

Cranfield University - Mental health case study

Background/Context

Early in 2020 HR, working in collaboration with our Student Experience Team, formalised the University's approach to wellbeing with a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

The Strategy, based on Universities UK #stepchange2, references the strategic themes proposed by Universities UK and aims to provide the foundation and structure to support mental health and wellbeing, for both staff and students. Prior to this, our approach had not been completely aligned across the University and while we had an infrastructure in place, it was not always seemingly cohesive.

Key milestones during 2020/21

As soon as the Strategy was signed off at Executive level, the world rapidly changed with the onset of the pandemic. The pandemic has been the catalyst for us to be able to further drive forward our mental health agenda. Linkage to National Campaigns has also created synergy with our offerings.

'Time out Thursday'

In March 2021, linked to 'Time to Talk' Day, we organised for the first time a virtual wellbeing day 'Time out Thursday'. Staff were asked to take time out of their busy schedules to reflect on ways they could boost their mental and physical wellbeing.

Using a digital conferencing platform, we organised virtual sessions throughout the day to focus on mental health and wellbeing matters, to include a staff-led panel discussion, with colleagues talking about their experiences with mental health and this really resonated with other staff.

Mental Health First Aiders

In recognition of the impact that poor mental health has on individuals in the workplace, we took the opportunity late last year to train members of the HR team as Mental Health First Aiders and officially launched this provision earlier this year.

Support during the Pandemic

During the early part of the Pandemic, we focused very much on continuous dialogue with our people, including our Unions and our managers, to include:

- A University Wellbeing Working Group has been set up to innovate and coordinate our approach.
- A dedicated section on our Intranet regarding Coronavirus, providing information on the various tools, systems and advice in place to support staff.
- Guidance regarding revised processes associated with our academic activities in light of coronavirus.
- Guidance on returning to work on COVID-secure sites via a Standard Operating Practice document and associated risk assessments,
- VC Live events with question and answer sessions for staff Live dedicated in-house virtual wellbeing sessions such as 'Work from home successfully'.
- Advice for managers on keeping in touch with any furloughed staff, to include how to hold a wellbeing discussion.
- Additional to general health and wellbeing workshops, we have provided a number of more focused sessions from our OH provider, on remote working and resilience.
- Wellbeing days for staff during lockdowns, to ensure staff took adequate breaks over and above their annual leave.

- Measured and tracked staff wellbeing through our regular pulse surveys, to include a dedicated wellbeing survey that enabled bespoke signposting to wellbeing support.
- Our Communications Team set up a Cranfield Community Facebook group, as a way for staff to connect informally with friends and colleagues across the University.

Mental Health Awareness Week

During Mental Health Awareness Week in May, focusing on the theme of 'Nature', we encouraged staff to get outside and spend time immersed in nature. To add a fun element, we asked them to share their photographs taken during that week on aspects of nature on our social media channel.

Physical Health

Recognising the need to take a holistic approach to wellbeing, we put in place a range of activities that encourage more physical activity as well, to include online yoga and meditation classes and engagement with a local gym, to access a range of live online classes.

Disability Network

Over the last year, we formally established a Cranfield Disability Network to help identify and support actions and interventions to make Cranfield a more inclusive University for disabled staff, promoting disability awareness and an inclusive, safe and supportive environment in which everybody is treated with respect and dignity.

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