Wellbeing in FURTHER EDUCATION
It is becoming increasingly popular to talk about the teaching of happiness, wellbeing or “positive psychology”. Floods of businesses are asking how they can teach wellbeing to their employees. I am delighted to be writing the foreword to this project which represents a demonstration that further education is embracing wellbeing in both theory and practice, wrestling with the complexities of how to improve wellbeing in staff and students in increasingly difficult times.

Enormous strides have been made in the 20 years since Professor Martin Seligman of Pennsylvania University founded the “positive psychology” discipline. Hitherto, academic psychology had primarily been devoted to understanding the causes of mental illness and aberration: he stood psychology on its head and asked what are the the factors that lead to happy and successful lives. The research evidence is clear: children and adults can be taught emotional resilience, self-control (the lack of which leads to much mental illness), the habits of optimism, handling negative thoughts and much else besides. The young can also learn how to form positive relationships and avoid negative ones. Studies clearly show the young can be taught how to “run” their bodies optimally through proper relaxation, breathing, diet and exercise. Sceptics need to study the evidence. It is true that teaching psychological skills does take some classroom time. But schools and colleges are full of wasted time and conflict over priorities. Young people learn better and time is used more productively when they are calm and settled.

Mental illness, depression, acute anxiety and suicide are growing with increased affluence. The cosy belief with which we all grew up – that increased prosperity would lead to increased happiness – is a chimera. Depression and hyper-anxiety among the young at school, college and university (and among their teachers) have reached epidemic proportions.

This is madness. The skills of wellbeing should be taught because the evidence shows that they help young people to develop the resilience to cope with the inevitable difficulties they will face. At present, they go on to university and work often without even the rudiments of understanding of how to master their own minds, emotions and bodies. It is not only about avoiding stress. Teaching these psychological skills allows all to enhance their appreciation and enjoyment of life. The teaching of “mindfulness”, the ability to focus purely on what is before one, is just one of the skills. Research shows that happier people are less prone to physical and mental illness and have enhanced productivity. It makes economic as well as educational sense.

Ultimately, one must ask: what is the purpose of education and of government policy? Many would say it is the maximisation of exam and economic performance respectively. Ten years ago, the Gradgrind Theory – that nothing should get in the way of toil and sweat – was just about respectable. Now we know more. Psychologically healthy schools, colleges, universities and workplaces enhance academic performance and economic productivity. It is time for the detractors to catch up.

Sir Anthony Seldon
WHAT WE WANT TO ACHIEVE

The purpose of this project paper is primarily to promote further discussion in the further education sector to consider how we might better approach issues of wellbeing for our staff and students.

The paper aims to do a number of things:

i. to build the case as to why staff and student wellbeing is increasingly important to create resilient and well balanced individuals but also to create a balance in the FE debate which has become increasing focused solely on skills

ii. to highlight and share current practice in colleges across the Eastern Region and how they have improved wellbeing outcomes for staff and students

iii. to provide a self-assessment tool for wellbeing. The tool is designed to be simply a beginning point for discussion within colleges. Aligned to and informed by the Public Health England “Workplace Wellbeing Charter”, it considers the current arrangements and activity for leadership teams, HR practitioners, teachers and students

iv. to make recommendations on the topic of wellbeing to key stakeholders. The group in region acknowledges that our discussions were only a starting position. Our recommendations can be considered ‘asks’ of government, the FE sector leadership, and colleges for future development

v. to signpost key research and resources for colleges to use in their wellbeing journey

A group of colleges in the eastern region, supported by ACER came together with a common concern and through conversation, shared values and best practice, we began to establish a shared purpose. We quickly realised that, despite some excellent practice, the area of wellbeing in further education lacks a coherent narrative, proper research and common strategies for improvement. This is an area of work that has great current and future importance and in which the sector needs to place significant future resource, ‘head space’ and energy.

We hope you find this a helpful beginning.

ACER Wellbeing Group

“I n order to carry a positive action we must develop here a positive vision.”

Dalai Lama
The latest update of the World Happiness Report, released in March 2016, highlights the importance of wellbeing for student performance so we should be even more determined to put happiness at the heart of student activities at college.

Research shows that levels of engagement are directly affected by wellbeing – not just at work but in every aspect of life. I believe that leaders at schools and colleges have a role to play in championing wellbeing.

But it has prompted me to question: why isn’t there a more concerted, government-led focus? A relentless focus on skills and qualifications is, of course, important. But so is supporting people to live grounded, thriving lives. After all, ask an employer what qualities they look for in recruits and the discussion, although often beginning with a technical description, will quickly move on to teamwork, honesty, enthusiasm, social skills, taking responsibility and leadership potential. Ask someone what it is to be a good friend or neighbour, and they will give you a similar list.

We need to question how we, as educators, can improve the skills of good citizenship in young people. I would argue that the structure of most academic courses, assessments and progression (to university or work) is too one-dimensional and linear to cope with the complexities of being human. Standard academic years, the length of the college day and how learning is structured all have an impact on wellbeing and student success.

**Take a seat at the happy cafe**

During my first year as Principal at my college, I partnered with Action for Happiness, harnessing the organisation’s research and tools – including its 10 keys to happier living, which are now incorporated into our tutorial program. We also set up a “happy cafe”, encouraging students to socialize outside their classrooms. This link-up is the first of its kind, and it’s just one example of us helping students to take positive action to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Never has our integrated approach to wellbeing been more important: according to the non-profit Young Minds, in an average classroom, three students will have a diagnosed mental illness, and many more will be battling conditions for which they have not sought help.

**Social cohesion**

Colleges play a central role in social cohesion. Our interaction and close involvement with students, families, minority groups and businesses means that we are ideally placed to actively improve well-being in the local area. For some students, college can be a lifeline, not just in terms of improving their work prospects and boosting technical and professional skills, but also by helping them to develop as a whole person. We provide emotional and practical support, set goals, and raise hopes and aspirations. The college is a community, and we must nurture and invest in that.
The purpose of further education: skills or education?

We might begin with three seemingly unrelated, yet important, research facts. Firstly, English children are once again unsatisfactorily near the bottom of the childhood happiness leagues (a woeful 13th out of 16 countries). Secondly, a recent report for Social Market Foundation further reinforces what we all know about educational inequality. Of those pupils who are in receipt of free school meals, only 40% of them are likely to achieve five A*-C's. This compares to the 70% of the rest. Michael Gove, when education minister, in 2012 said “More than almost any developed nation, ours is a country in which your parentage dictates your progress”. Finally, a recent Sutton Trust report tells us that adults who are assertive, talkative and enthusiastic are 25% more likely to earn over £40,000 per year.

There is no single ‘silver bullet’ to address all these issues and significantly improve the educational, social and economic opportunities or outcomes for our young people. However, we can begin to have a more meaningful debate about the purpose of further education and whether we are prepared to invest in it and how as a nation we value in this resource. To invest resource is a conversation worth having. The improvement of social mobility, and implicitly, the reduction of inequality and substantially improving wellbeing surely should be a measure as to whether schools and further education is working?

It was back in 2011 when Professor Alison Wolf, in her famous report, highlighted that any good vocational education system needs to take into account the expected variety of job histories young people will experience. She also concluded that employment experience can make up for a lack of acquisition of formal academic success. Success in the job market, as we all know, goes way beyond qualifications or the demonstration of technical skills. Therefore, we need to question how we, as educators, improve the social skills and ‘non-academic skills’ in young people.

Qualifications are very important, as they are the portable currency of our current understanding of education; whether at GCSE level or degree study. But a better consideration might be asking the question – what do students actually need? As educators it is arguably our moral responsibility to solve the answer to that question first. The role of a qualification will only be a narrow and single dimension for success; so what else?
More than skills factories

This is primarily an educational leadership challenge. Permit us to begin with the assumption that as leaders we are only present to influence outcomes. We must take responsibility for both what our college does and also how we do it. The former needs to answer the question what do young people need to provide the solid foundation for life (which is for individual, social and economic success)? The latter challenges us to explore both pedagogy and a values led, ethical framework in which the institution (and people) operates.

Challenging the ability to deliver academic success alongside the development of a student’s character and wellbeing are thus intrinsically linked. They are not, as suggested by OFSTED, funding bodies or examination bodies, mutually exclusive; to be bolted on as an afterthought or a ‘nice to have’. The development of character and values must sit next to, and interact with, the technical or academic training.

Current obsession, expressed by some local authorities, local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and government departments is one exclusively, and sadly, of economic impact. They talk endlessly of skills gaps in strategies, dangers of unemployment (rarely under-employment) and the ‘necessity’ of growth (economic not human). Some of the answer, rightly, to close the productivity gap is development of skills. It is telling that colleges have until the latest government changes, been controlled under the watchful eye of the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and not Department for Education. There is an inductive leap in policy that runs if we have skills shortages then we must only have skills training, which is dictated exclusively by labour market information and employer led organisations. This is a sound argument if the sole purpose of education is providing a compliant, well drilled and competent workforce to only support industrial aspirations. But if we wish all our citizens to be happy and flourishing, if we desire lower crime rates, better social cohesion, increased social mobility, richer arts and cultural contributions, improved fitness and physical wellbeing, better mental health outcomes, then we must set aspirations higher and broader.

To achieve the first set of aspirations could be seen as to only require a “skills factory”, industrial input/output model. The second requires meaningful engagements within the challenge of developing character and wellbeing. Helping people live smarter and more grounded lives. To build foundations of strong mental resilience. To better understand our strengths as much as understand our weaknesses. This must exist in values led institutions focused on education not just skills.

Developing character

One of the things that a truly excellent school or college does is teach the development of character. The teaching of character can be taught as curriculum or through the curriculum. Whichever approach is taken it is vital that we support young and older students alike to explore and develop character.

Character can be expressed as the sum of the mental and moral qualities that are distinctive to an individual. Character traits are defining for an individual but can be positive or negative to the individual or others around them. Often people talk about others by saying they are of ‘good character’. I am sure that we all want to be described in this way, I know I do! So given this, what do we mean by ‘good’ character? As the principal of a college, my own view is, we are thinking about someone who is definitely not perfect but demonstrates certain qualities that are admirable; that we can look up to. They are qualities that we would often like for ourselves. We want to be around people who act with ‘good character’. Things such as self-control, the ability to bounce back when things get tough, (commonly referred to as resilience), being optimistic, being grateful and the ability to ‘stay the course’. They are the students and staff who are fully engaged in college and school life, people who know when to seek help, look beyond their “remits” for the benefit of others and make effort to connect to our community. These qualities, when combined with academic and technical skills development, can become very powerful indeed. Colleges play a huge role with our students to help bring out these qualities. It is our challenge, ultimately, as educators, to teach more than just skills and knowledge.

8. Building the case for good wellbeing
We need to teach, or at least help develop, character. I would argue that we should value these aspects of education as much as the “technical” skills we teach. Why? These aspects are the ones that ultimately will help us become happy, flourishing human beings. If we demonstrate and develop positive character traits - we will have better relationships, be more optimistic in life, and be able to ride out the bumps in the road. Overall - our wellbeing will flourish. Not only will our wellbeing improve but the research tells us that our chances of higher wage earnings and career success are enhanced too. This begins to feel like an obvious and essential step.

So can character be developed or are we just born with it? Well, the research provides us with an optimistic view. Around 50% of our character is given to us by nature. Some people are simply born to be more optimistic than others, for example. But the other 50% is entirely up to us to choose. A person’s character, therefore, can be considered as a reflection of their choices. It is led by the decisions that they make. This conduct, the setting and showing our own personal standards, is the best proof of character. We must at this point be careful - character must be authentic and not forced. You cannot pretend to be committed or kind for long before the cracks begin to show. We shouldn’t expect everyone will display leadership in the same manner or will take the same path to showing kindness and compassion. All of us must work these elements out for ourselves.

Teaching character development is difficult

The innovative wellbeing programme at our college engages many activities that support this development. This combined with good, strong teaching by experienced role models that live the values of our college, helps makes this happen. People often talk about the ‘University of Life’. This paradoxically is both a clumsy yet helpful expression. What I think they often really mean is the need for people to grow through learning by experience and not all those experiences need to be based around academic learning in a classroom or even be positive experiences. Demonstrating resilience through tough times will certainly help students grow. Perhaps ‘the school of hard knocks’ if encompassed within the scaffold of a safe college environment has much to offer.

One of the key learning points of life is that there are no short cuts. Just hard work and commitment. This is considered uncomfortable or untrendy in a world of the ‘life hack’ to retain a firm focus on what is important is difficult these days in the modern 24/7 media, mobile phones, and other “weapons of mass distraction”! Never before has it been so difficult for a generation. I am very proud of every one of my students who ‘stays the course’ and is successful. They are demonstrating the grit and determination that they will need throughout life.

William Channing wrote “the great hope of society is in individual character”. I believe that the character developed in schools and colleges impacts hugely on our wider society. Yes, technical skills are important to gain a job and successful career but let us not overlook becoming of good character, which will help us far more to be successful in our communities as neighbours, brothers, sisters, parents, co-workers and community leaders.

In terms of wellbeing, colleges could and should help learners develop their self-awareness, and understand preventative strategies to genuinely, and with confidence, deal with the ups and downs of real life. Human beings are complex and we must be proficient engineers to make running repairs throughout our lives in physical and psychological wellbeing. It could be argued this does not come easily. It requires support, good teaching and sophisticated learning. The cost of doing this early on might mean an increase in overall cost of education but the long term benefits should be obvious. Thus a broad education is a social investment. The question begins to emerge ‘what are we willing to pay for?’ and ‘how can we more sensibly measure best public value?’

Happy balance

So I believe if we spend more time focusing on the broader aspects of an education then academic success and technical proficiency will follow. As will positive career outcomes. At my College we talk about three key things being important: firstly, that students leave with the skills and qualifications they need, secondly, they leave with a secured and supported progression, thirdly, that through their time at College we develop their character, resilience and overall wellbeing.

We must want our young people to be higher in the happiness tables, achieve better academically, (based on their potential and not where they are born), and enjoy economic prosperity in meaningful and varied lifelong work. To do this, for me, the answer is simple – let’s bring back a balance between skills and education in our colleges, and let us ensure that sufficient reward is provided for these more positive social aspirations.
Happy staffing

Building the case for people working in the FE sector being under increased and unsustainable pressure is not a difficult thing to do.

According to the HSE, stress cost the economy nearly ten million working days last year; 43% of all sick days are attributed to stress. Last year University and College Union (UCU) found nine out of ten members thought their jobs were stressful. The biggest rise in stress levels were linked to change and ‘change fatigue’. They discovered higher levels of presenteeism and poor levels of work-life balance.

Currently in colleges, through Area Based Review and sectorial change, we have to acknowledge that there are high levels of pressure and insecurity propagated by current and unknown future change. In my view it is because of situations like these that now is the time to redouble our efforts for staff wellbeing, enabling honest conversations about what is possible, realistic and even desirable, to supporting colleagues within a values based framework.

So what is staff wellbeing?

Overall, it’s about a sustainable condition that allows individuals to thrive and develop. A combination of feeling good and functioning well. This may link to positive emotions like happiness but also sense of purpose, positive relationships and developing our own potential, and having some control over our own lives. To obtain wellbeing requires us to not be simply passengers on our own life journey (including work) but to proactively influence outcomes.

Developing a coherent ‘prescription’ for how we can improve conditions for our teams, and with our teams, becomes more challenging. Similarly how we practically and, in some respects, philosophically approach who is still responsible for improving wellbeing in the workplace is worthy of debate. Does this rest with a paternalistic institution or is it the individual that should use opportunities to help themselves? The answer is clearly both.

There is a growing recognition that it makes sense for the sector to influence, positively, our staff wellbeing. The argument sits easily for three reasons. Firstly, there is much evidence to suggest that happy staff are more productive and less susceptible to absence. This in times where outcomes are paramount and money tight there is a case for greater organisation effectiveness and efficiency. Secondly, and more importantly, there is a moral case to be answered. I argue that improving student wellbeing must be an educational policy objective. It stands to reason therefore as caring, values driven organisations that colleges must wish our staff to be fulfilled; not just at work but in their wider lives. There is an employer duty of care protected in law but what needs to happen should go beyond statutory duty and extend to improving the life conditions of staff working in the FE sector we should ‘care’. In addition, improved staff wellbeing will inevitably lead to better staff recruitment and retention and it is easy to project this leading to improved success for students. At this juncture we must, however, face a reality of life working in FE in the 21st century. It is difficult as it contains significant pressure for periods of time, and it is not likely to change in the immediate future (due to mainly well-rehearsed funding arguments).

As Vanessa King, author of recently published ‘10 Keys to Happier Living’ and someone who has been working with our college says “being happier is not about trying to experience pleasure all the time or avoiding unpleasant emotions. It’s about being realistic and making the most of its good times and finding ways to bounce back when things get hard.” Accepting this as a starting point leads us to ask two important questions within this context: 1. What can the college do to improve staff wellbeing? 2. How can individuals proactively seek to improve and take responsibility for their own wellbeing?

It’s a stress thing

Whilst wellbeing is a broad area of study, it is worth thinking about stress. The work of psychologists such as Gail Kinman have found that both ‘perceptions’ of stress and the ‘fact’ of stress have grown markedly. Demands have increased, relationships have deteriorated and the ability to embrace change has reduced. In one study 80% of academics reported their work as ‘very stressful’.

Stress is an all-purpose response the body has to demands placed upon it. Often we talk about ‘stress’ rather than ‘distress’ and fail to recognise what endocrinologist Hans Seryle described as ‘eustress’ or good stress. Both eustress and distress are essentially the same thing but find themselves at opposite ends of the same curve. Every teacher knows that a ‘dollop’ of good stress can be motivating, alleviate boredom and combat under stimulation. Good teaching contains an element of being out of the ‘comfort zone’. ‘Good work’ does exactly the same thing. The key issues are the volumes of the stress and the amount of continued time we are under stress for.
The third element, which may be a silver bullet, is our own ‘thinking’ response as individuals. The mind is as powerful an ally as it can be an enemy; we can think our way into, and out of, some situations. To become resilient we don’t have to be clinical positive psychologists to benefit from the techniques found in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) or utilise the research. Charney in 2007 considered ‘the resilience prescription’. He identified a range of useful techniques to improve and strengthen our resilience as individuals. These ranged from having a strong sense of purpose i.e. our moral compass to having position role models. From recognising our strengths to developing cognitive flexibility and learning to reframe. One magic ‘bullet’ identified was looking after our own physical condition. What strikes me is many of these techniques are low or no cost to individuals or colleges. Proactivity by individuals and good leadership have a role to play.

What can colleges do to support staff wellbeing?

Research is aligned on this subject and broadly rests in six areas of influence.

Staff are at their best when:

1. they are well informed and have the resources they need
2. have balanced workloads
3. have a strong sense of individual purpose and clear yet challenging goals
4. that individuals experience well managed change
5. that they hold some control and influence how work is done
6. there are supportive work relationships in their teams

Colleges may not be able to get this right overnight but it seems sensible that this framework is utilised to kick start a discussion. At my college we have taken steps to provide better mental health support, resilience and wellbeing training, free access to new gym facilities and introducing more family friendly policies. We are looking hard at how we support people to be responsible and accountable for their results but doing this in ways that colleagues don’t feel threatened by a culture of constant evaluation; such as a more holistic view of judging the effectiveness of teaching and learning. There is more to do to better understand, and differentiate between, the challenge pressures in the college (which can provide positive stretch and positive outcomes) and the hindrance pressures (which can bring distress and strain).

One area that needs significantly more work and research in FE is the role of leaders and the link to stress and wellbeing. How can we reduce anxiety or unhappiness in leaders and also encourage them to set examples and lead from an authentic place, recognising the critical importance of wellbeing in their teams? Personally as an experienced leader in FE, I have derived huge personal development and balance from a better understanding of happiness, positive psychology and resilience. I first encountered the research around a decade ago through being a leadership coach but also as a manager in FE too far along the ‘burn out continuum’ for my own welfare. Becoming both engaged and responsible for my own wellbeing at work has been transformational.

For FE it is time for a call to action for colleges and individuals to proactively engage in the wellbeing debate. There is opportunity to take new science and combine it with old wisdom to create a sector workplace which is kinder, more effective and ultimately happier.

Stuart Rimmer,  
CEO Great Yarmouth College & Chair of ACER Wellbeing Group
In the past three years colleges have reported a very large increase in students experiencing a wide range of mental health difficulties. In response to this in 2015 AoC carried out a survey on mental health which was responded to by 127 general further education and sixth form colleges. Results showed that:

- 66% said numbers had ‘significantly increased’ in past 3 years with a further 22% saying they had increased
- 75% felt there were ‘significant numbers’ of students who had undeclared mental health difficulties
- 43% had no full time counsellor or support worker and 55% said they had experienced cutbacks in this area

Discussions with college staff showed the importance of colleges having close relationships with the various health services. However, many colleges reported real difficulties with referring students on to health services at times of crisis with 61% reporting their relationship with local mental health services as only ‘fair’ or ‘not very good/non-existent’. It is also clear that good and holistic practice occurs when college staff are able to work in collaboration with other agencies, for example some colleges have a member of staff funded by Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or by Public Health England where others have a nurse employed by NHS or links with a mental health voluntary organisation. This type of joint provision not only enhances the support which can be provided for particularly vulnerable students but has a spin off effect across the organisation as a whole. However, survey results showed that only 26% of colleges had this type of joint provision and further work has revealed that health support for people with mental health difficulties is far from straightforward with different organisations providing different services and with many regional and local variations.

Colleges are clearly doing what they can to promote wellbeing amongst their students with 52% providing health and wellbeing sessions for all students and 40% for some students. This type of work is clearly essential but is also work which is particularly vulnerable in a time of cutbacks as well as being under threat with increasing Government emphasis on academic results as the key measure of success both for students and for institutions.

At a national level there is increasing political and media attention being paid to young people’s mental health. However this attention is often focused on either schools or universities with little mention of further education colleges despite the fact that further education colleges educate far more 16-18 year olds than schools. To try to raise awareness of this gap AoC has convened a new mental health group with representatives from Department for Education, Department of Health, NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups, National Union of Students, National Association for Managers of Student Services, Sixth Form College Association, college and sixth form principals and practitioners. This group has been successful in so far as it has raised the profile of further education with relevant government officials; AoC now has representation on the Department of Health Children and Young Peoples Stakeholder Forum and also the most recent DfE survey on mental health and character education includes colleges as well as schools. But we are aware that far more needs to be done at college level. Next steps include looking at how AoC might raise awareness of the crucial part colleges can play in supporting young people with mental health difficulties by providing targeted information to health providers, and also by encouraging initiatives at a regional level. The North West has already established local mental health further education groups and welcomes the new ACER group that is addressing the broader wellbeing concerns in this document. We have also started an AoC mental health blog and welcome further insights, initiatives and ideas from all our members.
‘Education Policy Institute mental health discussion

The AoC, jointly with NUS, hosted a student-led roundtable discussion on mental health within colleges, supporting the work of the Education Policy Institute (formerly known as Centreforum) in the development of a new report on children and young people’s mental health. Students from a range of colleges across the country came to share their experiences of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), discussing topics including the transition between school and college and accessing mental health services and the accessibility of information.

Led by Emily Frith, the Director of Mental Health at the Institute and a former special advisor to Nick Clegg MP, the second report is being developed as part of their commission on children and young people’s mental health. The scope of the report looks at the range and quality of mental health provision for young people.

Liz Maudslay, SEND Policy Manager
Association of Colleges

“If you want to be happy, be.”
Leo Tolstoy
CREATING A WELLBEING CULTURE ON CAMPUS; A VIEW FROM MIND

With 1 in 4 of us experiencing mental health problems at any one time, and 1 in 8 students experiencing suicidal feelings at university (Mind website 2016) there is growing recognition that mental wellbeing is a pressing issue that needs to be addressed at FE/HE institutions. However a key obstacle to seeking help is the stigma surrounding these issues.

Organisational cultural change can help, to tackle this, when wellbeing values are openly adopted by all individuals on our campuses – and that includes teaching and administrative staff at every level.

At Norwich Mind we have identified 7 key principles for creating workplace wellbeing:

1. Prevention is better than cure. We should invest to maintain and improve personal mental health resilience; not just when there is a problem.

2. We should focus on keeping people at work by making often simple workplace adjustments so individuals are better supported. Long periods of sickness absence erode confidence, heighten isolation and are costly for the organisation.

3. Any investment should contribute to a workplace culture of greater acceptability, awareness and value of mental health issues. Recognition that these experiences are universal - and in fact a positive attribute showing resilience and tenacity- creates opportunities to open up otherwise tricky conversations for those at risk.

4. Managers are the gatekeepers to good employee Mental Health. Effective training and coaching in basic management skills and mental health awareness are essential to spotting the signs early and handling more complex issues.

5. Get buy-in from your most senior staff and ask them to model openness about their own mental health.

6. Initiatives with a universal appeal will have the greatest impact - networks for peer supporters, Wellbeing Champions (those trained in Mental Health First Aid) and Workplace Wellbeing Programmes create structure and reach and can be simple to implement.

7. Clear, consistent communication (organisationally via campaigns and individually between staff) will bring lasting change.

Ruth Taylor, Head of Community Partnerships Norwich and Central Norfolk Mind
“Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony.”

Mahatma Gandhi
16. Best practice case studies from Eastern region

**Idea for staff**

The College has an Employee Wellbeing Committee chaired by the Principal which meets on a termly basis to discuss areas of concern or to action plan. The staff survey has questions mapped which relate to the HSE Wellbeing questionnaire. The College has two training days each year. This has included communications and digital citizenship and have also been supplemented on occasion with a Wellbeing Fair or for the forthcoming day, a Financial Wellbeing Fair.

The College has trained the College Leadership Team in mental health wellbeing. Training has also been provided to some groups of staff in the area of mindfulness and resilience. A free telephone support service is available for all staff which is independent of the College. The College has negotiated a preferential rate for staff with a cashback for medical treatment scheme. The College uses the local health service IAP Wellbeing Service which provides support for staff living in Norfolk. This is a self-referral service which fast tracks staff through a series of wellbeing workshops run at the local hospital.

We have run several Health and Wellbeing sessions as part of our whole college training programme. Earlier this year, following discussions at an Employee Wellbeing Group meeting, we decided to run a session themed “Financial Health and Wellbeing”. This was to help people look at ways to make their pay go further.

We invited a variety of companies: banks, building societies, insurance companies and Healthshield. Other local organisations who got involved were the Library, Citizens Advice, Ramblers Association, Natural Therapy Centre and the NHS Stop Smoking Service. We also had retailers including the Book People, and Muntons Home Brew which was particularly popular – yes it can be cheaper to brew your own! Our own trade unions got involved and we had food demos provided by our catering team. Our sports development officer and environment officer were involved promoting low cost exercise, cycle to work and car share schemes.

Fantastic feedback from the staff teams means we will definitely run something similar again.

“Staff and student wellbeing is essential for the delivery of successful teaching and learning here at CWA. Promoting a culture where individuals take responsibility for their health but are supported by college initiatives is an important part of both good employment practice and the student journey”

- David Pomfret, CEO & Principal
Idea for staff

It’s always good to be told when you’ve done a great job. City College Norwich introduced the ‘Thanks’ system as a way to make someone’s day by saying ‘thanks’ when they have gone above and beyond to help others. As a result of being ‘thanked’ staff are subsequently entered into a monthly prize draw. The feel-good factor of receiving a ‘thanks’ has been highly praised and staff fully support and appreciate the scheme.

Idea for students

Last summer City College Norwich developed a programme, in partnership with MAP, to provide support to an identified group of 15 students who were struggling with their mental health. The students were concerned that the lack of routine and structure across the summer would cause a deterioration in their mental health or lead to them not returning to study in autumn and therefore becoming NEET (not in education, employment or training).

We ran a weekly club with a range of activities, from kayaking to emotional regulation workshops. Each week came with its own challenges but also successes. The group who did not know each other beforehand became firm friends over the summer and on returning to college have continued to support and look out for each other. All students who participated returned to education, 14 of the 15 to City College Norwich.
Idea for staff

With the busy academic year at an end, July gives staff across the college a chance to get together as one.

In previous years, the workforce has gone out and about with options including walks in the Peak District, West End theatre trips and cake decorating workshops.

The end of term in summer 2015 saw the event brought back in-house and renamed the staff wellbeing day. Organised by the college’s Staff Voice Forum, its ethos was to get staff active and/or to learn a new skill. Staff therefore could choose between activities as diverse as salsa dancing, drumming, croquet/knitting and learning how to research genealogy. There was even a hotly-contested departmental five-a-side tournament. To round the event off, a picnic lunch was served, giving everyone the chance to enjoy platters of sandwiches, fresh fruit and vegetables, and other healthy snacks.

Idea for students

A new wellbeing zone was created for the 2015-16 academic year, looked after by two student development advisers.

One works with and mentors young carers and those who are homeless or living independently; the other supports and offers counselling to students who have a range of mental health issues, from anxiety and panic attacks to depression and personality disorder.

The two groups of students, who number around 100 each, have access to a number of facilities in a quiet wing at the front of the main college building, accessible from both the main atrium and café area. These include a safe room where they can play with toys and games, use a computer in peace or just sit on a beanbag and relax in tranquil surroundings.

Down the corridor is a small quiet room and a separate toilet for students with disabilities and conditions such as OCD to use.

“In recent years we have noticed that it is no longer sufficient to ensure that the college is safe and aesthetically pleasing, that the community is harmonious, diverse and vibrant and that working relationships are well defined in a culture of shared values, clarity of expectation, recognition and reward.

It is clear that there are a significant and perhaps increasing number of individuals, both students and staff, who struggle to find peace and happiness, even within such an environment, and so it has become important to provide a broad range of support networks and activities that are designed to enable students and staff to be happy, productive and successful.”

- Chris Nicholls, Principal
Idea for staff

Increasing pressure at home and at work, higher than recommenced alcohol consumption, not getting enough sleep, poor diet and increasing levels of obesity – these are just some of the factors that we are told characterise modern 21st century living for some. Whilst we might not be able to change the nature of the world we live in, we can at least try to combat the pressures of modern living by making more time for ourselves. Indeed, experts say that if we neglect ourselves, we are unlikely to find happiness.

One initiative to improve wellbeing at Chelmsford College was to start a staff ‘Boot Camp’, led by former Royal Navy fitness instructor Jamie Jones. Jamie says: “Although people join to improve their physical health or levels of fitness, taking part in structured exercise also has huge psychological rewards; the endorphins released make you feel good, and the sense of achievement helps to improve confidence, energy levels and resilience”. When asked what might put people off taking more exercise, Jamie puts it down to confidence. “Some people are a little worried at first that they might not be able to take part, or they are a little self-conscious; but as we tailor the programme for each individual, concerns soon disappear as people see the benefits”.

This is echoed by member of staff Natalie Masson: “I’ve noticed a big difference since taking part in Boot Camp. Not only do I feel fitter, but I have more energy, don’t feel so tired and have more confidence. I’m doing a 5k run tonight, something I’d never have done before taking part in Boot Camp”.

So whereas you might think taking more exercise is only connected with improving your physical health, there are so many more potential benefits. Taking part in “Boot Camp” can provide a sense of achievement and progress; an improving self-image; as people feel good about themselves they want to carry this on into other aspects of their lives. Feeling good about ourselves encourages us to look after ourselves more, to watch our diet, get more sleep, even improve our relationships with others. We want to live life more to the full.

So if you want to be healthier... and happier, make time for yourself and get those boots on!

“If exercise was a pill, it would be one of the most cost effective drugs ever invented.”

- Dr Nick Cavill
Idea for staff

In February 2015 we undertook our first Staff Survey and whilst the results were on the whole very positive, key messages from the survey were that staff were unable to complete their work within contracted hours, there were insufficient people to do the job and work/life balance was not always achieved.

With this information in mind, our intention has been to demonstrate our commitment to our health and wellbeing agenda by:

• Providing outlets for regular health activities
• Encouraging and promoting healthy eating
• Providing access to a range of benefits
• Providing access to a range of health related initiatives
• Continuing to offer a range of flexible work options to assist staff in work life balance
• Supporting staff that are increasingly faced with supporting an increasing number of students who have mental health issues
• Recognising that staff are working in an increasingly stressful environment at work taking appropriate action were necessary

The initiative started with a two day Taster Event in February 2015 to promote the main launch of the initiative on 2nd July 2015. A cross college working party was formed to engage staff in designing a programme of events and to assist with promotion. We worked with a number of external delivery partners including: NHS, Harlow Leisurezone, Heart Radio, Heart Radio and Mindfullness.

450 staff engaged in the Wellbeing Day choosing from a menu of approximately 35 activities including swimming, healthy eating demonstrations, wall climbing, tips for personal protection, skin bar beauty, back care and posture etc.

Since the Wellbeing day we have achieved a 15% growth in employees engaged regularly in physical activity within the College and more in their outside lives. The college was also awarded Essex Active Workplace of the Year 2015 as a result of this initiative.

“As a business, we strongly believe in investing in our staff to ensure that they remain happy and healthy within the workplace. We want to ensure that we are doing our best where our staff are concerned, we want to retain their services to help us deliver our corporate objectives and make the college a successful business.

Therefore we have sought to demonstrate the value we place on our staff by trying to create an environment that promotes a state of contentment, allows our employees to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and the College.

In summary our objectives are:
• To become an employer of choice
• Improve staff wellbeing, health and engagement of staff
• Improve staff retention and efficiency”

- Karen Spencer, Principal

HARLOW COLLEGE

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“Even though people spend more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else, people underestimate how work influences their overall wellbeing and daily experience.”

Tom Rath
As Stephen R Covey said “Always treat your employees exactly as you want them to treat your best customers” rightly therefore, we are committed to looking after our staffs’ wellbeing, particularly if we want to see our students’ improve.

This year we have rolled out counselling initiatives as well as a host of after-work activities at our new Sport and Wellbeing Centre – free to staff and students. We have included wellbeing targets in the staff appraisal process and we are also developing off-site initiatives in conjunction with partners.

Our college Chaplain organised a staff retreat day in support of our “Happy Balance” programme in June 2016 that proved so popular we are keen to repeat it. The retreat day is an opportunity to take time to reflect, refresh from daily life and is something which many individuals in various fields appreciate when undertaking jobs which require a lot of focus and energy. The staff that attended In June found it hugely beneficial, pausing to take time for “the present” and to be more mindful and self-aware; techniques that they have brought back to college and are trying to practice and pass on to others.

Other staff wellbeing activities being explored include team building and activity days with partner organisations as well as a drive to simply ensure we all take time out for social and personal development and reflection activities.

All staff are leaders and coaches in various aspects of their lives and there is a vital role for values, being in touch with our emotional states, finding space to reflect and acting with mindfulness. The space this creates enables self-reflection, improves our sense of wellbeing and gives us time to assist others with theirs. As an employer committed to these values we have signed up to the Charter for Employers who are Positive About Mental Health. http://www.mindfulemployer.net/charter/

“Research shows that levels of engagement are directly affected by wellbeing – not just at work but in every aspect of life. Get the balance right and staff and student engagement at work (whether it be in employment or study) will improve and you will see individual, team and organisational performance at its optimum.”

- Stuart Rimmer, Principal
Idea for students

With the introduction of our Happy Balance initiative and our partnership with Action for Happiness we have seen students transformed by their experience of the new and varied wellbeing programme.

Students complete an Action Plan for Happiness each year that encourages them to reflect on all aspects of their lives and identify positive actions that could improve each area. Through its tutorial programme, the college supports students in their quest for improved wellbeing and has developed a number of ‘tools’ to call upon as and when the need arises, such as counselling, exercise programmes and social groups. The college emphasises the importance of achieving a ‘happy balance’, clearly labelling activities around the campus and providing hints and tips in the form of leaflets, wall art, digital screens and social media.

Following their involvement in the programme, we have examples of students who couldn’t enter class on their own now conducting presentations; and we have students making time to take part in extra-curricular activities despite tough family demands and circumstances which has boosted their confidence and social skills, enabling them to engage fully in class, improve their productivity and go on to achieve their full potential.
We have developed a self-assessment tool as a starting point for assessing your college’s wellbeing. It is designed to promote discussion and identify areas for improvement.

It is aligned to and informed by the Public Health England “Workplace Wellbeing Charter” and considers the current arrangements and activities for leadership teams, HR practitioners, teachers and students. The assessment tool is available at

www.acer.ac.uk/resources/
“For everyone, wellbeing is a journey... the secret is committing to that journey and taking those first steps with hope and belief in yourself”

Deepak Chopra
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WELLBEING FOR THE GOVERNMENT

We ask of policy makers and government that:

• policy makers should make more frequent reference to, and consideration of wellbeing and social inequalities in defining outcomes for education and skills post 16; with sufficient balance being introduced to policy to counter an over focus on economic outcomes.

• in FE we see a growing number of students arriving with existing mental health problems (both diagnosed and undiagnosed). A focus and resources to support prevention at an early age rather than a crisis management approach would support this.

• sufficient funding is provided with strong programmes to ensure there is resource to adequately teach wellbeing and build resilience and capacity in our young people. Further investment in mental health support for young people is needed in order to provide intervention at point of need rather than at point of crisis, this will have a longer term payback in economic and societal terms.

• change the message of PE in primary and secondary schools, and support sport in FE by focussing on exercise as a positive experience for feeling healthy and happy. Currently the focus is on competing and does not deliver a message to students that being active feels good. In FE we see students who focus on body image or who struggle to communicate and make friends, where physical activity could support and build team work, self-esteem and resilience.

• children living in poor housing have increased chances of experiencing stress, anxiety and depression. According to the NHS Mental Health Taskforce Feb 2016, one in ten children aged 5-16 have a diagnosable problem linked to behaviour and mental health. A focus on sustainable housing and support for post 16 housing issues would support a positive change.

• policy makers should, with the FE sector and colleges, take an evidence-based approach to investing in research for post 16 wellbeing, to better define issues and ensure solutions are appropriate.
“Wellbeing is attained by little and little, and nevertheless is no little thing itself.”

Citium Zeno
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING WELLBEING FOR THE FE SECTOR, COLLEGES AND TEACHERS

- Ensure that wellbeing and the whole person approach is embedded within each part of teacher training. New teachers need to be fully aware that their main subject interest is only a part of the role of teaching and that the skills of coaching and facilitation are key to helping each student to manage their own lives in a positive way.

- Information on positive health and wellbeing needs to be much more prevalent – information on diet, exercise, relationships, excess, relaxation, etc., to allow students to grow in autonomy and self-possession.

- Combine careers and enterprise education with wellbeing to promote the link to overall individual happiness. Understanding the positive link between work and wellbeing impact in terms of economic resources, psycho-social needs and individual identity and the poor health, particularly mental health that can be associated with worklessness.

- All colleges should provide core tutorials for students in resilience, emotional well-being and mental health literacy.

- More counselling needs to be made available as a matter of the highest priority. Students should not be waiting long periods of time to see a counsellor.

- The mental health of all staff needs to be included in the college strategy. Staff need to be much better informed about their own mental health and how to look after it, as well as their role-modelling and responsibility to students. Sufficient resource needs to be put into training alongside making institutional changes to ensure colleges are leading employers in the wellbeing arena.

- Staff need to be better informed about how to understand difficulties that they themselves might be experiencing, as well as identifying these problems in others.

- Colleges should have at least one Mental Health First Aider in addition to their first-aiders at work.

- Colleges should complete the Wellbeing Self-Assessment and utilise it as a planning tool to encourage internal debate and stimulate activity.
“Happiness is not something ready made. It comes from your own actions.”

Dalai Lama
USEFUL RESOURCES

Action for Happiness: http://www.actionforhappiness.org/
Interactive Happiness: http://happinessinteractive.com/
ChildLine: http://www.childline.org.uk/
YoungMinds: http://www.youngminds.org.uk/
Get Connected: http://www.getconnected.org.uk/
SupportLine: http://www.supportline.org.uk/
NSPCC: http://www.nspcc.org.uk/
AM I Normal: http://www.aminormal.channel4.com/
Mental Health Support: http://www.mentalhealthsupport.co.uk/
Samaritans: http://www.samaritans.org/
Mindful Employer: http://www.mindfulemployer.net/
Mind: http://www.mind.org.uk/
Headspace: https://www.headspace.com/
Oxford Mindfulness Centre: http://oxfordmindfulness.org/
TES articles: http://www.gyc.ac.uk/boost-happiness-results-sure-follow/
Minded: https://www.minded.org.uk/
MHFE: http://mhfe.org.uk/
Midlands Workplace Wellbeing: http://www.mwwellbeing.co.uk/
national-awareness-days/
• 10 Keys to Happier Living by Vanessa King
• A Good Childhood: Searching for Values in a Competitive Age by Richard Layard and Judy Dunn
• A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose by Eckhart Tolle
• A Primer in Positive Psychology by Christopher Peterson
• The Happy Manifesto: Make your Organization a Happy Workplace by Henry Stewart
• Doing the Right Thing: The Importance of Wellbeing in the Workplace by Theo Theobald and Cary L. Cooper
• Resilience: How to Cope When Everything around You Keeps Changing by Liggy Webb
• Mindfulness at Work: How to Avoid Stress, Achieve More, and Enjoy Life! by Stephen McKenzie
• How to be Mentally Healthy at Work by Chris Ames
• 50 Things You Can Do Today to Manage Stress at Work by Cary L. Cooper and Howard Kahn
• Mindset by Carol S. Dweck
• The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey
• Coaching for Resilience: A Practical Guide to Using Positive Psychology by Adrienne Green and John Humphrey

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