



WELLBEING AT OXFORD

STUDENT WELLBEING AND MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY

OCTOBER 2019



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Introduction



“Studying at the University of Oxford is an exciting and challenging time. We are committed to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of everyone who studies here so that they can flourish as they develop intellectually and personally.

“This new strategy sets our long-term ambitions for increasing our support in the coming years – building on the excellent pastoral care already provided in collaboration with Colleges, and through our specialist support services.

“The strategy outlines a University-wide, holistic approach to supporting students, covering all aspects of university experience. Inclusion is a key focus, and we developed the strategy in partnership with our students and external experts.

“Oxford’s strategy forms part of a wider focus on mental health and wellbeing across the higher education sector. We are proud to have been involved in sector-wide discussions for several years and will continue to do so in the future.

“Everyone at Oxford has a role to play in student mental health and wellbeing, and this strategy signals the start of a longer journey towards achieving our vision for the collegiate University. We have an ambitious programme of change and are resolute in our commitment to increasing support across the University in the future.”

Martin Williams, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Education
University of Oxford

Our Vision

Our vision for the collegiate university is an environment which allows all students to flourish at Oxford personally and academically, and equips them with the skills to thrive throughout their lives.

Our Aims and Objectives

1. To promote the wellbeing and good mental health of all students in all aspects of university life at all stages

What Oxford does well

Oxford has excellent pastoral and welfare support already in place. The Colleges offer small supportive communities, regular contact hours, and extensive welfare support. Colleges have welfare teams which include GPs, Nurses, Chaplains, other pastoral advisors, counsellors and student volunteers. The University also offers specialist welfare services, including a Counselling Service and a Disability Advisory Service. The University and Colleges commit substantial resources towards supporting student wellbeing and mental health, spending £2.7m in 2018-19 on specialist central services alone.

What we will do in future

We are adopting an holistic approach to student wellbeing and mental health covering all aspects of the student experience. Providing the right support is a key strand to our work, but so is prevention and building resilience. We will review course design, promote and embed inclusive practice, and help students to develop the life skills which will help them to thrive.

2. To ensure that consideration of student wellbeing and mental health is embedded in institutional decision making

What Oxford does well

We already have agreed policies on Student Mental Health, Confidentiality in Student Health and Welfare, and a Common Framework for Supporting Disabled Students.

What we will do in future

We will put student wellbeing and mental health on the agenda across the institution, ensuring it is taken into account when we review and create courses, or consider workload and assessment methods. The need to support student wellbeing will influence our policies and procedures, which will be kept under review. It will inform our staff training and our support provision.

3. To base welfare and wellbeing policies on the best evidence available

What Oxford does well

We already measure the efficacy of our Counselling Service, and collect feedback from students about all of our welfare services. Our Student Wellbeing Sub-Committee reviews the University's welfare services annually.

What we will do in future

We will identify appropriate metrics to measure student wellbeing, in collaboration with academic colleagues and experts. We will also measure the efficacy of more activities and interventions to ensure that they are supporting student wellbeing and mental health.

4. To pursue a better understanding of the needs of a diverse student body

What Oxford does well

We have been expanding our welfare services to include support for students of colour and LGBTQ students, through the Peers of Colour and Rainbow Peers schemes.

What we will do in future

We will continue to work with OxfordSU and other groups to identify the needs of our diverse student body. We have a student population of over 24,000 students, and we will tailor our activities to ensure that their needs are met.



5. To monitor and report progress

This Strategy is overseen by Council through its Education Committee, and is supported by regular reviews of our agreed actions and by seeking feedback from students and staff. We will hold ourselves accountable by regular reviews of our agreed actions and by seeking feedback from students and staff. Oxford is preparing for the University Mental Health Charter and will continue to work with others in the sector.

Measuring success

We will develop appropriate metrics and analysis that can assess levels of student wellbeing and mental health, evaluate policy changes, and provide broad assurance of the success of the strategy.

Our first academic collaboration is with colleagues in the Department of Psychiatry who are running a population-wide wellbeing study of new undergraduates. This important international study will help the University to understand the scale of wellbeing and mental health issues, and how they affect academic progress.



Core areas

We have identified five core areas of focus for the Strategy. Across all of them will run themes such as inclusive and accessible practice, preventative measures, and positive self-care.

We consulted widely with students, staff and external experts to identify the most pressing wellbeing and mental health concerns at Oxford. We have seen increasing demand for support services across the collegiate University in recent years, including more students disclosing mental health disabilities. These are our long term goals, and we have identified initial actions for each of these areas for this academic year.

The collegiate University will:

1. Learning

Develop our courses with student wellbeing and mental health in mind by considering workload, methods of assessment, teaching provision and design.

We will:

- Review how course design can take student wellbeing and mental health into account
- Promote and embed inclusive teaching and learning practices across the collegiate university
- Promote diversity of assessment for taught courses

2. Life Skills

Enable our undergraduate and graduate students to flourish at Oxford throughout the entire student journey by supporting them to develop the resilience and coping skills, discipline, self-care, and other skills that will help them to thrive.

We will:

- Promote supportive resources to help students build resilience
- Develop our life-skills programme, in collaboration with colleges and OxfordSU
- Increase our regular student communications on a range of welfare issues
- Plan increased support for the exam season in collaboration with colleagues across the institution

3. Community

Tackle student loneliness by working to ensure that both undergraduate and graduate students can engage with college, university, and local communities in Oxford safely and positively. We will work to improve access to clubs and societies, activities, sport and a high quality living environment, and help students to engage with our city through volunteering.

In collaboration with OxfordSU we will:

- Promote the de-stigmatisation of mental health difficulties
- Work with local charities and groups to offer volunteering opportunities which either promote good wellbeing or specifically address mental health issues
- Encourage active participation in University clubs and societies, and work to make these activities more inclusive

4. Inclusion

Pursue inclusive practice across the protected characteristics and for students from all backgrounds, so that all students feel fully included in all areas of their student lives.

We will:

- Develop our guidance for staff on inclusive practice and anticipatory provision for disabled students
- Develop and promote inclusive sport and physical activity at Oxford
- Identify activities for academic Departments which promote positive student mental health and wellbeing

5. Support

Continue to promote and develop early intervention opportunities, backed up by high quality professionally-led support services. We will take a holistic view of physical and mental health, and work collaboratively with the NHS and local charities.

We will:

- Provide additional resources to the University Counselling Service for the next year
- Establish a mental health team in the Disability Advisory Service
- Review all of the specialist welfare services provided by the University
- Provide more training for staff who support students with mental health difficulties
- Increase out of hours and out of term mental health support for students
- Develop further training for student pastoral volunteers
- Increase collaboration with local NHS services
- Collaborate with local charities to promote support within the community
- Communicate our existing welfare support more effectively through a new online hub.



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