**Application for Student Support Initiative 2018**

**Inverness College UHI: A whole college approach to mental health - Resilience Workshops**

1. **Outline of Project**

There is a wealth of evidence that shows that the number of people with mental health issues is rising within society and that the number of students in FE and HE with mental health issues is increasing steadily (youGov.uk 2017, NUS 2016, Universities UK 2015)

As the numbers of students reporting mental health difficulties within the College continues to increase year on year, we needed to look at strategies with both preventative and responsive elements. We believed that integration and embedding mental wellbeing across the College would ideally create a college environment that is conducive to mental health and learning. In addition to reducing distress, it was expected that an investment in good mental health would lead to improvements in student retention and achievement (Porter, 2011; Turner and Berry, 2000)

At the start of academic term 17/18 we campaigned for, and adopted, a whole college approach to mental health, promoting positive health to complement our wider supportive measures for students with mental health issues. This approach offers an inclusive model, which shifts support from being reactive to being more proactive, and shifts to a wider social model of health.

The whole college approach has many strands ranging from strategic actions such as embedding mental health into the strategic planning to a range of operational practices. The strand that we are entering for the award is the introduction of resilience and positive mental health workshops for all Further Education students.

These workshops are designed to help students develop strategies and positive responses to setbacks and challenges and to help them to develop academic confidence. It was felt that these workshops would help students to maintain positive mental health and thus meet two objectives:

1. Reduce the number of students requiring mental health support
2. Help with student retention and attainment

Although this initiative is not unique across universities, the paradigm shift to a positive wellbeing focus is innovative and has helped to inspire a move to a more healthy university.

**2. Implementation of project**

During an internal review of the student support area the Access and Progression Manager put forward to Senior Management a proposal to change the focus of the service to a positive wellbeing service which, whilst including services to support mental ill health, took a much more proactive approach to wellbeing (see appendix 1). This whole college approach to mental health was warmly supported.

As part of this initiative, the guidance and wellbeing team met to discuss a range of possible interventions to help deal with the increasing number of students seeking both wellbeing and counselling support. After researching international best practice across educational institutions and large businesses it was felt that our students in common with many other pupils, students and employees, lacked resilience and very often gave up at the first hurdle. The team therefore felt that mandatory, interactive workshops that tackled issues of resilience and positive mental attitude might help students to cope better with the challenges of transition and academic demands. The team discussed this with personal academic tutors (PATs) who felt that this would be helpful and were happy to include this within PAT time.

The team then planned and developed the workshops during the summer recess ready for delivery at the start of academic term 17/18 (workshop presentation submitted with this paper). The workshops were delivered to 67 Further Education classes between September and October 2017. The workshops have since been delivered to a further 18 January start classes. No additional funding was available for this work.

The initiative was then evaluated with both students and staff at the end of semester one, findings detailed below

1. **Impact**
2. Early student withdrawal has fallen significantly this session. It is acknowledged that this will be due to a diverse range of issues but it is felt that the workshops may have played a part in the rise in retention.
3. Four focus groups were held with students who had attended the session. Positive comments received included

* *It changed thinking from fixed to growth mind-set, in some subjects*
* *more awareness of mind-sets*
* *the workshop made me think more positively about situations*
* *have used the workshop outside college during driving lessons*

All students felt that further workshops would be beneficial with many students saying that one workshop was not enough

* *In the short term it helped, but not really in long term*
* *after the workshop, tended to forget main points*
* *Opened our eyes after 1st workshop, but more sessions would help to remind us*

1. Staff who attended the workshop with their students were sent an online evaluation questionnaire. Although the response rate to the survey was only 15% the results gained were positive.

* 74% of respondents felt that the workshop helped students to explore the benefits of resilience
* 60% felt that students became more aware of the difference between fixed and growth mindsets.
* 80% felt that the workshop was useful for their class
* 96% of staff said that they would be interested in booking further workshops relating to this topic
* Staff were asked to give examples of how the workshop was useful
* *I have always used this in my PAT sessions but I feel the students are more open to it.*
* *used the content to open discussion with students who have been struggling, that they just don’t know information YET and will in the future.*
* *it has been a key theme of discussion with my adult students who have past history of low confidence, unemployment and mental health issues/other barriers to work and study*
* *noticed greater willingness by students to attempt work*
* *I have noticed a more positive attitude with the students. They started asking more, in class.*
* *Students used this information and shared with their work supervisors and tutors as part of end of course group presentation about how to survive at college*
* *More students are attempting projects and work at the edge of their capability than would have otherwise attempted previously.*

Evaluation with staff also indicated that a one off workshop was probably not sufficient to change behaviours and actions. Staff also commented that they felt that they would benefit from staff training in the topics, which would enable them to reinforce ideas and concepts with students throughout the year.

1. **What next**

It is our intention to continue with the work and further refine the workshops. In academic year 2018/19 we plan to deliver a series of three workshops to all students (Further and Higher Education). We feel that this will help students to establish resilience strategies and to more fully embrace a growth mind-set. This will be very resource intensive and to mitigate this we plan to recruit wellbeing ambassadors who will be trained in the topics and on workshop delivery. These ambassadors will then deliver peer led workshops giving then valuable experience whilst helping to extend resource.

References:

NUS (2016) *Mental Health in Scotland: A 10 year Vision* [online] Available from <<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/new-figures-highlight-worrying-state-of-scottish-student-mental-health>> [15.03.17]

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**Appendix 1 A whole college approach to mental health**

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organisation as : “A state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO 2014)

There is a wealth of evidence that shows that the number of people with mental health issues is rising within society and that the number of students in FE and HE with mental health issues is increasing steadily.

* 1 in 4 people in the UK experience a mental health problem each year (Mind 2014)
* More than a quarter of students (27%) report having a mental health problem of one type or another. (youGov.uk 2017)
* “In the UK, every year one in four of the population experience a mental health difficulty. It is reasonable to presume that this degree of prevalence may also reflected in the student population” (Universities UK 2015:12)
* Amongst 12 institutions holding data on the 4 years 2011/12 to 2014/15 there has been a **47% increase in students requesting access to mental health support services,** with some institutions seeing up to **70% rise** in students enquiring about accessing services. NUS (2016)

For many students transition can be challenging and entering a new and unfamiliar academic environment can be stressful. Pressures associated with academic performance, funding, accommodation and building new social networks can have a negative impact on mental health and well-being. Throughout the academic year demands of study, balancing study, paid work and like, fear of failure etc. continue to add to everyday stressors.

As the numbers of students reporting mental health difficulties increase, we need to look at strategies with both preventative and responsive elements. Integration and embedding mental wellbeing across the College would ideally create a college environment that is conducive to mental health and learning. In addition to reducing distress, it is expected that an investment in good mental health would lead to improvements in student retention and achievement (Porter, 2011; Turner and Berry, 2000)

**A Whole College Approach**

Whole college approaches are becoming increasingly necessary to help promote positive health and give wider supportive measures for students with mental health issues. This approach offers an inclusive model which shifts support from being reactive to being more proactive and shifts to a wider social model of health.

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| All students | Institutional structure: organisation, planning and policy |
| Supportive, inclusive campus climate and environment |
| Mental Health Awareness |
| Resources/training to promote positive mental health |
| Students with concerns about coping | Capacity to respond to early indicators of student concern |
| Self-management competencies, coping skills |
| Students with mental health concerns | Accessible wellbeing services |
| Crisis management |

Amended from Canadian Association of College and University Student Services and Canadian Mental Health Association (2013)

**All students**

1. Embed mental health into the strategic planning and operational practices reflecting the importance of mental health as a foundation for successful learning
2. Commit to support student mental health within strategic goals and resource allocation
3. Develop a mental health policy and strategy. Work already completed on Fitness to Study, Students in Crisis and general Additional Support for Learning Policy and Equality and Diversity Policy
4. Incorporate relevant development sessions for all staff (academic and support) into staff training
5. Create a working group, to include student representation, to enable individual departments to review the implications of their own practices on mental wellbeing

1. Provide resources (perhaps working in partnership with mental health organisations) for educators to ensure their course materials do not perpetuate mental health stigma, prejudice, and discrimination.
2. Include workshops on resilience and positive mental health in Personal Academic Tutor sessions

**Students with concerns about coping**

1. Work to ensure that students feel supported and empowered to declare their needs on application.
2. Make it as easy as possible for students to disclose that they are experiencing difficulties, not just at the start of their course, but throughout. Ensure that services are well signposted and that staff have a positive and proactive approach to encouraging disclosure.
3. Establish an early alert system (INSIGHT) that builds staff capacity to notice early indicators that students may require help and are referred to support services.
4. Develop a range of resources that encourage self-management competences and coping skills to strengthen student resilience, academic buoyancy and management of multiple demands of student life.

**Students with mental health concerns**

1. Regularly assess that support services are adequately resourced in relation to demand and effectiveness
2. Maintain and develop support services to ensure that they are responsive to the changing needs of students
3. Fund student-led activities to raise awareness or to provide peer-to-peer support. Peer support has been found to be very helpful and is a key feature of the ‘recovery model’ of mental health
4. Enhance transition into College for students who declare mental health issues to include orientation and adaptation skills
5. Provide timely triage processes with initial assessment and referral to appropriate services
6. Work collaboratively with a range of mental health organisations to widen the range of support options available for students
7. Raise staff awareness of the types of situations and circumstances that require crisis management, what the protocols are and what their role within these are
8. Widely disseminate details of external emergency agencies
9. Increasingly move from a crisis –management model to a self-management model

**References:**

Canadian Mental Health Association (2013) *Post-Secondary Student Mental Health: Guide to a Systematic Approach.* Canada: CACUSS/ASEUCC

Mind (2014) *Students and MIND* [online] Available from <http://mind.org.uk/get-involved/students/> [15.03.17]

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