but gradually extending the training to other staff and students. This should further include a commitment to resilience building in students and developing structures that promote and enable students to disclose issues in relation to mental health and wellbeing.

**Actions to be taken:**

- To ensure key members of staff and student representatives have been provided MHFA training.
- Mandatory Mental Health awareness workshops delivered to all college staff.
- Deliver ASIST Training for key members of staff.
- Further develop the online student support referral system including safeguarding referrals and ensure through staff inductions that all staff are aware of these processes.
- Explore mental health wellbeing and resilience courses for staff and students.
- Students' Association contributes by ensuring students are aware of and are able to access training opportunities i.e. through Class Rep system and by identifying students who are able to make a valid contribution to strategy delivery.

**4. To explore the possibility of enhanced partnerships with external organisations including the third sector.**

The College continues to review its services and enhances them where there is a need identified. In addition to the support services already offered by the College we acknowledge that there are a wide range of services and mental health support organisations, predominantly in the third sector, who are well placed to provide additional support to both staff and students. The College and Students' Association will continue to explore, develop and nurture those partnerships.

**Actions to be taken:**

- Engage in talks with the Third Sector which covers the two main council areas, Aberdeen City and Shire.
- Engage in talks with the local NHS board.
- College and Students' Association maintain, in line with GDPR, a database of organisations who can support the events, activities and training aims of the Mental Health Strategy.
- Engage with Think Positive events to learn from and contribute to good practice sharing with participating institutions.



**5. To identify vulnerable student groups and give them the opportunity to give feedback on support services available, highlight any barriers they may face and shape services.**

The College delivers across three campuses and covers a wide North East of Scotland geographic area. Each campus has its own identity but all have vulnerable students who require additional support and encouragement. It is recognised that vulnerable student groups may be more reluctant to seek support at an early stage where they experience mental health difficulties.

**Actions to be taken:**

- Ensure information on student support and mental health services is displayed across all campuses and is accessible to all in terms of format and language e.g. posters, plasma screens, student portal, inductions, academic tutoring slots, social media.
- Engage with vulnerable student groups on an ongoing basis to determine the biggest issues they face and ways to address these - focus on subject areas where retention is poor and identify actions that can be taken in respect of these groups - Introductory SCQF Level 4 groups are currently under review and the College is aware of poor attainment and retention of students in these groups and is working to mitigate risks and identify appropriate actions.
- Use feedback to shape the services available.
- Actively contribute to the development of the new College system which will capture information and interventions that are made in respect of all learners, particularly those who are vulnerable.

**6. Ensure that the aims of the Agreement are made known to the whole student population including part time and distance learners and staff members.**

It is essential that this be seen as a live, working document and, to that end, one the aims of which are delivered in partnership with both staff and students. In this way, both students and staff will see Mental Health as a priority.

**Actions to be taken:**

- Consult with students as to the preferred formats and content of a Student Friendly version. The Students' Association will, in the first instance, take this to Class Rep meetings across all main campuses.
- Ensure the Student Mental Health Agreement is accessible to all students and staff and is promoted throughout the year i.e. student friendly version.
- Ensure that all formats of the SMHA are available through a variety of mediums - Staff and Students Intranets, Noticeboards etc.
- Mentally Healthy College initiative steering group will ensure that the SMHA is a regular agenda item and will monitor and evaluate progress against actions. This action may also be carried out in conjunction with the Student Engagement Action Group (SEAG) who have responsibility for evaluating progress against the Partnership Agreement.

Signed by:



Liz McIntyre, Principal and Chief Executive

Signed by:



Abby Miah, Regional President Students' Association