

LEADING WITH HOPE: MATERIAL POVERTY AND MENTAL WELLBEING

A guide for further education and skills leaders and managers

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LEADING WITH HOPE

Introduction

The further education (FE) and skills sector plays a crucial role in shaping the future of its learners. For many, FE serves as a foundational and transitional environment, bridging the gap between compulsory education and the world of work or higher education and their lives beyond.

However, in today's challenging landscape, where the effects of economic deprivation and material poverty are increasingly apparent on mental health, it can be difficult for FE and skills leaders and managers to know how to effectively lead and support their staff and learners.

Economic insecurity and vulnerability, and a lack of readily available mental health support create a complex set of challenges for learners' mental wellbeing. The wellbeing of FE and skills staff, including leaders and managers, is also increasingly impacted by economic pressures and limited resources. This creates a challenging environment where colleagues are trying to support themselves, each other, and their learners.

Despite these challenges, FE and skills providers are uniquely placed to support learners to make the next steps in their lives – and to foster a community that creates a sense of belonging, opportunity, aspiration and hope.

This guide will equip you with the knowledge and tools to support the mental health of your learners and staff. It outlines some of the key challenges related to material poverty and mental wellbeing, and offers guidance, suggestions and strategies for supporting staff and learners as part of a whole-organisation approach. In particular, it provides guidance on leading with purpose and positivity to foster a sense of belonging and connectedness in your setting, as well as addressing practical barriers.

As leaders and managers, consider how to engage and support your diverse learner population, focusing on the importance of creating connections within your organisation and with your broader community. This can help to create a resilient, aspirational learning community where hope can flourish.

Please note, while the information in this guide draws on research and practice in FE colleges, it can inform and be adapted to the needs of other FE and skills organisations, such as independent training providers, offender learning, adult education, and work-based learning.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MATERIAL POVERTY AND MENTAL WELLBEING

Material poverty and mental wellbeing

Mental health is complex, and we cannot underestimate the influence of the social, economic and physical environment on individuals and communities. There is a growing body of evidence that demonstrates the impact of socioeconomic factors on mental health, particularly among young people, where inequality correlates with negative health and wellbeing.

Recent research paints a concerning picture of youth mental health in the UK more broadly. According to NHS England, in 2023, 20.3% of 8 to 16-year-olds, 23.3% of 17 to 19-year-olds, and 21.7% of 20 to 25-year-olds had a probable mental disorder.¹ These statistics underscore the scale of the challenge facing educational institutions, particularly within FE and skills which often serve the 16-25 age group.

Research also suggests that young people growing up with economic disadvantage are 2-3 times more likely to experience mental health problems than their non-disadvantaged peers.² This relationship is often cyclical: poverty increases the risk of mental health problems, which can be exacerbated by intergenerational and intersectional elements, which in turn lead to further economic disadvantage.³

The effects of material poverty on mental health begin early and can have cumulative impacts throughout life, with children born in deprived areas experiencing higher levels of ongoing mental ill-health.⁴ Children born into families experiencing material poverty may experience food insecurity, exposure to stress, and poor access to housing and healthcare, which can affect development and future mental health outcomes.⁵

Access to mental health support is also influenced by socioeconomic factors. Research from the Sutton Trust found that people from the most deprived regions are 11 percentage points more likely to still be waiting for or have not received the mental health support they need compared to their peers in affluent areas (39% vs. 28%). The divide is especially stark regarding access to specialist services such as NHS Children and Young People Mental Health Services (CYPMHS). In the most deprived areas, 39% had not received the necessary specialist support, compared to only 18% in wealthier areas.⁶



¹ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2023-wave-4-follow-up>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC10786006/>

³ https://mind.org.uk/media/12428/final_poverty-scoping-research-report.pdf

⁴ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7525587/#:~:text=In%20one%20cohort%20study%2C%207.3,in%20the%20least%20deprived%20areas.>

⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/18/17/8990>

⁶ <https://www.suttontrust.com/cosmo-the-covid-social-mobility-and-opportunities-study/>

Challenges in the FE and skills sector

The FE and skills sector faces unique challenges in addressing mental health and wellbeing, particularly in the context of material poverty.

While there is a lack of substantial research on mental wellbeing across the diversity of organisations that make up FE and skills sector, recent findings on the mental health of college learners and staff point to significant challenges. According to the latest Association of Colleges Mental Health survey, 90% of colleges said there was a significant or a slight increase in the disclosure of mental health issues among 16 to 18-year-olds, and 86% said the same for learners aged 19 and above.⁷

When asked what they felt were the main influences impacting learners' mental health, 75% of respondents highlighted the cost of living, while 69% suggested money worries as significant influences on learners' mental health and wellbeing.

This is having a particularly significant impact on college attendance. In the Association of Colleges' College attendance survey, mental health was cited as the primary cause of non-attendance by 88% of colleges in autumn 2023, up from 50% in autumn 2019. Colleges also saw an increase in poor learner attendance caused by greater numbers engaging in paid work - 50% in 2023 compared with 26% in autumn 2019.⁸

The All-Party Parliamentary Group for Students also reports that many learners are making short-term decisions to support themselves and their families, sacrificing longer-term educational goals. Some consider it impossible to continue into higher education or their chosen higher-paid training route. There has also been an increase in safeguarding issues resulting from financial pressures. This includes more learners being referred to supported housing, while some vulnerable learners are becoming victims of criminal and sexual exploitation.⁹

These impacts are compounded by several other challenges related to mental health and wellbeing that the FE sector faces, as noted in the Association of College's Mental Health Report:

- **Staff wellbeing:** 56% of colleges have experienced an increase in support staff accessing mental health support services, a further 54% of colleges reporting an increase of teaching staff accessing services, and 26% of colleges reporting an increase of management accessing support.
- **Availability of local community services:** colleges reported concerns regarding the impact of the closure of community services and a lack of available local support.
- **Substance misuse:** 62% of colleges cited drugs and alcohol misuse as a significant influence on learner mental health.
- **Risk of suicide:** 75% of colleges recorded over five attempted suicides within the previous 12 months, with 30% of colleges reporting at least one death by suicide.
- **Lack of trust in support systems:** there is concern that learners have a 'lack of trust' in health professionals support systems.
- **Impact on relationships:** colleges outlined the challenges associated with learners demonstrating under-developed core social skills, difficulties with managing relationships, and an increase in social anxiety.

⁷ <https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/AoC-Mental-Health-Report-2024-FINAL.docx>

⁸ <https://d4hfzltwt4wv7.cloudfront.net/uploads/files/College-Attendance-Survey-Report-2024.pdf>

⁹ [CBP-9886.pdf](#)

Diversity, inequality and mental health

When addressing mental health in FE and skills settings, it's essential to recognise that certain groups may be disproportionately affected, particularly when socioeconomic disadvantage intersects with other aspects of identity or experience.

This is particularly acute in FE and skills providers, where the learner population often includes a high percentage from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, learners with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and refugees or displaced individuals.

FE and skills leaders and managers should consider:

Asylum seekers and refugees often face multiple challenges, including language barriers, cultural adjustment, trauma from displacement, and anxiety over legal status. In FE and skills settings, issues such as lack of ESOL courses and staff, and learner vulnerability to trafficking or legal status changes, present additional complexities for staff wanting to keep their learners safe and help them succeed.

LGBTQI+, trans and non-binary young people may face additional stressors such as family rejection, homelessness, and discrimination. Research has shown that fostering a sense of belonging is crucial in preventing depression and suicidal ideation among this group.¹⁰

Racially minoritised learners often experience racism as a major driver of mental health problems. According to research from Anna Freud, 88% of young people report that racism significantly affects their mental health, yet only a quarter feel that education staff understand this impact.¹¹

Care leavers often face multiple disadvantages, including higher rates of homelessness and unemployment, which can exacerbate existing mental health issues. Young carers may also struggle to balance learning and caring responsibilities, impacting their mental wellbeing and educational outcomes.

Neurodivergent learners and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) face unique challenges in accessing mental health services and transitioning to adult services. According to Mencap, the rate of mental health problems in people with a learning disability is double that of the general population, highlighting the need for targeted support in FE and skills settings.¹²

First-generation FE and skills learners may face additional pressures such as a lack of family resources in navigating the education system and financial stress. They may also experience 'impostor' syndrome, and face challenges with balancing work and study commitments.

Adult learners may be returning to education with existing mental health concerns and additional life pressures. Many of these learners may have had challenging experiences in school, making the transition back into education difficult.

These factors often intersect with both material poverty and compound each other, creating complex barriers to good mental health.

While this picture is complex, FE and skills providers are uniquely placed to support learners who experience some of these challenges. Below, we outline some of the strategies that FE leaders and managers can implement to support learners in their setting.

¹⁰ <https://d1uw1dikibnh8j.cloudfront.net/media/17009/classroom-wellbeing-toolkit.pdf>

¹¹ https://www.wellbeinglaunchpad.com/wp-content/uploads/briefing-paper_final-1.pdf

¹² <https://www.mencap.org.uk/learning-disability-explained/research-and-statistics/health/mental-health>



STRATEGIES FOR FE LEADERS AND MANAGERS



Building resilience is not about one source of support or one intervention, it's about a multi-layered approach. Think about it like building with layers of Swiss cheese.

There will be gaps at each layer, and if you're relying on just one of those layers there's a greater chance of falling through the gap. But the more layers you build with, the more gaps are closed. (Professor Jess Deighton, Anna Freud).

Leading with hope

Despite these challenges, FE and skills providers are uniquely placed to make a significant difference in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their learners and staff.

This requires leadership that is both pragmatic and hopeful, and that promotes and embeds a multi-layered approach to mental health support that both fosters a sense of community and addresses practical barriers.

In particular, this involves:

- embedding a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing
- creating an ethos and environment that creates a sense of belonging, connectedness, safety and trust
- prioritising learner voice and enabling learner agency
- providing targeted support to vulnerable individuals and groups of learners
- providing practical, material support, supportive initiatives and guidance
- creating community partnerships that embed the FE and skills provider in the local community.

Each of these layers of support can help to build a positive, hopeful learning community – with a sense of belonging, connectedness and trust at the heart of your organisation's approach.

Below, we've outlined how FE and skills leaders and managers can implement these strategies to support the whole learning community.

Embedding a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing

A whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing is fundamental to creating a supportive, connected environment for all members of your learning community.

This approach should be multi-layered, taking account of aspects of study and life that can impact mental health and wellbeing. At its core, it recognises that FE and skills providers are communities and work to support the wellbeing and development of all their members by creating a safe, compassionate and connected environment.

At the heart of this work is the role of the [Senior Mental Health Lead \(SMHL\)](#). With support from leadership and management, they play a crucial role in leading and embedding the eight principles of the DfE's whole-school or college approach across your setting's broader policies, support and strategy:



Source: *The Department for Education's eight principles of a whole-school or college approach to mental health and wellbeing.*¹³

While these principles are designed to be applied to schools and colleges, they can also inform and be adapted to other FE and skills settings. How you embed these principles, and the support you provide will depend on the specific needs of your setting.

¹³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/promoting-children-and-young-peoples-emotional-health-and-wellbeing>

Some key considerations for FE and skills providers include:

- [Monitoring and measure learner wellbeing](#) to identify mental health and wellbeing needs
- Developing [a mental health plan and policy](#) for both staff and learners
- Identifying and signposting to appropriate support and pathways for learners and staff experiencing mental health difficulties, ensuring everyone is aware of the process and their role within it
- Developing a [trauma-informed approach](#) to help create a safe environment for those who have experienced trauma and adverse experiences
- Where possible, [working in partnership with parents and carers](#) to support your learners, focusing on building long-term, positive and supportive relationships
- Integrating mental health education into the curriculum
- [Developing a peer support programme](#)
- Identifying and provide appropriate [mental health training for staff](#)
- [Creating a connected FE community](#) with strong links with other local community services and initiatives.



The [Association of Colleges Mental Health Charter](#) also provides further guidance on how to embed a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing in your setting.

Resources

Anna Freud: [5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing: a framework for schools and colleges](#) - a free framework, with guidance and resources to support the implementation of a whole-organisation approach – adaptable to FE settings.

Anna Freud: [Mental health lead resource hub](#) – a hub of resources to support Senior Mental Health Leads to develop and embed a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.



Ethos and environment: fostering a sense of belonging, trust and connectedness

While all eight principles are crucial to supporting learners and staff, when responding to some of the interconnected mental health challenges that material poverty presents, it's particularly crucial to create a positive ethos and environment that fosters positive relationships and a sense of belonging and connectedness for all.

This involves taking a **relational approach**. This puts positive, supportive relationships – between leadership, staff, learners and the broader community – at the heart of your support and strategy. We know that trusted relationships are at the heart of good mental wellbeing¹⁴ – and creating this sense of trust and belonging can help learners and staff to feel safe, comfortable and confident that the community in your setting can support them.

Putting belonging at the heart of your whole-organisation approach



Belonging is that sense of being somewhere you can be confident that you will fit in and be safe in your identity: a feeling of being at home in a place.¹⁵

A sense of belonging and connectedness is fundamental to learner success and wellbeing in FE and skills settings. Research has further shown that a sense of belonging in educational settings is linked to:

1. Increased learner motivation
2. Improved academic achievement
3. Reductions in learner absence
4. Better overall health and wellbeing
5. A growing sense of agency in learners and staff.¹⁶

This is particularly true for learners from marginalised backgrounds and communities, who may question their feeling of belonging more frequently than others.

By fostering an inclusive environment that recognises and supports the diverse needs of FE and skills learners, FE and skills providers can significantly impact learners' wellbeing, academic success, and future prospects.

Creating a sense of belonging and connectedness involves working within and beyond the learning community to create an environment where learners and staff feel valued.

For leaders and managers in particular this involves taking a compassionate, purposeful approach which brings everyone on board and sets your learning organisation on a positive trajectory.

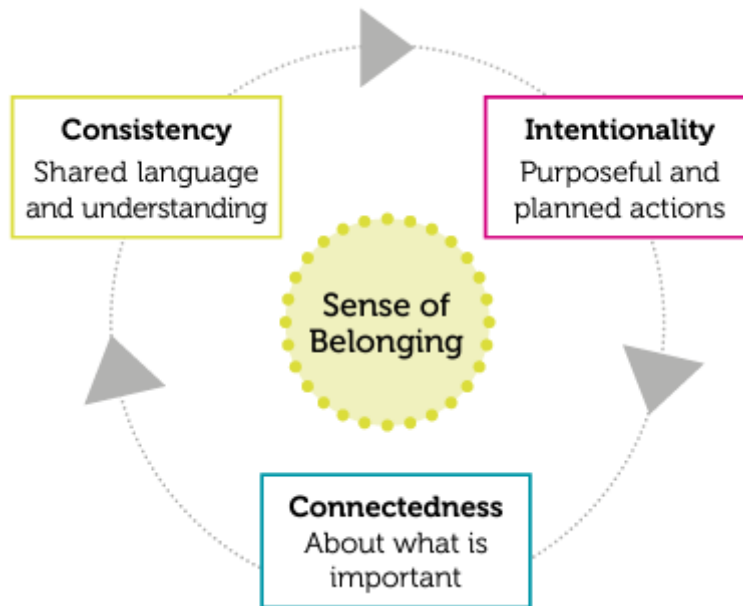
¹⁴ <https://www.annafreud.org/news/trusted-relationships-and-mental-wellbeing-what-we-learned-from-headstart/>

¹⁵ <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Belonging%20research%20booklet.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Belonging%20research%20booklet.pdf>

The cycle of connectivity

One way of thinking about this approach for FE and skills settings is via the cycle of connectivity. This model, outlined as part of the National Education Union and UCL's [research on the importance of belonging](#), can help to inform your setting's practice, ethos, and approach to mental health and wellbeing:



Source: National Education Union, *Place and Belonging in schools: why it matters today: case studies*¹⁷

These principles are foundational for a successful [whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing](#), in which belonging, connectedness and community are at the heart of your approach.

By focusing on these principles, FE and skills leaders can create an environment where both learners and staff feel they belong, are heard, and have a sense of agency.

Below, we have highlighted some further specific areas of focus, along with suggestions and strategies for how you might implement effective support in your setting.

¹⁷ <https://neu.org.uk/sites/default/files/2023-04/Belonging%20research%20booklet.pdf>



Enable learner voice

One crucial element of a whole-organisation approach that can support learners' sense of belonging, connectedness and agency is to [enable learner voice](#).

This should draw on a participatory approach, such as [the Lundy model](#), which truly empowers learners in decision-making processes.

This involves considering:

- **Space:** providing a safe and inclusive environment for learners to express their views
- **Voice:** provide appropriate information and facilitate the expression of learners' views
- **Audience:** ensure that learners' views are communicated to someone with the responsibility to listen
- **Influence:** ensure that learners' views are taken seriously and acted upon, where appropriate.

In practice, this could include:

- Establishing regular forums for learners to share their experiences and ideas
- Involving learners in the design and implementation of support services and initiatives in your organisation and the broader community
- Gathering learner voice from vulnerable or minoritised groups (e.g., [on the impact of racism on mental health](#))
- Implementing learner-led initiatives that promote inclusivity and mental health awareness
- Creating opportunities for [peer support and mentoring programmes](#).



Anna Freud's [5 Steps framework](#) provides further guidance on how you might [gather and enable learner voice](#).

Provide targeted support for vulnerable groups and individuals

Given the diverse needs of FE and skills learners, and the ways that these intersect with the mental health impacts of material poverty, it can also be helpful to implement [targeted support](#) for vulnerable groups.

Learners' own voices are again crucial here: it can be both more empowering and effective to develop any targeted support offer in collaboration with learners.

Targeted support might include:

- Working with learners to develop specific support programmes for SEND learners, LGBTQIA+ young people, and learners from ethnic minority backgrounds.

E.g., Create support groups for different communities, facilitated by trained staff or external specialists.

- Offering targeted interventions for learners with known adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

E.g., Provide [trauma-informed support](#) for learners who have experienced trauma.

- Providing specialised support for refugees and asylum seekers, including trauma-informed support, ESOL and cultural integration support, and signpost to appropriate support that is available in your local community.

E.g., Establish a 'welcome programme' for refugee and asylum-seeking learners, offering language support, cultural orientation, and connections to relevant support and community services.

- Creating support groups for young carers and care leavers.

Example: Set up a 'young carers network' offering peer support, advice on balancing caring responsibilities with studies, and signposting to additional services.

Any targeted support should be combined with universal support to provide a holistic combination of support that meets the different needs of your whole learner body.

Resources

Anna Freud: [Targeted support toolkit](#) - a toolkit to help staff review, refresh and develop effective targeted support for social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

UK Trauma Council: [Childhood trauma, war, migration and asylum](#) – information and guidance on supporting those who have experience trauma in relation to war, migration and asylum.

UK Trauma Council: [How to support refugee and asylum-seeking young people who have experienced trauma](#) – information for education staff on supporting young people in your setting.





Support staff wellbeing

As well as your learners, it's crucial to support the mental wellbeing of staff. As well as [the effects of the cost of living crisis on staff](#), it's important to recognise the broader and interconnected mental wellbeing challenges that staff may face. For example, [Education Support's 2023 Teacher Wellbeing Index](#) reports that 78% of education staff reported that they have experienced poor mental health due to their work.

Staff need to know they can rely on their employer, manager and peers for support, in order that they can support both themselves and their learners.

Wellbeing support for your staff can include:

- [Staff wellbeing surveys](#) to understand your staff's wellbeing needs and deliver effective support.
- Developing a [staff mental health and wellbeing plan](#).
- Identifying and signposting support that is available in your organisation and local community.
- Providing opportunities for reflective practice and supervision.
- Creating psychologically safe environments where staff feel trusted and can openly discuss mental wellbeing.
- [Prioritising work-life balance](#) by reviewing workloads, implementing email protocols, and promoting flexible working arrangements where possible.
- Implementing an [Employee Assistance Programme](#) for confidential support.
- Recognise and support staff contributions and achievements.
- Providing mental health awareness training for all staff, [including specialised training for staff with mental health responsibilities](#).

These suggestions also apply to FE and skills leaders and managers. It's important that you prioritise your own wellbeing and model a positive and open culture that promotes the importance of mental health and wellbeing. The following resources can support you to do this:

The Education and Training Foundation: [Taking care of yourself as a busy FE leader](#)

The Education and Training Foundation: [Helping staff manage work and life](#)

Resources

Anna Freud: [Ten ways to support staff wellbeing](#)

An action-planning guide and template to help leadership teams plan and implement effective wellbeing support for their staff as part of a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.



Anna Freud: [Training for schools, colleges and independent providers](#)

Our evidence-based training courses have been written by mental health professionals and education experts. Every session is delivered by one of our highly experienced qualified trainers.

We offer both shorter and more intensive training courses for staff across various educational settings and organisations. This includes training on:

- Staff wellbeing
- Reflective practice and supervision
- Developing a policy for your whole-organisation approach to mental wellbeing.

Provide practical support and initiatives

As well as support that is specifically focused on your learning community's health, various other forms of practical support can make a significant difference to their mental wellbeing and their capacity to develop a sense of security, belonging and aspiration.

The support that FE and skills providers can offer will depend on the specific needs of your learners and staff, as well as resource and budget constraints. You may wish to consider the following:

Food and clothing support

- Establish or expand food banks, partnering with local supermarkets for regular donations.
- Create a 'community support hub' that includes a clothes bank, sourcing donations from local clothing retailers.

Transportation assistance

- Implement a 'travel bursary' scheme for learners from low-income backgrounds.
- Negotiate discounted public transport passes for learners with local transport providers.

Flexible learning and support options

- Develop blended learning courses that combine online and in-person elements to allow for more flexible schedules, accommodating learners who need to work.
- Provide online mental health support to learners via Anna Freud's [Early Support Service](#), and signpost them to information from trusted organisations such as [YoungMinds](#) and [the NHS](#).

Free breakfast programmes

- Start a 'breakfast club' offering free, healthy breakfasts to learners before classes begin.
- Partner with local businesses or apprentice's employer to provide discounted meals or snacks throughout the day.

On-site services

- Create a 'learner services hub' where vocational learners (e.g., hairdressing, beauty therapy) can offer low-cost services to the learning community as part of their training.
- Provide advice from skills departments around car maintenance and DIY on a budget, using a token system offered by learner services for equitable access.

Health initiatives:

- Increase awareness of period poverty and provide free sanitary products.
- Offer sexual health education and resources in partnership with local health services.

Life skills development

- Establish gardening groups, leading to healthy cooking on a budget sessions, promoting physical activity, mental wellbeing, and practical skills.
- Organise financial literacy workshops in partnership with local banks or financial advisors.

Develop partnerships with local mental health services and community organisations

- Establish a 'Mental Health Partnership Board' with representatives from local NHS services, charities, and your organisation to coordinate support efforts.

- Encourage participation in community projects and make promote local events, volunteering opportunities, and support services.

Social Prescribing

An increasing number of colleges are adopting [social prescribing](#) into their practice, which helps improve mental health by connecting people to community services, reducing pressure on GPs and overprescribing.

There is emerging evidence around the benefits of social prescribing for young people, particularly for those aged over 17, on personal and mental wellbeing, including loneliness.¹⁸

FE and skills settings can:

- **Train and appoint social prescribing link workers:** train staff members to become social prescribing link workers who can refer learners to non-clinical local services to support their wellbeing.
- **Partner with local sports clubs and facilities:** collaborate with local yoga studios to provide weekly on-campus classes for learners and staff and negotiate free or discounted memberships to local gyms or sports clubs for learners.
- **Connect with arts organisations:** set up partnerships with local theatre groups to offer drama workshops and arrange for local artists to provide creative workshops on campus.
- **Engage with environmental groups:** organise regular 'green gym' sessions where learners can engage in conservation work in local parks or nature reserves, and partner with local environmental organisations to offer nature-based activities and workshops.
- **Promote volunteer opportunities:** partner with local charities to create a range of volunteering opportunities for learners, promoting social connection and skill development.



¹⁸ <https://socialprescribingacademy.org.uk/media/j5jfyovd/nasp-strategy-2023-2026.pdf>

Focus on career support, development and life skills

The FE and skills sector plays a crucial role as a bridge between school and the next phase of a learner's life. A lack of information and guidance can disproportionately hinder learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds.¹⁹

FE and skills providers can help learners not only to find their place in education and their local community, but to develop a sense of aspiration and hopefulness about their future.

By providing robust careers advice and support, and helping learners develop essential life skills, providers can significantly contribute to learners' mental wellbeing. It can be helpful to:

- Implement comprehensive career counseling services.

Establish a 'career cafe' where learners can drop in (remotely or in-person) for informal chats with career advisors during lunch breaks.

- Organise regular career fairs and employer visits.

Host 'industry insight' sessions where local employers present about their sectors and career opportunities. These can be recorded so that learners can access them digitally at any time.

- Collaborate with higher education institutions.

Develop progression agreements with local universities to create clear pathways for learners and arrange campus visits and joint activities to support learners considering higher education.

- Establish pathways for learners into apprenticeships.

Support both current apprentices to progress up a level, and learners to progress to apprenticeships

- Incorporate financial literacy and life skills into the curriculum.

Partner with local organisations to offer workshops on budgeting, saving, and understanding personal finance and financial support for learners.

- Facilitate smooth transitions to university or work through targeted support programmes.

Set up a peer mentoring scheme where current learners who have received university offers mentor those applying.

- Focus on developing soft skills crucial for both academic and professional success.

Organise a TEDx-style event where learners can present on topics that they are passionate about, developing public speaking and presentation skills.



¹⁹ https://www.somo.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Advancing-Social-Mobility-2023_Full-Report.pdf

CASE STUDY: TAMESIDE COLLEGE



Improving wellbeing through leadership and cohesive partnership with staff and students

Our college prioritises the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff, recognising it as essential to both academic success and a positive community. We are committed to building a supportive environment through proactive leadership and partnerships across all levels. By collaborating with students and staff to co-create mental health resources and strategies, we aim to empower our community to prioritise resilience, health, and wellbeing in line with our core values.

Proactive leadership and commitment to wellbeing

The college's senior leadership is committed to supporting staff and student wellbeing, with strong partnerships with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and local agencies to respond dynamically and proactively address our community needs. Central to this approach is fostering open discussions on mental health to increase awareness, reduce stigma, and create a supportive culture. Our leaders actively engage in wellbeing conversations and share personal experiences to encourage mental health prioritisation across the college.

New initiatives

To strengthen our mental health strategy, we reviewed our existing resources and support systems for both students and staff. This process allowed us to identify areas for improvement, resulting in an enhanced support framework with more accessible mental health resources. For example, the "Time to Talk" initiative offers staff sessions with college leaders to openly discuss wellbeing issues. These sessions align with significant national awareness days, including World Mental Health Day, National Time to Talk Day, and Mental Health awareness days. This successful initiative has since become an essential part of our wellbeing offerings.

Recognising the importance of mental wellbeing in a high-paced academic environment, we introduced a new initiative known as "Wellbeing Days" for staff. These include a dedicated day off for staff to focus on personal wellbeing without the pressures of daily work responsibilities. This day is designed to encourage meaningful rest, self-care, and wellbeing practices. We also have a wellbeing day on campus, where staff can participate in a range of wellbeing workshops, mindfulness sessions, yoga classes, and mental health talks. By labelling these as "Wellbeing Days," we aim to emphasise their importance and validate the need for mental rest.

We organise weekly and weekend walks, fostering a community environment that supports physical activity, social connection, and time in nature as part of a holistic approach to mental health. These walks provide a space for informal conversations, community building, and opportunities to de-stress in a supportive setting.

Empowering students for resilience, development and career success

Our college offers comprehensive mental health resources to help students build resilience and essential wellbeing skills for academic and career success. Through workshops on stress management, resilience, self-care, and online safety, we equip students to handle academic pressures, manage challenges posed by the online world, and help them thrive in their professional lives. Our commitment to fostering a supportive culture prioritises mental health, open dialogue, and accessible resources. By collaborating with staff and students, we aim to create a resilient community where individuals feel valued, supported, and ready to navigate both personal and professional development.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Anna Freud: [5 Steps to Mental Health and Wellbeing: a framework for schools and colleges](#) – a free, evidence-based framework to support the implementation of a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Anna Freud: [Mental health lead resource hub](#) - a hub of resources to support senior mental health leads to develop and embed a whole-organisation approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Anna Freud and CORC: [Wellbeing measurement for school staff](#) - survey questions and guidance to help school and FE and skills leadership teams better understand their staff and provide them with the support they need.

Education and Training Foundation: [Mental health and wellbeing guides for the Further Education sector](#) – information, guidance and resources to support FE and skills leaders and managers.

National Education Union: [Trauma-informed toolkit](#) - a toolkit with practical resources and guidance on embedding a trauma-informed approach to mental health and wellbeing.

UK Trauma Council: [Childhood trauma, war, migration and asylum](#) - resources to help children and young people affected by war, migration and asylum as well as the professionals supporting them.

UK Trauma Council: [How to support refugee and asylum-seeking young people who have experienced trauma](#) – guidance on supporting and improving outcomes for refugees and asylum-seeking children and young people

Anna Freud: Schools in Mind

Schools in Mind is a free network for education professionals. It shares evidence-based, accessible information and resources to support good mental health across the whole school and college community.

When you join, you'll get an email newsletter each month sharing:

- free mental health resources
- information about upcoming events and training
- opportunities to take part in programmes and share your views.

[Sign up now](#)



Thank you



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