

# Wellbeing at LSBU

A case study

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# Overview

London South Bank University has always in some way or another focused on wellbeing among students and staff.

In 2016 Ed Spacey, the Head of Health and Safety made a business case to the University that they needed to create a specific task force dedicated to this area. It was approved and wellbeing champions were appointed across the institution.

This case study briefly looks at the history of wellbeing in University and explores the current wellbeing provision for staff and students. In addition there are some suggestions for ideas the library service can implement.

**A**

**Wellbeing at our core**

**B**

**Across the University**

**C**

**Within the LLR**

## **A Eighteen Ninety**

In the early years of LSBU, the South London Polytechnics Institute Act was passed. It helped to create a governing structure and aims for the then Polytechnic based in Borough Road. Part of the mission statement was to promote the “industrial skills, general knowledge, health, and well-being of young men and women.” So from the start there has been an emphasis on supporting wellbeing in an educational setting.

## **B Whole and consistent is the key**

At LSBU there is a dedicated wellbeing team to support all students. Aside from the confidential support sessions being offered, students can also make use of the free online counselling service, SilverCloud. There is also a holistic approach to mental health with a liaison (by consent) with external support services such as the GP or NHS Mental Health team. Every Wednesday the student support team host a workshop for 2 hours. Students can use the space to meet friends, share ideas, play board games, be involved with the ‘part time pets’ initiative as well as other wellbeing orientated activities.

## **C More than books**

In recent years the LLR team have been looking into addressing wellbeing within the space. Currently at the Havering Campus library satellite site they have a wellbeing trolley filled with Reading Well suggestions and mindfulness colouring sheets and pencils. There are plans to create a unique reading well list for both sites but this will rely on donations from staff and students. The library are keen to look at ways to support staff and students beyond providing literature on the subject.

# On Staff Wellbeing....

Annie Yau,  
Wellbeing Advisor

## **How do you keep across the general wellbeing of such a large and diverse group of people? Are you able to track usage of wellbeing services?**

Utilising the goodwill of volunteers across the organisation and group who have their ear to the ground and passionate interest in wellbeing generally. Also, the following websites: PHE, Mental Health Foundation, NHS, professional networks, CIPD, MHFA England to name a few. I have access to data analytics for EAP and OH services, also staff engagement survey results.

Working with colleagues from Organisational development, Learning development, Equality Diversity and Inclusion, and HRBPs and service desks – all provide useful and invaluable insights, learning and understanding of trends and focus and gaps.

## **What has/is worked/working well for staff to improve their wellbeing?**

Staff engagement is the highest indicator of interest and impact. I have identified a number of things that remain a consistent feature in the wellbeing calendar. These are the staff BBQs, annual flu vaccination, Virgin Global Challenge, Staff Wellbeing Conference. Other events are more adhoc and flexible based on trending issues and climate.

## **What is not working so well?**

Getting staff to access EAP and OH provisions – there is still some reticence

## **What are the challenges you face in promoting wellbeing across the University?**

Staff forget quite quickly about what is available unless it is relevant to them. There is a need to balance continually repeating and reinforcing the message without it become background noise. For some there is a mistrust in the process (myths need debunking), and others who know about the services perhaps feel they don't have time till it hits crisis ie the become so unwell they are unable to come into work. Sometimes there are inconsistencies in how policies are applied in relation to staff wellbeing.

# On Student Wellbeing...

Hamada Abdalla,  
Mental Health & Wellbeing Manager

## **What is services do you offer and what is a typical day like at LSBU in your team?**

Our Mental Health and Wellbeing (MHWB) team are here to support any students who are experiencing personal, emotional or mental health difficulties that may be impacting on their studies. The team offer a confidential and collaborative space to discuss what's on the student's mind and can also advise and signpost the student to available support. We can refer students to counselling if this seems appropriate. We also coordinate a Specialist Sexual Violence Liaison Service (SVLS).

My own particular role - I manage the mental health and wellbeing team, so my main duties are in coordinating our offer of support to students. This includes liaising with course directors and lecturers, screening new referrals and offering operational & clinical advice and guidance to the team. I normally attend a number of meetings a week with other University departments so that we can provide a seamless experience for our students.

## **Currently, what percentage of the student population use the wellbeing services on offer?**

It's difficult to name a percentage as Wellbeing covers both Mental Health & Dyslexia and Disability Support. However, on average, the MHWB team would normally support around 850 - 1000 students during each Academic term.

## **How do you generate ideas for wellbeing services you can offer at LSBU?**

Coordinating our offer internally with our teams as well as facilitating coordination meetings with other students/university services e.g. SU/Accommodation/Academic Schools. Of course we also regularly ask for student feedback.

We also work collaboratively with NHS and other external services as well as third sector organisations in order to provide students with the best support available and ensure that their wellbeing needs are met holistically.

## **Are there any barriers that you are facing within the sector?**

Like many services we are faced with high demands and limited resources and our scope has a very large remit (i.e. we also coordinate other university processes such as Safeguarding, and the SVLS etc.).

We've also noted that there appears to be certain barriers in certain groups in accessing our services for example BAME students and especially Black men.

## **How has wellbeing within the LSBU changed over the years? Is there a greater demand for the services over the years?**

Our offer to students had definitely expanded over the last few years. We have also noticed that there is definitely an increased demand for mental health support in the last year or so and this is down to many factors. Student experiences are often now more complex and require a greater amount of support.

## **What do you think the library can do to support the provision already within the University?**

I note that you have a 'wellbeing trolley' which is really great.

We also have some other ideas (and we know that they may be hard to implement)...

- We think it would be really great if the library could perhaps provide some fiction books/poetry etc. as we know reading is a great 'de-stressor' for many individuals.
- We also wonder if a book club or fiction/poetry workshops might also provide students with more opportunities to socialise and increase their wellbeing.
- Another thought we had was maybe coordinating a 'book-prescription' i.e. an Advisor would prescribe a book and the student could collect this from the library i.e. maybe a designated library colleague.

# What can the library do?

From the interviews above and talking with similar institutions, the wellbeing service can and should be expanded into the library. The library can keep resources relevant and perhaps tackle the 'taboo' surrounding accessing what's on offer for staff. For students it can support the existing provision by providing additional materials, space and time. Unless the University can take a holistic approach to wellbeing it will be unable to reach as many people as possible at a time when it is most in demand.

Below are some ideas that could be implemented in the library. Looking to the future it is important for libraries to take a more active role in wellbeing and find ways to measure the success of its initiatives to share with other higher education settings.

BooksOnPrescription  
MindfulMeditationSessions  
WellbeingArticlesDisplay  
BookClubs Signage  
SoftSeatingAreas MentalHealthFirstAid  
MindfulColouringSheets  
LanguageInCorrespondence  
BoardGames  
ReadingForPleasureCollection  
LunchtimeWalks  
FruitAndWaterDuringExamTime  
FlexitimeForStaff

