UCL Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021

Action plan for Objective 2 (June 2019)

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 2 - Support students in their integration into life at UCL

Effective integration into the community, a sense of belonging in the learning and living environments and close, encouraging peer networks are the foundations of good student wellbeing and success. UCL's diverse traditions and student population offer great opportunities, but developing a sense of belonging in such a diverse setting can be challenging and overwhelming at times for some. Supported integration is a key step towards building inclusive local communities and enhancing student wellbeing. Induction into the UCL community begins much earlier than students' arrival on campus to commence their studies.

Leads:

- Wes Durdle – UCL
- Guy Stepney – SUUCL

a) Provide more online information, preparation programmes and resources to facilitate a smooth and effective settling-in process.

- Improve the Countdown to UCL blog and email campaign by integrating a wider variety of relevant new content every year, in various media.

- Improve the Welcome to UCL app, ensuring all welcome events are included and that it is more personalised for users.

- Review and enhance the New Students pages based on student feedback, including checklists and information on the enrolment process.

- Lead an audit and review of pre-arrival communications across UCL, to work out what is being sent, when it is being sent and by whom, reducing duplication and unifying messaging. Provide staff across UCL with templates and guidelines for pre-arrival comms.

- Increase consistency of look and feel of pre-arrival communications, ensuring this is exciting, fun and welcoming. This lays the foundations of a cohesive 'Welcome to UCL' student induction package across UCL in the longer term.

- Support the successful roll-out of the Introductory Programme, designed to help new students familiarise themselves with the history, layout and achievements of UCL and build a sense of belonging.

- Develop a new Welcome Guide for all new students, providing practical advice and information for all students, especially those new to London, whether international or home.

- Make greater use of the 'Spotlight on…' videos wherever possible, especially those focussed on topics related to induction, and produce new videos where appropriate.

b) Promote UCL and the Students' Union as inclusive, caring and supportive communities to prospective and new students. Facilitate the development of inclusive personal networks and enable a sense of belonging in a culturally diverse context.

- Review materials for prospective students to ensure UCL is presented as inclusive, caring and supportive wherever possible.

- Prioritise wellbeing messages in all guidelines produced for staff disseminating local pre-arrival comms and running welcome events.

- Support review and enhancements of the Transition Mentors scheme.

- Ensure that new students have access to a comprehensive and inclusive programme of social activities on arrival.

- Offer opportunities for new students to introduce themselves to others through apps and/or other 'official' online platforms, possibly through social media.

- Ensure that UCL's campus is welcoming for new students on arrival and excites them about the start of their UCL journey, with a particular focus on the Student Centre as a focal point for student activity on campus.

- Help new students navigate the campus (in particular locations related to enrolment) more easily, and work with colleagues in Estates, CAM and the Department of Geography to improve signage and campus maps insofar as possible.

c) Deliver comprehensive local induction programmes in students' learning and living environments. Encourage and facilitate personal interactions between new and current students as well as staff to foster a sense of community.

- Develop a comprehensive set of guidelines for staff delivering student inductions, outlining what topics should be covered and what type of events should be run at programme, department, faculty and central levels. Encourage innovative events that provide opportunities for students to meet each other to be delivered at faculty, department and/or programme level.

- Expand the International Student Orientation Programme (ISOP) into a full and unified central offering, with several relevant events taking place every day in the week before the start of term. Increase capacity and develop and promot related online resources wherever possible.

- Make greater use of the Student Residence Advisers (SRAs) to enhance the induction events offered in halls of residence.

- Encourage colleagues in faculties and departments to establish local student buddy schemes, especially between home and international students.

- Deliver a Student Services Fair on campus over the Start of Session period.

d) Identify best practice and strengthen the co-ordination of UCL and the Students' Union's many induction activities, ensuring that all students receive a welcoming start to their life at UCL.

- Support the introduction of a fully online enrolment model.

- Improve campus tours, ensuring they are consistent across UCL and delivered by other students wherever possible. Incorporate key health and wellbeing sites near campus.

- If possible, further expand our programme of on-campus meningitis vaccinations to ensure a higher proportion of at-risk new students are immunised.

- Continue to run regular best practice workshops for members of the Student Inductions Forum and at other relevant opportunities, such as conferences.

- Run regular Professional Services stakeholder meetings in the run-up to the main Start of Session period with representatives from key central divisions, to coordinate activities.

- Deliver training to colleagues across UCL to become staff 'Welcome Ambassadors', supplementing the existing team of student Global Ambassadors.

- Enhance the Doctoral School Welcome and induction and welcome provisions for postgraduate research students more generally, in line with student feedback.

- More effectively share data and feedback collected about student induction activities, including the New to UCL survey and reports written in SSW.

e) Develop a web-based platform for staff providing guidance and resources for effective student inductions. Facilitate sharing of best practice between programmes, departments and faculties.

- Maintain the Microsoft Teams site for the Student Inductions Forum and encourage sharing of ideas and knowledge between colleagues across UCL. Use this space to host resources for staff.

- Encourage the establishment of local groups of key induction contacts at faculty level from departments and faculty offices.

f) Ensure induction programmes promote academic success in the context of positive health and wellbeing.

- Prioritise health and wellbeing considerations in all guidelines and training produced for staff delivering student inductions, including recommendations on how to ensure that inductions are fully inclusive to all students.

- Ensure the Here to Support You guide to SSW services is made available to all new students.

- Produce content focussed on life skills and living independently. Enhance information and resources on academic writing and other aspects of study.

- Encourage staff delivering induction events to spread out sessions over the first term where possible to reduce overload of information in the first few weeks.

- Promote the Positive app to the incoming cohort in September 2019 and encourage students to download.

- Ensure that information, resources and training about suicide prevention, awareness and support, as well as consent, sexual violation, harassment and bullying, is incorporated into student inductions.

- Run a concerted cross-platform campaign encouraging new students to register with a GP and ensure they are familiar with how to access health care services.

g) Offer dedicated information to student groups who may require additional support to settle into UCL, such as care leavers, students transitioning gender, students affected by health conditions, students with disabilities, students who are parents or carers, BME students.

- Improve induction support for disabled students.

- Improve induction support for care-experienced and estranged students.

- Improve induction support for students transitioning gender students.

- Improve induction support for students affected by (physical and mental) health conditions.

- Improve induction support for student parents and carers.

- Improve induction support for BME students.

- Conduct research to find out if there are other specific student groups who may need additional support around induction, and then improve our provision as appropriate.

h) Parental support is an essential part of university life for some students. Develop dedicated web resources for parents and guardians who wish, for example, to engage with the processes of settling-in and accessing specialist services.

- Develop a comprehensive new website for parents.

- Produce a printed guide for parents directing to and complementing the new website.

Priorities for the 2019-20 academic year:

- Lead an audit and review of pre-arrival communications across UCL, to work out what is being sent, when it is being sent and by whom, reducing duplication and unifying messaging. Provide staff across UCL with templates and guidelines for pre-arrival comms.

- Develop a new Welcome Guide for all new students, providing practical advice and information for all students, especially those new to London, whether international or home.

- Improve the Welcome to UCL app, ensuring all welcome events are included and that it is more personalised for users.

- Ensure that information, resources and training about suicide prevention, awareness and support, as well as consent, sexual violation, harassment and bullying, is incorporated into student inductions.