

WELLBEING STRATEGY 2021-2023



INTRODUCTION

North East Scotland College’s (NESCol) Wellbeing Strategy sets out strategic direction across the next three years. NESCol understands the challenges faced by people living with mental, physical and social health issues and the impact this can have on their personal, working and academic lives.

Here at NESCol we want to create an environment where there is no stigma and discrimination related to mental, physical or social health, and awareness and understanding is raised through education, advice, information and training. Furthermore, it is our intention to provide an environment where peoples’ wellbeing is considered in all that we do and, where practicable, opportunities are available for the enhancement of personal wellbeing.

We believe this is best achieved by working collaboratively with the Students’ Association, People Services (HR), Student Advice and Support Team, NUS Scotland, Local Authorities, schools and third sector organisations.

CONTEXT

In 2017 the Scottish government published the national [Mental Health Strategy 2017-2027](#) with the guiding ambition that mental health problems should be treated with the same commitment, passion and drive as physical health problems.

Poor mental health is one of the most challenging public health issues and around one in four people are estimated to be affected by mental illness in any one year. ([Scottish Health Survey 2019](#))


NESCol notes that the number of full time students with declared mental health needs has risen by 48% since AY2016-17 (564 full time in AY2016-17 to 837 in AY20120-21) so the need to seek further support is growing.

Counselling Services for students at NESCol were launched in September 2020 and by 6th April 2021 the service had grown in response to demand from 1 counsellor to 3 counsellors delivering the service at NESCol equating to over 300 hours of support in that time.

Although mental health has consistently represented between 40%-45% of all declared disabilities for full-time students at NESCol, there has also been a steady increase in physical and social impairment declarations. Declarations have increased by 43% since AY2016-17 (796 full time in AY2016-17 to 1043 in AY2020-21). It is important to note that during this time there have been vast improvements in reporting systems and pre-application information and support, which will have contributed to the increase.

Staff absence rates in 2019 were 3.14%, which is in line with the average of 2.8% for the Public Sector ([Office for National Statistics Dataset 2021](#)). Reasons for absence vary with the most common reasons being due to minor illnesses such as stomach upsets, colds and flu. However, in 2019 16% of days lost were for reasons related to mental health.

In addition to the increasing trends, the impact of COVID-19 on wellbeing cannot be underestimated.




Health

- COVID-19 has had a profound negative effect on physical and mental health through both direct and indirect means
- The depth, severity, and longevity of some of these impacts are less certain and strongly interrelated with impacts and mitigating measures on other outcomes such as the labour market and economy
- Uncertainties over the eventual trajectory of the pandemic persist, but it is likely that some patterns will continue to be seen, including poorer health outcomes for some groups


Deaths from COVID-19

There are substantial differences in the risk of dying for different groups of people within Scotland




Age

The oldest age groups have been most affected, with more than three quarters (77%) of deaths from among those aged 75 and over.




Sex

After adjustment for age, males were 1.4 times more likely to die than females.




Ethnicity

There is evidence that minority ethnic groups are at higher risk of dying from COVID-19 than the rest of the population, and the risk may not be the same for all ethnic groups.




Location

People in large urban areas were 4 times more likely to die than those in remote rural areas.



Poverty and Deprivation

People in the most deprived areas were over twice as likely to die as those in the least deprived areas.



Existing Health Conditions

Most people (92%) who died between March and August had an existing underlying health condition.

(Scotland’s Wellbeing: The Impact of COVID-19)

VISION

NESCol is committed to making a positive difference to the lives of all staff and students so they are able to experience positive mental, physical and social health and achieve their full potential as successful and confident individuals.

To achieve this NESCol is committed to investment in preventative measures such as building resilience, promotion of self-management strategies and providing an environment that promotes a healthy lifestyle and is free of stigma and discrimination. The wrap-around support services will continue to cover from prevention to the treatment end of the scale when it comes to supporting staff and student wellbeing.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

NESCol has worked well to address the issues posed by increasing numbers of students with mental health issues. A College steering group consisting of support, teaching and student body representatives will be created in order to develop and drive forward a range of initiatives that link to the Wellbeing Strategy. NESCol has worked closely with the Students' Association and NUS Scotland representatives on the creation and dissemination of a Student Mental Health Agreement and identifying action points to start making a positive difference to our students and staff.

Through the successful implementation of the whole-college approach to student support, all students are provided with more integrated, targeted and impactful support services that has improved communication and partnership working between the student and curriculum and student support teams. It should be noted, however, that there are limits to the type and extent of support that the College provides and there is no intention to attempt to replicate specialist NHS services.

The College has two contracts designed to support staff health and wellbeing. The first of these is with an occupational health provider which enables us to provide preventative support such as health surveillance, lifestyle checks and workstation assessments. Where staff are experiencing health problems which impact upon their work, referrals can be made to occupational health so that expert advice can be sought.

The second contract is for an Employee Assistance Programme which provides online information and wellbeing support as well as access to a confidential counselling service.

In addition, the College provides wellbeing information, advice and activities for staff.

In April 2019 we achieved Investors in People Health and Wellbeing accreditation (now called "We Invest in Wellbeing" and we will continue to work positively on staff wellbeing, with an aim also being that we maintain the accreditation.

Whilst we aim to provide support and opportunities for staff and students to maintain their personal wellbeing, ultimately, wellbeing is an individual responsibility, and we will encourage individuals to engage in services and opportunities provided for them.

STRATEGIC AIMS

1. Leadership: Deliver a whole-College approach to Wellbeing which supports both staff and students

To achieve this we will:

- Continue to embed the role of the Academic Tutor and ensure all students are aware of their allocated Academic Tutor
- Make all students and staff aware of support services available via the Student Advice Centre ensuring appropriate referrals are made by staff and the correct support is provided to students
- Seek opportunities for co-creation of services working in partnership with the Students' Association
- Ensure all staff are aware of the support available for staff and opportunities for enhancing personal wellbeing
- Ensure all staff are fully aware of the College's Mental Health First Aid guidelines and Safeguarding policy
- Provide all students and staff with access to counselling services when required
- Continue to develop the College's online Mental Health Toolkit available to staff and students
- Embed the RESPECT campaign and annual themes, highlighting this as a core part of being a NESCol citizen for staff, students and contractors.

2. Promotion: Challenge stigma and discrimination by promoting and supporting mental, physical and social health and wellbeing

To achieve this we will:

- Capitalise on and grow the NESCol calendar of events and activities that raise awareness in order to reduce stigma and promote wellbeing in conjunction with internal and external partners
- Ensure systems are in place so that both staff and students are involved in informing what these events and activities should look like
- Make students and staff aware of the NESCol's 'Wellbeing Matters at NESCol' initiative and the RESPECT campaign
- Work in collaboration with the Students' Association helping them to achieve further 'Healthy Body Healthy Mind' awards
- Establish a 'Wellbeing Matters at NESCol' group consisting of staff and students who will act as Wellbeing ambassadors

3. Partnership: Explore and strengthen links with external organisations

In order to achieve this we will:

- Attend local third sector mental health networking and forum meetings
- Collaborate and share good practice with local educational providers on support and services provided to staff and students
- Continue working with local third sector organisations in order to deliver mental, physical and social health workshops and webinars to students and staff
- Participate in the NUS Scotland 'Think Positive' campaign and the NUS Scotland national research survey on student mental health and wellbeing
- Consider opportunities for third sector organisations to have a regular on-campus presence to promote their services and our partnerships
- Continue to work closely with ACIS Student to deliver NESCol's Counselling Service for students
- Continue to work with "This is Re;Markable" to maintain Investors in People "We Invest in Wellbeing" accreditation.



4. People: Develop the awareness, knowledge and skills of staff throughout the organisation, equipping them to support students as well as to develop self-management and self-care strategies as appropriate

In order to achieve this we will:

- Set out the mental health training requirements for key members of staff e.g. Mental Health First Aid, ASIST, Safe Talk, Suicide Talk
- Facilitate joint staff and student training opportunities and information sessions to build resilience and promote self-management and self-care strategies
- Provide mandatory mental health awareness and safeguarding training sessions
- Work closely with the College's student counselling service provider, ACIS Student, to deliver mental health and wellbeing workshops to enable staff to feel more confident when dealing with students
- Offer free extra-curricular courses on mental health awareness and self-management.
- Provide a programme of wellbeing activities and opportunities for staff and students.

5. Review: Ensure continuous review of College Policies, procedures and practices

In order to achieve this we will:

- Ensure continuous and proactive review of existing and new policies that impact on student and staff wellbeing
- Establish a culture of reflection and challenge, embedding Equality Impact Assessments as a standing item on meeting agendas, giving due consideration to Trauma Informed Practice

DELIVERY, EVALUATION AND REVIEW

The following documents will support the delivery of the strategy:

1. Student Mental Health Agreement
2. Framework for Supporting Successful Students
3. Framework for Student Wellbeing
4. Framework for Staff Wellbeing
5. Framework to Advance Student Engagement
6. Mental Health First Aid Guidelines
7. Safeguarding Policy and Procedure

The Wellbeing Strategy will be reviewed every three years and as appropriate on an ad hoc basis with the aim to expand, update and improve its strategic priorities. NESCol encourages all of its staff and students to engage with this strategy and suggest areas for improvement, enhancement and development.

