

APPRENTICESHIP WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

Mental Health in Apprentices: counting the cost
Good & Best practice identified in other curriculum areas

 South Devon College



PETROC

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Introduction

This document serves as an insightful compilation of the best practices recognised within each partner organisation, tailored to facilitate the provision of mental health support for all learners. In addition to highlighting these exemplary strategies, this piece also delves into the challenges and constraints, providing a candid exploration of the limitations and barriers that often impede the seamless delivery of such crucial support services. Furthermore, this document offers a brief set of forward-looking recommendations for improvements to the mental health support for apprentices.

South Devon College

At South Devon College we have recently launched a new Behaviour Culture. This behaviour culture is built upon the principles of relational and restorative practice. At its heart the approach places a focus on the development of meaningful, caring and kind relationships between staff and students and between students. We have incorporated the ideas drawn from trauma informed practice to ensure that students feel protected and safe, that they have connection to the college community of staff and students and that the relationships they have foster understanding and care. This approach is new to us and is in its infancy in terms of its implementation across college. The approach is drawn from the best evidence-based practice, and we are confident that there will be a measurable impact upon many aspects of student progress and achievement, including their wider personal development and mental health and wellbeing. This approach should impact positively upon all our students, including apprentices, young people, adults, and high needs students.

At South Devon College we ensure that personal development is a part of every student's curriculum, and this personal development programme includes support for wellbeing including mental health. Two years ago, we developed a series of learning outcomes from entry level to level 4+ that specify the learning we expect for all of our students in terms of their personal development - an example of these can be seen appendix 1. You will see there that the learning outcomes are divided across four 'pillars' with one of the pillars being Health and Wellbeing. In here we have learning outcomes that are linked to the students developing their knowledge of ways to improve their wellbeing including mental health. Programme teams for all of our groups of students - adults, apprentices, young people, and high needs - must plan their curriculums to include this learning, either linked to the core delivery within the subject or through tutorial/personal development sessions delivered by the tutor or subject specialists which include external speakers.

This approach has worked most well with our young people where they have a tutor and dedicated personal development/tutorial sessions to ensure all personal development learning is covered across the study programme and is planned and delivered in a way that is meaningful to the students. For apprentices, many do not have named personal tutors or personal development/tutorial sessions and here they rely on a bank of resources created in OneFile that apprentice students can access their personal development learning independently. Personal development learning (PD) does not count as off-the-job training and therefore is often seen as an addition to the scheduled 7.5hpw of learning in college that must be linked to learning against the apprenticeship standard. Employers will also push back against college delivery of PD learning, citing that they do not wish their apprentice to be learning things that are not linked to their progress through the standard. This has marginalised PD learning for many apprentices and means that the planned deep learning of PD, including how to maintain health and wellbeing is not covered in the same way as our young people on full time programmes, for example. The lack of a tutor also means that there may not be the focus on the individual students and their wider needs, especially relating to their personal development including how to maintain good mental health.

The benefits of the relational approach may also be reduced for our apprentices. Where a personal tutor has a very strong, trusting, and caring relationship for their tutees there is a greatly increased opportunity for a student to open up about their individual struggles and for the tutor to respond with their direct support or referral to the wider college support services. These wider college support services are many and are listed below but it is important to note that apprentices, in general, because of their lack of time given to PD and because they are only on-site with us for a greatly reduced period of time in relation to full-time students, generally do not access these services anything like as much as our full-time younger students.

The range of mental health support options at SDC that are available to all students including apprentices are listed here, but as mentioned above many apprentices are much less likely to use these support services.

- Counselling referrals offered to all, via the Wellbeing Team, support from trained and trainee counsellors.
- Dedicated Wellbeing Team support, trained staff for each section, to support students of all types, ages, and locations. Support is provided for students struggling with all aspects of wellbeing including mental health, homelessness, poverty, and financial support including a food and clothing bank, friendship and relationship issues, sexual health and consent, financial support and drug and alcohol issues. The team have close contact and strong relationships with a wide variety of external support agencies including social workers, midwives, support workers, police, independent sexual violence advisors, Torbay council housing support, drug and alcohol services and domestic abuse services.
- Students can be referred to weekly wellbeing sessions which will typically be for up to 6 weeks, consisting of one appointment per week. In this time, we will discuss the support that is needed and ways that we can implement this support for our students either personally or by seeking external services.
- Everything discussed with our wellbeing team will be kept confidential between the student and their designated wellbeing officer and only shared with a Safeguarding Lead if someone may be at risk of harm.
- We also hold a wellbeing café once a week. This is a great opportunity for our students to meet new friends, find support in each other and build their confidence for those who struggle with social anxiety (and to have a cup of tea!)
- Facilities and support provided for any CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) referrals/meetings to take place on site with private and confidential spaces guaranteed for these meetings.
- Over 70+ SDC staff are trained Mental Health first aiders.
- Ongoing training for all SDC staff on how to signpost and support students with poor mental health.
- Personal Development provided for students relating to mental health and how to support positive wellbeing.
- Ongoing Assessor Coach support provided to all apprentices, including check-ups regarding their study progress but also their wellbeing.
- External support agencies advertised and sign-posted to all students via SDC support pages etc, so that they can self-refer. These external support agencies include the NHS Mental Health team that have been working with us for several years now and offer a wide range of mental health support sessions for cohorts of students, to be booked in by their tutor.
- Specifically tailored to mental health related issues, we most regularly work with support from CAMHS (under 18), Talkworks (over 18), Young Devon (up to 25), The Mix, and inhouse counselling at South Devon College. We will look at different options of mental health support until we find a suitable option for each individual student. We can assist our students to make a referral for these organisations, as well as contacting their GP if needed.

City College Plymouth

At City College we offer a broad range of support services, recognising that mental health concerns can often be the impact of more root causes such as: poverty/financial concern; dealing with workloads; & relationships (in the workplace, at college and at home).

Recognising a distinct challenge of 18.6% of children living in poverty in our city we have set up a support hub, which contributes at every level, whether that be physical, mental, social, or cultural help. Over the past few years this has included the set up (& expansion) of a food and clothes bank, resources to support those in digital poverty, as well as recognising and combating period poverty.

Beyond addressing these basic physiological and safety needs, the support that is in place for all learners at the College includes support for mental health including counselling services (available online, telephone and face to face) and referral to other agencies, if appropriate.

A dedicated area for learners, the Lighthouse, was set up a couple of years ago where they can meet up, access services, relax, and even meet our therapy dog, is well used in the College. This is available for apprentices as well as full-time students but there is more work needed to encourage apprentices to utilise this as a service. Given apprentices tend to only be in college once a week most of the support services are available to them online (e.g., dealing with stress, highlighting mental health awareness week, tips for dealing with neurodiversity, how to cope with loneliness). Again, more work to encourage & support apprentices to use these services is required.

The College has developed a comprehensive tutorial programme for apprentices, which as well as including critical safeguarding, health & safety, British Values, and equality & diversity training, includes alcohol & drug awareness, money management, suicide awareness, health & wellbeing, and staying healthy. The intend of this programme is to ensure there is parity between apprentices and full-time students.

PETROC

Wellbeing Team

The Wellbeing Team at PETROC has 10 members, all of whom are Mental Health First Aiders. They are based centrally in the College Campuses and there is always a duty adviser on hand to speak to anyone dropping in for support. Their role involves mentoring, listening, and helping learners to develop coping strategies.

Daily Safeguarding Meetings take place at which any student with a potential issue is discussed and appropriate 1:1 support planned. Options include referral to the college Counselling service, referral to external agencies, and creating a bespoke package of support to enable the individual to achieve at college.

1:1 support is offered to all students who need it, this includes apprentices but as they are not often on campus there is not a high take up of this support, something the Wellbeing Team is addressing.

All on campus curriculum areas are allocated an individual in the wellbeing team as their key contact, so they know exactly who to go to if a wellbeing issue arises.

Wellbeing Hub

The screenshot shows the Wellbeing Hub website interface. On the left is a navigation menu with categories like Home, Accessing support, Safeguarding, Supporting a young person, The Pod, Young adult carer, Support for adult learners, Mental wellbeing, Managing anxiety, Sleep, Grief and loss, Substance misuse, Physical wellbeing, Sexual health, Free sanitary products, Friendships, Student Union, Enrichment, Relationships, LGBT+, Gaming and gambling, Online safety, Housing support, Study support, and Money. The main content area is titled 'Welcome to the Wellbeing Hub' and 'Help and support'. It features a 'Self-Care September 2023' calendar grid with 30 numbered tips for happiness, one for each day of the month. The tips are: 1. Find time for self-care. It's not selfish, it's essential! 2. Notice the things you do well, however small. 3. Let go of self-criticism and speak to yourself kindly. 4. Plan a fun or relaxing activity and make time for it. 5. Forgive yourself when things go wrong. Everyone makes mistakes. 6. Focus on the basics: eat well, exercise and go to bed on time. 7. Give yourself permission to say 'no'. 8. Be willing to share how you feel and ask for help when needed. 9. Aim to be good enough, rather than perfect. 10. When you find things hard, remember it's ok not to be ok. 11. Make time to do something you really enjoy. 12. Get active outside and give your mind and body a natural boost. 13. Be as kind to yourself as you would to a loved one. 14. If you're busy, allow yourself to pause and take a break. 15. Find a coping/soothing phrase to use when you feel low. 16. Leave positive messages for yourself to see regularly. 17. No phone day. Make time to slow down and be kind to yourself. 18. Ask a trusted friend to tell you what strengths they see in you. 19. Notice what you are feeling, without any judgement. 20. Enjoy photos from a time with happy memories. 21. Don't compare how you feel inside to how others appear outside. 22. Take your time. Make space to just breathe and be still. 23. Let go of other people's expectations of you. 24. Accept yourself and remember that you are worthy of love. 25. Avoid saying 'I should' and make time to do nothing. 26. Find a new way to use one of your strengths or talents. 27. Free up time by cancelling any unnecessary plans. 28. Choose to see your mistakes as steps to help you learn. 29. Write down three things you appreciate about yourself. 30. Remind yourself that you are enough, just as you are.

The Wellbeing Hub, maintained by the Wellbeing Team, is a comprehensive wellbeing resource for all learners. It can be accessed from any device without being logged in as a student, so the information is widely available not only for students, but also parents, carers, and employers. Contents include mental wellbeing; managing anxiety; sleep; grief and loss; substance misuse; physical wellbeing; sexual health; free sanitary products; friendships; student union; relationships; LGBT+; housing support; study support; money; young adult carers; support for adult learners. There

are links to a wide range of support services as well as contact details for the Wellbeing team members and other College networks such as the Student Union.

The Wellbeing team, as a result of the AWD project, is already making changes to the Wellbeing Hub to ensure the Apprentices' Mental Health Wellbeing video is available. They are also planning a training session for all Assessors to know how to support their apprentices with their mental wellbeing. The team is also considering developing a distinct area on the Hub for apprentices and employers to provide relevant support.

Cross partnership analysis

This project has highlighted the wealth of positive, mental health support interventions that are available within each partner organisation. It has also brought to the forefront the issues surrounding apprentice take-up on the offer available. As a result of the project investigations, City College Plymouth discovered and raised an important concern with the semantics of 'students' and 'learners' not being perceived as representative to apprentices. Alongside the barriers that apprentices face to accessing and receiving mental health support, they also often feel like much of the support offered is not for them if it is labelled for 'students' or 'learners'. Actions are already being taken to mitigate this finding.

In order for there to be parity of opportunity for our apprentices to access all of the personal development learning and all of the support that a tutor can provide as well as the referral to the wider support services, it is our recommendation that apprentices are allocated a personal tutor and dedicated tutorial time so that meaningful one-to-ones can be carried out and there to be opportunities for personal development learning to be facilitated by a tutor. The tutor can also help then to signpost the student to access all of these wider support services and opportunities listed above and ensure that apprentices' needs are not overlooked.

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