

South Lanarkshire College

Student Mental Health Agreement 2019-20

1 **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the Student Mental Health Agreement continues to be to provide an opportunity for South Lanarkshire College and the SLC Student Association to work together on reviewing and continually improving student mental health initiatives that will best support the needs of students.

2 **COMMITMENT**

Having worked together on the Student Mental Health Agreement for 2018/19, both the College and Student Association are fully committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all our students. Attending College can be an extremely exciting time for students, however it can also present challenges which can impact on mental health. As such, we were incredibly keen to be involved in the NUS Think Positive initiative for 2018/19 to provide an opportunity to review and improve upon our existing mental health support provision.

It is our belief that students should be able to study their chosen course in a safe environment that is free from discrimination or stigma of any kind. We are proud of the fact that there is already a large provision of support focused on students' mental health and wellbeing.

Currently, students can access free student counselling, weekly mindfulness classes, weekly pastoral support, one-to-one emotional support from Student Services and guidance support from their Faculty Guidance Tutor. Advice and support regarding mental health is presented in various formats including a dedicated webpage on the College's website and Moodle pages, our Student Support pocket guide, Learner Induction packs, the Student Handbook, and health & wellbeing induction videos. The College also joined the Big White Wall, which is accessible to all students and provides 24/7 mental health and wellbeing support. We host a variety of annual events focusing on mental health which tie in with national campaigns such as World Mental Health Day, Mental Health Awareness Week and 'Movember'. The purpose of these events is to promote that it is okay to talk about mental health without fear of judgement. Alongside all these initiatives we will be publishing our Student Mental Health Strategy, outlining our vision for building upon these already established services.

We understand that it may still prove difficult for an individual to disclose a mental health concern, but we remain committed to creating a safe environment where students feel comfortable discussing their mental health concerns and are able to access the support services available to them. We are committed advocates of 'it's ok not to be ok'.

3 BENEFITS

Through participating in the Student Mental Health Agreement last year, it is clear to see the benefits that have arisen as a result of it. For example, one of these benefits is forging a stronger partnership between the College and Student Association to address issues surrounding mental health. It provided an opportunity for the student voice to be heard in relation to mental health and wellbeing and allowed us to create a dialogue with students in order to identify priorities that can be adopted for moving forward. We have been able to provide additional relevant training for both college and Student Association members, allowing us to support more students throughout the academic year.

Through completing the Agreement and subsequent reporting, this allowed both the College and Student Association an opportunity to reflect on the support already in place. It allowed us to review the impact of the four working areas we had identified in order to gauge what had worked well and what could be improved upon for the future. It provided a focus to ensure that the support services in place were effective and beneficial for all students.

4 OUTCOMES

The 2019/20 Student Mental Health Agreement has built upon the good practice established by the 2018/19 Agreement. By reviewing the Agreement on an annual basis, it provides an opportunity for both the College and Student Association to reflect on the achievements that have taken place during the academic year. This continued close working relationship ensures that both the Student Association and the College can clearly acknowledge the student voice and implement actions to provide the best support systems possible.

5 ADAPTING TO NEW CIRCUMSTANCES

As has been the case for all College and Student Associations across the UK, South Lanarkshire College and Student Association have had to adapt to the changes faced when responding to COVID-19. The relocation from in-college to remote working and learning, alongside the physical closure of the College building, have required us to be innovative and creative in the ways we can continue to promote positive mental health and wellbeing. As the College is virtually open for teaching, it was important that the support systems that had been established continued to be available. This Agreement will outline how we have sought to ensure mental health support was continually available for all our students during the 2019-20 session.

These adaptations will be taken forward for the next academic session with regards to continuing to find innovative and creative ways to engage with students on a virtual basis. We acknowledge this will create challenges, however many of the activities we outline below highlight how this can be conducted successfully.

5 WORKING AREAS

1. Increase Uptake of Support Services by Male Students

One of the main aims of the Student Association this academic year was to highlight the importance of men's mental health and of access to appropriate support. We hoped to encourage more male students to access the mental health services that are available both in the College and the wider community.

Actions taken

- For the 2019-20 session, the College and Student Association worked together to launch the 'Promoting Positive MENTAL Health' campaign. This event included a poster and social media campaign. The Student Association visited all Faculties to highlight the event and welcomed participation from the lecturing staff. A large quantity of pink hi-visibility vests was ordered for the staff and students in the Construction department. Additional pink t-shirts were also purchased for other male staff and students to wear with the aim of showing their support. All hi-vis vests and t-shirts promoted the 'Promoting Positive MENTAL Health' tagline. The event was widely publicised in the College. The Student Association also liaised with the local newspaper to arrange publication.
- Recording the success of this aim will involve analysing statistics of the uptake of student counselling by male students. Presently there has been an annual increase in male students accessing counselling, however there is still an imbalance with approximately only 25% of students attending counselling sessions being male. It is hoped that eventually this gender split will be 50:50.
- This focus on increasing access to mental health support will continue to work in tandem with the existing focus on breaking down the stigma of discussing mental health. Open and inclusive dialogue will be strengthened by continuing to host various events highlighting the importance of recognising mental health, such as Mental Health Awareness Week, Equality and Choices, World Mental Health Day, Freshers' and Refreshers'.
- A review and restructure of the Student Support sessions took place in order to provide a space for students to meet and discuss any concerns they may have. One of the outcomes of this will hopefully involve creating an environment for peer support. Part of this restructure involved making the sessions less formal and attended solely by the Student Association.

2. Working with the Supported Learning programmes

As highlighted in our 2018/19 Student Mental Health Agreement, the student body in South Lanarkshire College is comprised of individuals from a variety of different backgrounds. It is imperative that we acknowledge and recognise each student's unique perspective and ensure that they feel supported throughout their time at college. Last year we highlighted the support available for various groups such as the LGBT+ community, students with caring responsibilities, care experienced students, veterans and estranged students. For this Agreement we will be reviewing the support provided for students in our Supported Learning programmes.

Actions taken

- The Student Association continually liaised with the Learning Development Department in relation to the organisation of a variety of events, including karaoke sessions, cinema trips, health walks, etc.
- They attended and participated in the annual Life Options Christmas Party
- Regular communication with the Learning Development team took place in order to ensure that the voice of the students within their classes was heard.
- Continual engagement and communication with the Learning Development team and students throughout the year. This was especially important during lockdown to ensure that important routines were maintained for our students. Once classes moved to remote learning and teaching, this communication included 'phoning students regularly or chatting on Teams.
- Participation in the virtual Dance-a-thon fundraising event where the Student President took part by dancing for one hour continuously to raise funds for the students' chosen charities. This is an excellent example of how we can continue to engage virtually with students; adapt to new ideas; and use technology to engage, connect and raise charitable funding.

3. Investigate New and Innovative Ways to Increase Student Engagement

The College and Student Association are always looking for new ways to support and engage with students. We currently organise and participate in several existing events and promotional activities that focus on mental health; however, it is important that we always review and reflect to see if there are any new and exciting opportunities that can be introduced.

Actions taken

- The Student Association and the College will continue to co-ordinate and participate in a variety of events to promote engagement throughout the year, such as Freshers', Refreshers', Health & Wellbeing Week, Gender Based

Violence Prevention, Mental Health Awareness Week, Equality & Choices, Care for a Cuppa, etc. We recognise that these events may need to be delivered in a different way given the current COVID-19 situation.

- The College and Student Association worked closely together in signing the Armed Forces Covenant. This close engagement highlighted the support available to veterans attending South Lanarkshire College, including promotion of the named staff contact.
- Arrange social events for care experienced students and students with caring responsibilities. These were co-ordinated to tie in with national campaigns such as Care Experienced Week and Carers Week. It is hoped that by creating these events, they encourage cross-college discussion where students can share and talk about their experiences.
- Continue working towards the LGBT Youth Bronze Award. Both the Student Association and the College should co-ordinate and participate in LGBT Equality events such as Purple Friday.
- The Student Association was responsible for co-ordinating the Love Your Planet sustainability event. This was an opportunity to promote sustainable alternative sanitary products such as menstrual cups. This promotion for sustainability should also have positive impacts on students' health and wellbeing.
- Re-evaluated and relaunched the Student Chit Chat sessions, which were outlined in the 2018/19 Student Mental Health Agreement. These sessions followed a more informal arrangement compared with previous events.
- Promoted Challenge Poverty Week via social media as financial concerns can have an overwhelming impact on mental health. Promotional ideas included initiatives that the College and Student Association provide to support students, such as SA hoodies or re-usable water bottles being available at a fraction of cost price; offering free sanitary products, etc.
- Continuing to promote the benefits of smoking cessation with regards to impact on physical and mental health. The SA worked with local NHS partners and the HR Department to promote Go with Flo stop smoking classes.
- Student counsellors provided classroom visits during Modern Apprenticeship week, highlighting the support available to apprentices both within the College and out in the Community.
- Promotion of Anti-Bullying day to take place to emphasise the importance of the ethos of inclusiveness and mutual respect.

- Responding to the need for additional mental health support as a result of students having to complete their studies remotely. This included implementing the following new initiatives:
 - Continuing to provide free sanitary products direct to student's homes in partnership with Hey Girls;
 - Signing up to and promoting the Big White Wall, an online safe space that is available 24/7 for staff and students to talk with their peers and undertake courses;
 - Creation of multiple new webpages focusing on support available in the community, counselling support and GBV crisis support;
 - Close collaboration between the Principalship and Student Association to ensure clear communications sent regularly to staff. This included a joint statement that was printed on the website and videos created to provide clarity and connection;
 - Continual engagement with students via several communication channels to make sure they felt supported throughout such an uncertain time; and
 - It is acknowledged that remote working and engagement will be challenging going forward, especially in relation to events such as Freshers', etc, where these occasions will need to take place on a virtual basis. However, the College and Student Association will continue to work closely together to ensure we support student mental health throughout.

4. Establishing and Building on Internal and External Partnerships

As outlined above, the Student Association and the College already work very closely together in order to provide the best possible experience for our students. The Student Association has close partnership working across many areas of the College and this is something that will continue to take place.

Alongside this internal partnership working, it is equally important that both the College and the Student Association build upon external partnerships. A great deal of work is already carried out with local organisations and community groups, as illustrated in the number of events that take place within the College on an annual basis.

There is also the opportunity to create new external partnerships such as when working towards sector awards and goals. For example, the College was recently awarded the Going Further for Student Carers: Recognition Award and the Student Association has been instrumental in progressing this work due to the amount of supportive activity which they have led. The Student Association has also supported local charities and food banks during this pandemic, making ongoing efforts to maintain the important civic contribution of the students of our college. It is important that both the College and Student Association continue to work closely together to build on existing partnerships and investigate opportunities for new partnership working in the community.

Actions taken

- Close partnership working which resulted in the achievement of the Going Further for Student Carers: Recognition Award.
- Both the College and Student Association to remain up to date on mental health support initiatives across the educational sector.
- The Student Mental Health Agreement will continue to be an agenda for the College's Mental Health Working Group.
- Student Officers to be involved in the creation of the Student Mental Health Agreement to ensure the student voice is heard.
- Investigation of new partnership opportunities for both the College and Student Association, with a view to inviting external organisations to annual events for promotion of their services.
- Ensure referral services were current and used as and when appropriate.
- Attendance at external events with partners to ensure information circulated was current and up to date.
- Engagement with local foodbanks to raise awareness and support the local community. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, the President of the Student Association highlighted the community support available by promoting foodbank collections taking place in their local area during Clap for Carers every Thursday.
- Continue to invest in positive working relationships between the Student Association and various college faculties and departments to promote student support, such as working with HR to co-ordinate Paws Against Stress as part of the annual Health & Wellbeing Week and arranging activities for Purple Friday.

Signed and Agreed by:



Principal & CEO

South Lanarkshire College



President

SLC Student Association