

# Glasgow Caledonian University

## Challenging mental health stigma and discrimination within Higher and Further Education through a whole institution approach.



### What is it?

Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU) based their support provisions approach on a whole institution approach, which includes everyone in the GCU community. This means valuing diversity and ensuring services and provisions are accessible to all staff and students.

Current support for staff and students utilises structural support, which includes the student counselling service, staff counselling (PAM assist), disability teams, student mental health and wellbeing advisors, holistic wellbeing approaches, policies for staff and student wellbeing, representation for staff and student mental health and wellbeing, and strategic approaches.

To help demonstrate how they embed this ethos, and engage with members to provide a holistic, and cross-institutional wellbeing provision, they are developing a framework which will be launched in a few months time.

### Who is it for?

The approach can be adapted for use in universities, colleges, students' associations/unions, students, primary and secondary schools, charities and the private sector. Although, GCU focused on higher and further education establishments.

### What was done?

GCU has a long-standing commitment to undertaking a whole institutional approach when supporting staff and students. This ethos is underpinned by their vision to create a culture of positive mental health where everyone – staff and students – can thrive. This whole institutional approach aims to support staff and students, work with the community, hold events, give crisis support and include student ideas and feedback. There is a strong commitment to this issue across all areas of the university. Crucially, the Principal views this work as a key institutional priority and has provided clear strategic leadership.

Staff and students are at the heart of enhancing provision and advise on this, through the Student Wellbeing Advisory Group,

the Mental Health at Work Taskforce, Student Mental Health Agreement, student-led campaigns and various consultation events.

GCU support the students and staff through a holistic, whole institution approach, they have introduced many groups to ensure students and staff are included in the decisions made in relation to mental health and wellbeing, such as the Student Wellbeing Advisory Group and the Mental Health at Work Taskforce, they have also established action plans, and introduced a Project Officer for Student Mental Health.

#### **Student Wellbeing Advisory Group**

The Student Wellbeing Advisory Group is a cross institution working group. Where representatives from across the GCU community, including academics, staff from the on campus gym, the Arc, INTO GCU, the GCU London Wellbeing team and Students' Association, wellbeing staff, and staff representing each school, work together to coordinate the delivery and enhancement of the Student Mental Health Action Plan. The group also advise the executive board when developing policy in relation to students' mental health and wellbeing, promotes the development of services and supports communication and awareness of both mental health and the support available.

#### **GCU Community Mental Health Campaign**

A student-led campaign to raise awareness of mental health and the support available, and to tackle stigma, throughout the GCU community. The students who have undertaken the design work will receive coursework credits for working with the Student Wellbeing Team to produce this. The campaign is aimed at students and staff and is building on other campaigns which GCU have produced with students, such as the Erase the Grey campaign which has been launched by several other Universities and Police Scotland.

The campaign is themed 'Our Community' and has a number of different messages such as our community cares, our community listens, supports and more.

**Student support**

GCU have worked to provide a robust support structure for staff and students. This means they provide support through, counselling (for both staff and students), mental health advisors, institutional policies, as well as community support such as free mindfulness and wellbeing workshops and peer support programmes. The support service was restructured in 2016, introducing additional staff, including a Project Officer for Student Mental Health.

To continue to improve and enhance the support system in place at the University they have approved the future introduction of an embedded worker from SAMH to enhance the mental health literacy and skills throughout the staff and student body.

**Project Officer for Student Mental Health**

The Project Officer for Student Mental Health supports ongoing development, evaluation and implementation of many projects and initiatives, to support the whole institution approach to student mental health and wellbeing.

**Engaging new projects**

When new projects and initiatives are being developed, GCU tries to empower staff and students to introduce and develop grassroots initiatives to compliment wider University actions. An example of this is The Scholarships, which was founded in 2017 as a part of the 2020 Student Experience Action Plan, this funded several projects including:

- Contemporary Academic Advising & Mentoring (CAAM).
- Evidencing a better understanding of the learning of students with disabilities.
- Inclusive Curricula Design (INCLUDE).
- A project to consider and highlight the implications and findings of the TransEdu project which explored the experiences of trans, non-binary, and gender diverse students and staff across the Scottish HE sector.

**Why was it done?**

Engaging the whole community is fundamental to the work done by GCU. This means considering all staff and students when evaluating, improving and introducing new initiatives to support mental health and wellbeing. To explore the impact of intersectional experiences and the barriers faced by individuals when accessing service provision.

It is important that the students and staff, throughout the GCU community, are engaging with and have an awareness of the services available.

They do this through:

- Holding consultation events (such as a Student Summit event on the topic of mental health, consulting during national mental health and wellbeing days including University Mental Health Day, World Mental Health Day, Time to Talk Day, etc.).
- Activities for National Mental Health Days.
- A partnership with the students' association on the Student Mental Health Agreement.
- Students and staff being at the forefront of developing new initiatives for support.
- The Student Wellbeing team being visible to the students through attending Fresher's and Re-fresher's induction talks, and a weekly newsletter for both students and staff, which promotes upcoming workshops, current support provisions and ongoing projects.
- Ensuring information is as accessible as possible, the internal and external webpages have been redeveloped, and are updated weekly with relevant information.

Staff considered training essential in improving confidence to have meaningful and effective conversations with students and colleagues around their mental health and wellbeing. Due to this feedback they began working with City of Glasgow College in 2019, to deliver workshops on Mental Health Awareness, Positive Psychology and Developing Resilience. To build on this they have recently approached an embedded worker from SAMH to extend the mental health workshops and training provision.

**What was the impact?**

- Training feedback highlighted that staff considered the training essential to increase confidence in their ability to have meaningful and effective conversations with young people about mental health and wellbeing.
- GCU achieved the Healthy Body, Healthy Mind Award in 2019 in partnership with the Students' Association.
- GCU are now accredited by Carers Trust Scotland, and recognised by the National Autistic Society for inclusive practices.
- GCU are leading a collaborative cluster with the Quality Assurance Agency and other higher education providers and Students' Associations to explore Curricular Design and the impacts on student mental health and wellbeing – and aim to produce recommendations on how academics can structure the curriculum to enhance wellbeing.
- To ensure continuous improvement, they have had a Student Mental Health Action Plan for over three years. As well as this they participate in the Student Mental Health Agreement Project.

## Resources

- Framework Briefing Document [Link »](#)
- Student Wellbeing Advisory Group Terms of Reference document
- Student Mental Health Agreements [Link »](#)
- Student Wellbeing Webpages (staff pages are internal) [Link »](#)
- Wellbeing Newsletter [Link »](#)
- Mental Health Student Representative [Link »](#)
- QAA Collaborative Cluster on Inclusive Curriculum [Link »](#)
- GCU Student Experience Projects on Wellbeing [Link »](#)

