

# UCL Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021

## Action plan for Objective 1 (June 2019)

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### ***Strategic vision***

*Enhance our inclusive, caring and supportive community by positively promoting good health and wellbeing (social, physical and mental) as the foundation for academic success and a great student experience.*

### **Main objectives**

1. Establish a whole-university approach to student health and wellbeing.
2. Support students in their integration into life at UCL.
3. Develop resources to encourage personal awareness of health and wellbeing and facilitate peer support.
4. Establish effective links between UCL, the NHS and other services to deliver integrated mental health care and improved risk management.
5. Ensure support for disabled students or those affected by health and wellbeing difficulties is personalised and the adjustments are effective.
6. Align student and staff wellbeing policies and initiatives to foster an inclusive and supportive community.

## **Introduction and context**

Wellbeing does not mean an absence of physical or mental illness. Rather it is a state of physical, mental and emotional health where a student is able to engage meaningfully in learning and contribute to their community. Wellbeing is personal and multifactorial, but typically includes feelings of being socially connected, a sense of direction and belonging, satisfaction with personal achievements, and low levels of anxiety.

This strategy sets out to embed a whole-university approach to health and wellbeing so that students can reach their full potential, be successful and enjoy their time at UCL.

The strategy has been developed and will be delivered in partnership with Students' Union UCL. It recognises the positive impact of inclusive and welcoming communities on student wellbeing and commits to making sure that all students thrive at UCL. There should be no stigma in disclosing disability and health/mental health difficulties. A new clinical pathway for students affected by mental health difficulties will provide more students with evidence-based treatment, in a timelier manner than is currently the case.

There are numerous dependencies between staff and students. The strategy sets out to align approaches to staff and students' health and wellbeing in order to bring about cultural change and lasting improvements.

The strategy reflects UCL's context and mission described in UCL 2034. UCL students come from a wide range of backgrounds and bring a diversity of prior experiences to our community. In 2018/19, there are around 42,000 students enrolled on programmes of study and research at undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research levels across 11 faculties. Whilst UCL has more postgraduates than undergraduate students, some undergraduate programmes attract students as young as 16 years old. Around forty per cent of UCL students are international. UCL's location, in central London, further contributes to the richness of the student experience.

In 2018, UK government policy shifted towards an explicit expectation that universities will make student health and wellbeing a strategic priority. A former universities minister, Sam Gyimah, expressed that it is no longer acceptable for universities solely to see their responsibility as the training of the mind but that they also need to work to adopt a sense of real importance of wellbeing across the institution. As such, external developments inform the strategy, too.

The six main objectives of the strategy set out UCL's approach to student health and wellbeing over the period 2019-2021. Each objective is achieved by a group of actions to be set in motion immediately and be fully embedded by 2021.

The strategy will be refreshed in 2021 alongside the UCL Education Strategy and the Research Strategy.

## Action plan

### Objective 1 - Establish a whole-university approach to student health and wellbeing

*A whole-university approach to student health and wellbeing requires that UCL's senior leadership, academic units, professional services departments, the Students' Union and students themselves share responsibility, get involved and contribute to the process. UCL's senior leadership recognises that the university has a duty of care for its students and staff and seeks to go beyond that to be the best in the sector.*

Leads:

- Denise Long – UCL
  - Alex McKee – SUUCL
- a) Establish a Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group to have oversight of the strategy and responsibility for its implementation. Members of the Group include key stakeholders from across UCL, the Students' Union and students, together with external partners. The Group is co-chaired by representatives from UCL and Students' Union UCL.
- The Pro-Vice-Provost (Student Experience) and SUUCL's Welfare and International Officer have agreed to co-chair a UCL Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy Steering Group. The group has a wide internal membership, aligning to the 'whole university approach to student health and wellbeing' and with an extended reach inviting crucial external participation from stakeholders from the Camden community. The date of the first meeting is 5 June 2019.
- b) Set up a Student Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice (SHW COP). The Community strengthens the connections between academic units, central services and the Students' Union, as colleagues can discuss challenges, share expertise and co-ordinate plans for enhancing the support we offer to students.
- In February 2019, we began a series of workshops to establish the SHW COP. The SHW COP confirmed five projects and a team and team leader/s to take them forward. The projects cover a broad range of areas, aiming to improve and enhance student health and wellbeing. There is both overwhelming and positive commitment to be involved with this COP, including the imminent launch event on 13 June 2019, which has reached capacity. (Objective 6b)
- c) Develop a network of Student Advisers, who are UCL staff members based in academic departments, to act as a first point of contact for student welfare enquiries.

- The understanding of and support for student health and wellbeing varies across UCL and this emerged clearly in the engagement work for the Education Administration and Student Support (EASS) work stream in the TOPS programme. As with the Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy there are already a significant number of programmes and projects in progress touching on this (e.g. TOPS, Student Success Project, Here to Succeed, Careers Frameworks). OVPESA, SRS and SUUCL will use their representation via these platforms to influence change to create 'Student Advisors' who are trained and themselves supported to handle effectively and consistently student welfare enquiries.
  - While we aim to achieve this the SHW Strategy Steering Groups, SHW COP, UCL Arena and Occupational Health and Wellbeing will continue to strengthen promoting best practice and developing training, tool kits and guidance to support staff with this responsibility.
- d) Make key concepts related to disability awareness, inclusive learning, health and wellbeing an integral part of relevant professional services staff and Personal Tutor training. Incorporate these concepts into curriculum development, design and governance.
- SSW is building on their collaborations with SRS Academic Services, Occupational Health and Wellbeing and UCL Arena to improve awareness, knowledge and training in the areas of disability, inclusivity and health and wellbeing for the teaching and learning environments. (Objectives 5 & 6)
  - The SHW COP has identified a project to develop a *Departmental Wellbeing Toolkit* aiming to improve students' sense of belonging to a community within their academic through wellbeing initiatives and inclusive practices. (Objective 3b)
  - Promote 'UCL Ways of Working'; a behavioural framework developed for Professional Services staff that is also transferable for staff in other roles. The framework encourages inclusivity, integrity and the value of diversity and shares meaningful synergies with the essentials for the health and wellbeing of students (Objective 6a)
  - Ensuring student health and wellbeing is a fundamental part of the programme and curriculum design and approval process is essential. There is already good practice in some areas (e.g. the UCL East project is designing an inclusive curriculum checklist) but this should be a UCL-wide requirement. Consult with SRS Academic Services to consider how to incorporate this into the UCL's regulatory framework.
- e) Strengthen collaborative work with the Students' Union throughout their wide range of services, in particular Project Active, student networks and student clubs and societies.
- SUUCL and UCL are committed to working in partnership to deliver the SHW Strategy and is co-leading on many of the objectives.
  - SUUCL and SSW are working closely on wellbeing initiatives and promoting key messages and services.

- SUUCL will shortly publish a Student Wellbeing Report providing crucial insight and data to shape the programme for continuous improvements for student health and wellbeing.
  - SUUCL has committed to developing a Sports Strategy for UCL.
  - SSW is working with the Volunteering Service to help promote the positive benefits of volunteering to students.
  - SSW is working with SUUCL and Residences to connect the Halls Committee Representatives and Student Residence Advisers to improve the living experience of students.
  - SUUCL and SSW are sharing best practice to improve peer support programmes and initiatives.
  - Work with SUUCL to evaluate and utilise feedback from student networks, focus groups, clubs and societies to help shape and influence student health and wellbeing improvements and initiatives.
- f) Expand UCL's collaborations with other higher education institutions and voluntary organisations locally, nationally and internationally. Facilitate exchanges of expertise, research and experiences with regard to student health and wellbeing.
- UCL is represented on a wide range of national networks, organisations and forums focused on student health and wellbeing – e.g. AMOSSHE, London Higher, City Mental Health Alliance, ADSHE -The Association of Dyslexia Specialists in Higher Education, NADP - is the Professional Association for disability and inclusivity practitioners
  - Led by Professor Peter Fonagy, UCL Psychology and Language Sciences, UCL has been successful in obtaining funding from the Office for Students (OfS) to lead the London Hub of a national project to develop a 'step change' in student mental health support in the UK. (Objective 4)
  - SSW participates in NHS and PHE led projects to raise awareness on a number of health and wellbeing concerns, in particular in the areas of mental health, GP services, vaccinations programmes and public health protection.
  - SSW recently developed and hosted a training and knowledge exchange event with Oxford University and Beijing Normal University. Colleagues from all three participating universities reported how beneficial the day had been.
  - UCL engages with guidance and research on student health and wellbeing and has adopted Universities UK Step-change framework for student wellbeing.
  - UCL is participating in the Department for Education's research on Student Mental Health – the DfE has noted that to date there is no dedicated survey of student mental health and wellbeing and they wish to explore the potential for filling the gap. This is separate from the OfS sponsored study exploring models of support.

- SSW has partnerships and affiliations with a range of third sector organisations to provide expert advice, information and support – e.g. Rape Crisis, Gendered Intelligence, Tier Consulting, Step by Step, Nightingale Hospital.
- g) Ensure the impact on student health and wellbeing is considered in any future policies and strategies developed across UCL. Reflect on the opportunities to stimulate good health and wellbeing through the development of a sustainable built environment.
- In addition to incorporating student health and wellbeing concepts into UCL's regulatory framework for students there is a wider institutional governance structure making decisions that affect student health and wellbeing from the Estate through to UCL plans for future changes and growth. SSW will work with SRS Academic Services to identify approaches to ensure student and staff health and wellbeing is at the core of UCL's thinking and strategic direction.
  - Identify key Faculty staff to ensure faculties and departments consider student and staff health and wellbeing when developing and reviewing their policies and strategies.
  - Work with SUUCL to ensure their activities and governance support the health and wellbeing of students and staff.
  - Use evidence based data, research, student surveys and student feedback to identify what are the causes of poor health and wellbeing among the student community and what changes to UCL's policies, and strategies could realise improvements.
- h) Engage with student feedback to enable continuous monitoring and reshaping of the support provision in line with student needs.
- UCL collects considerable data and feedback on the student arrival and induction experience both locally within SSW (e.g. the ISOP survey) and cross-institutionally (e.g. the New to UCL survey).
  - Quantitative data and qualitative feedback is currently collected on all SSW services (Disability, Mental Health and Wellbeing drop-ins, Student Psychological and Counselling Services appointments, Student Centre enquiries, Study Abroad, ISOP) and relevant services in the Students' Union and elsewhere (Volunteering Service, Advice Service).
  - In collaboration with the SHW COP, SSW are leading a project to review, consolidate and share the data and feedback collected on student health and wellbeing. The aims of this project are to: (1) ensure compliance with GDPR and other relevant legislation, (2) ensure data and feedback collection processes are as straightforward and consistent as possible, and (3) pool relevant sources of data and feedback into a unified 'student health and wellbeing barometer' or online dashboard, accessible to all. This resource would also help to monitor the effectiveness of services and inform areas for improvement.

- Review national and international student surveys, research and benchmarking data as a comparator and ensure UCL is leading on best practice.

### **Priorities for the 2019-20 academic year**

- Monitor the progress of the implementation of the SHW Strategy and identify any blockers and risks for the SHW Strategy Steering Group to resolve.
- Ensure the UCL senior leadership team has sight of both progress and issues that might affect the implementation of the SHW Strategy.
- Support the SHW COP to complete the 5 projects.
- Continuing the commitment to working in partnership with SUUCL and ensure the student voice is influencing change.
- Participation in the TOPS Programme to discuss and define a Student Advisor role.
- Work in collaboration with SRS Academic Services to improve student health and wellbeing representation throughout UCL's governance structures and review policies that adversely affect student health and wellbeing.
- Staying engaged with relevant national debates and emerging trends.
- Strengthening partnerships with the NHS and other organisations that support UCL students.