



# Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021

## **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.

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## **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.

## Main objectives

### 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.*

#### **Actions:**

- 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.
- b) Set up a Student Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice. 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- h) Engage with student feedback to enable continuous monitoring and reshaping of the support provision in line with student needs.

#### **Measuring success:**

- Development, dissemination and implementation, across UCL and the Students' Union, of a best practice guide for induction, learning, research and social activities promoting good health and wellbeing
- Delivery of the Student Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice, ensuring ongoing engagement and project work
- Pilot of Student Adviser role in 2019/20 and subsequent roll-out of the scheme
- Training to Students' Union staff and club and society leadership teams to improve cultural awareness and promote inclusivity and wellbeing
- Successful delivery of collaborative initiatives with other higher education institutions and external organisations
- Consultancy support to other UCL strategic and policy initiatives, in particular the Estates Strategy and student attendance monitoring
- Improved student satisfaction in institutional and national surveys

## 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.*

### **Actions:**

- a) Provide more online information, preparation programmes and resources to facilitate a smooth and effective settling-in process.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- f) Ensure induction programmes promote academic success in the context of positive health and wellbeing.
- 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.
- 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.

### **Measuring success:**

- Number of students engaging and satisfaction with online information and preparation programmes and resources
- Improved student satisfaction with academic community and residential life
- Improved understanding of the support provided by UCL and the Students' Union
- Provision of information on health and wellbeing, accessing support and suicide prevention to all students at induction
- Engagement with and feedback on dedicated web resources for parents

### 3. Develop resources to encourage awareness of wellbeing and facilitate peer support

*Looking after oneself and awareness of how social, physical and mental factors contribute to wellbeing are essential for student success. Students take ownership of their health and wellbeing, taking proactive steps to engage with support when this is needed. Facilitating peer support through community-building activities and providing students with information and advice on wellbeing are key priorities for UCL.*

#### **Actions:**

- a) Develop a web-based 'Wellbeing for Success' platform to inform students and encourage them to set goals and make choices for a healthy life at university and beyond. Work in partnership with students to develop content for the platform that reflects diverse views and experiences.
- b) Isolation, perfectionism, time-management difficulties, exam anxiety, sleep problems, imposter syndrome and financial worries are faced by students. There is experience and expertise across UCL on managing and overcoming these issues. Encourage exchange of ideas and best practice through the Student Health and Wellbeing Community of Practice.
- c) Provide a range of dedicated resources, such as apps and online training programmes, to promote good health and wellbeing and ways to cope with complex experiences, thoughts and emotions.
- d) Building networks, learning new skills and contributing to the lives of others can help students stay connected and focused on the present. Encourage volunteering, career development, study abroad and entrepreneurship opportunities to this effect.
- e) Enhance existing and develop new peer support programmes across UCL to facilitate health and wellbeing-related conversations and activities.
- f) Continue to develop the Student Residence Advisers peer support system to effect a culture of care and respect for each other in UCL's student residences.
- g) Students find most beneficial the networks they self-identify with. Facilitate further development of student-led networks through the Students' Union for a range of specific characteristics, such as students who live at home and commute to UCL, mature students, students who are parents and carers, and disabled students.

#### **Measuring success:**

- Student satisfaction and numbers engaging with the 'Wellbeing for Success' platform
- Take-up and ongoing engagement with wellbeing apps and resources
- Number of community-building activities and student satisfaction with these

#### **4. Establish close collaborative links between UCL, the NHS and other services to deliver integrated mental health care and improved risk management**

*The development of closer links between UCL, the NHS and other specialist services to provide better co-ordination to student support and improved risk management is one of the recommendations of Universities UK's 'Step Change' programme. The programme, which is also reinforced by government policy, encourages universities to reconfigure themselves as health-promoting and supportive environments.*

*In this respect, UCL offers an innovative proposition: trialling a transition from a support to a clinical care model for students experiencing mental health difficulties. UCL researchers and therapists from SSW's Student Psychological and Counselling Services\* will develop and implement an integrated pathway, a stepped-care clinical model. The integrated pathway ensures more students receive evidence-based treatment in line with their needs and that they do so more quickly than is currently the case. The new approach is strongly supported by UCL's senior leadership.*

##### **Actions:**

- a) Involve expertise from across the UCL academic community, in particular within the Faculty of Brain Sciences, to inform and shape UCL's approach to supporting and improving the mental health and wellbeing of students.
- b) Adopt a new integrated care pathway to expand the range of therapeutic treatments at UCL. The model reflects the diverse treatment needs of the student population. It will be delivered jointly by Student Support and Wellbeing, Occupational Health and the Faculty of Brain Sciences at UCL, and NHS agencies.
- c) Improve access to mental health care for all students and deliver treatment which is not easily accessible within the NHS; for instance, treatment for self-harm, borderline personality disorder, eating disorders, and alcohol and substance misuse.
- d) Take proactive steps towards a 'suicide-safer' campus and develop a cohesive approach to student suicide prevention, response and postvention. Create an environment that encourages and provides opportunities for anyone affected by suicide to speak openly.
- e) Ensure improved risk management by providing holistic and co-ordinated care to students identified as being at risk of suicide.
- f) Provide appropriate and timely communications and offer support to those affected in the event of a student suicide.

##### **Measuring success:**

- Number of students supported through the clinical model
- Quick and straightforward access to a wide range of evidence-based treatment; improvement on current waiting times
- Recovery rate aligned with NHS targets
- Dedicated suicide prevention, response and postvention framework

\*SSW = Student Support and Wellbeing

**5. Ensure support for disabled students or those affected by health and wellbeing difficulties is personalised and the adjustments are effective**

*Some students need additional support to reach their full potential and thrive at UCL. Student Support and Wellbeing deliver student-led, personalised and timely adjustments to the learning and living environments to best meet student needs and access requirements.*

**Actions:**

- a) Make sure that disabled students can thrive at UCL. Emphasise a caring community where there is no stigma to disclosing disability and health/wellbeing difficulties. Meet disclosures with consistent and timely support.
- b) Deliver excellent student support to all those who are in contact with Student Support and Wellbeing services. Offer a sensitive, personalised and empowering approach to student support. Maintain integrity to foster a culture of trust and willingness to engage.
- c) Continue to embed an inclusive learning and living environment for all, thereby reducing the number of individual adjustments required.
- d) Offer a personalised approach to student health and wellbeing support by making available a range of interventions to meet individual needs. Interventions include (but are not limited to): awareness-raising and prevention; information, signposting and advice; reasonable adjustments; mental health mentoring; personal tutoring; and external referrals.
- e) Effect service efficiency and provide clear, quick and appropriate follow-ups to student appointments and further referrals. Offer dedicated support to students taking or returning from interruption of study and those considering leaving UCL due to health and wellbeing reasons.
- f) Expand the network of partner and affiliated external organisations. Offer effective signposting and direct referrals to specialist support for a range of issues, such as domestic and sexual violence and dedicated LGBT+ support.
- g) Continue to integrate the student support provision in UCL's student residences into the Student Support and Wellbeing department's activities. This ensures consistent and co-ordinated specialist support for students in both their learning and living environments.

**Measuring success:**

- Improved satisfaction with Student Support and Wellbeing services
- Reduced number of students applying for adjustments to their learning and/or living environment
- Number of partner and affiliated organisations and ease of access to specialist support

## **6. Align student and staff wellbeing policies and initiatives to foster an inclusive and supportive community**

*An aligned strategic approach to the health and wellbeing of both staff and student groups is required to bring about cultural change and lasting improvements since there are numerous dependencies between the two groups. This strategy is aligned with the UCL Wellbeing Strategy (2017-2022), which primarily addresses staff wellbeing.*

### **Actions:**

- a) Advance inclusive and supportive working, learning and living environments, where the health and wellbeing of both students and staff are equally important.
- b) Enhance the ability of staff to understand difficulties they or students may be experiencing and help them to support students, colleagues and others by making dedicated mental health and suicide prevention training widely available at UCL.
- c) Develop and deliver training programmes, providing staff with knowledge and skills to help them to effectively support students' wellbeing and personal development.
- d) Develop collaborative and co-ordinated approaches between student and staff support services and other relevant stakeholders to manage complex student cases.
- e) Strengthen collaborative initiatives between student and staff support services to offer consistency in the approach to enhancing the wellbeing of the whole UCL community. Offer shared access to resources and facilities where possible and appropriate.

### **Measuring success:**

- Availability of mental health and suicide prevention training to all staff at UCL
- All staff at UCL are proactively encouraged to undertake mental health and suicide prevention training
- Improved student and staff satisfaction in institutional surveys

## **Updates and reviews**

- Update in October 2019 in line with relevant policy and sector developments and the new Mental Health Charter for Universities due in September 2019.
- Review annually until 2021.
- Redevelop the Student Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2021 in line with the new Education Strategy and the Research Strategy