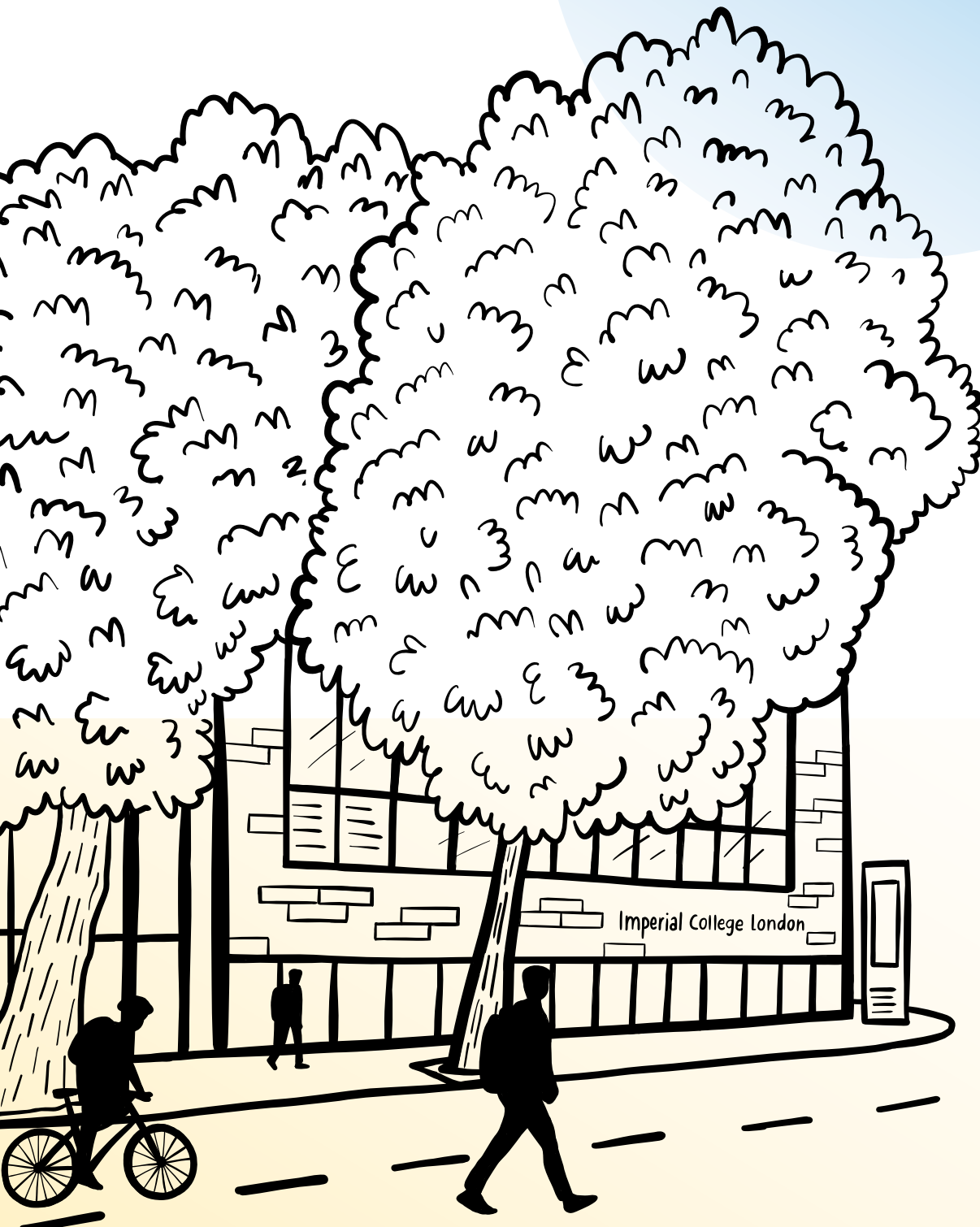


Imperial College
London

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy



June 2023

Introduction



Hugh Brady
President
Imperial College London

Mental health is everyone's business at Imperial. This new strategy sets out how we will ensure our students and staff get the support and advice they need, when they need it.

The rising tide of concern about mental health and wellbeing is widely recognised. These concerns are felt across the education sector, the workplace and throughout society. We are determined to address this head on.

This is a unified strategy for the whole of Imperial. At its heart is a belief that everyone at Imperial can get the right support when they need it.

Practically, it will guide all our future work in this area; provide a consistent approach for the years ahead; and ensure our efforts are joined-up and remain fit-for-purpose.

It deliberately focuses on both mental health and wellbeing, which are intrinsically linked. It is crucial we deliver support and advice across both. This includes how we boost people's wellbeing and support their resilience as well as how we provide mental health advice or services to those who need it. A key element of our strategy will be the effective signposting and transition of students and staff with mental health problems to the NHS, the primary provider of mental health services in the UK, as well as serving as a strong advocate for more investment in NHS mental health services.

This strategy builds on the wide range of high-quality work that already exists at Imperial. I have been impressed by the many dedicated and skilled individuals who provide important support and advice to our community, such as our mental health first aiders or student wellbeing advisers. As an institution, Imperial has already adopted the student trusted contacts opt-in policy and many other recommendations from the 2018 Suicide-Safer Universities Report, which I chaired, and the University Mental Health Charter. We take the issue of mental health and wellbeing seriously and continue our commitment to this inspiring work through this strategy.

What is important is that we now turn this strategy into a reality. I am pleased that work to implement this is already underway, including increasing investment in front-line services. I look forward to working with our entire community to develop this strategy and deliver against our commitments. Working together, we will ensure mental health and wellbeing remain central to Imperial's work.



Nathalie Podder
Deputy President (Welfare)
Imperial College Union

Six years ago, Nathalie was a purple-haired girl from the American suburbs; Aglaia was from a medium-sized town in Italy. Despite our apparent differences, our lives have been intertwined with similar experiences.

We were both high-performing and dreamed big – we had both excelled academically, and this formed a core part of our identities. For both of us, the transition to university was life-changing. Along with the excitement of a new stage of life came our first true encounters with mental ill health. Our illnesses became debilitating while everyone around us seemed to navigate their studies with relative ease. We fought our separate battles in isolation, questioning our identities and developing a new sense of purpose throughout our journey to recovery.

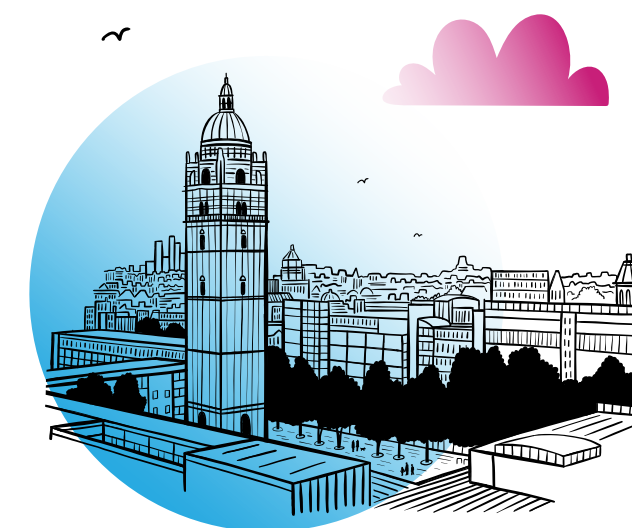
We are not alone in having this shared experience, and we want you to know that you aren't either. Today, we share one common goal: creating an environment at Imperial where every student can thrive and feel they belong.

Drawing from our personal stories, we believe that no student at university should be left to struggle on their own and that mental health should be everyone's business. As students, we know we must act now to adopt a shared and organised approach to mental health at university. We believe that well-being and excellence are not mutually exclusive and that good mental health is a long-term investment in good performance. As a world-leading STEMMB university, we want to draw on what makes us unique to improve students' experience and well-being. We want to use our scientific tools, expertise, and diverse community to create a space where we can all flourish no matter where we are on our journey. We want to create a new way of working that is healthier, more inclusive, and seeks to keep people well during their studies. We encourage everyone to talk about their mental health and join the conversation to collaborate on a whole-university approach to well-being, where good mental health is everyone's responsibility.

Let's create a healthier and more inclusive Imperial, together.



Aglaia Freccero
Mental Health Officer
Imperial College Union



Background

At Imperial, we prioritise the health and safety of our students and staff. We are committed to nurturing a culture of compassion and care in line with our Values.

We know that good mental health and wellbeing has a positive impact on the learning, work and lives of our students and staff. Through this Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy we are committed to developing a mentally healthy education environment and workplace.

This strategy will provide a unified approach across Imperial. We will provide support that is equitable and inclusive, as well as responsive to the needs of both staff and students. We will help our community develop resilience and continue to grow a culture that shows how seeking support is a sign of strength.

Imperial's world-changing excellence will only be strengthened by a culture of compassion and care. We aspire to be known as much for the quality of our achievements as for our supportive environment that enables students and staff to give their best.

Imperial, like other universities, needs to work in partnership with the NHS and others to provide appropriate support that addresses the increasing complexity and severity of mental health issues in society. We will always support the NHS to receive the resources it needs to fulfil its crucial role in providing specialist support.

Supporting students and staff

Many factors contribute to mental health and wellbeing issues within our community, for example: the Covid pandemic, financial pressures, and climate change.

A growing number of students are reaching out to seek support, with many encountering challenges both in their studies and their lives outside of university. We will support our students to get the help they need. We recognise we can help our students by further enhancing the student experience, encouraging them to be active participants in our community.

Imperial staff survey feedback also reveals that supporting mental health is a recurring and important theme for our staff. Increasing numbers have reported concerns about being able to manage their mental health effectively and some have reported increased levels of stress due to workload concerns. Helping staff to manage their workloads and identifying other ways in which we can support the mental health and wellbeing of our staff are major priorities for Imperial.

We aspire to be known as much for the quality of our achievements as for our supportive environment that enables students and staff to give their best.



Our vision and strategic goals

Our vision is for an inclusive, respectful and compassionate environment that supports our students and staff in their work and study.

Our **priorities** are to:

- build and maintain an inclusive, compassionate College community that enables everyone's voice and needs to be heard and respected
- build and maintain a supportive community where colleagues, supervisors and managers are knowledgeable and have the relevant training to promote mental wellness and prevent factors in the workplace that can trigger mental ill health
- promote a safe environment that boosts wellbeing, innovation, creativity, and productivity

Our Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy sets out how we will achieve our vision through nine **strategic goals**:

Leadership

There will be clear articulation by senior leadership that mental health and wellbeing are to be at the forefront of all areas of Imperial.

Belonging

We will continue to build and maintain a culture of compassion and care that enables students and staff to foster a sense of belonging and maintain their own wellbeing.

Collaboration

We will identify and signpost links to resources and pathways to improve the experience of those using our services and to provide students and staff with routes to support and training.

Prevention

We will take a proactive approach to support student and staff mental health and wellbeing, and seek to embed a culture that prioritises good mental health.

Early intervention

We will commit to working collaboratively to promote positive wellbeing and intervene where appropriate when mental health issues are made known to us.

Support

We commit to increase resourcing to promote the delivery of effective mental health and wellbeing support services for students and staff.

Education

We seek to educate in a way that is mindful of those struggling with mental health or wellbeing issues so that students still have the opportunity to demonstrate their attainment and are supported towards the best possible outcome.

Transitions

We will support and guide our students and staff as they enter, move within, and leave Imperial.

Evidence-driven

We commit to take an evidence-based approach to the design and evaluation of our mental health and wellbeing support.

Implementing our strategy

Each of our strategic goals are backed by a series of commitments, outlined through this document.

We will achieve these goals by generating a culture of shared understanding, diversity, and belonging; and build a community where everyone has a voice and can be heard.

We seek to foster a community that is proactive in its response to mental health and wellbeing, that facilitates speaking out about mental health and that ultimately creates an inclusive, respectful, and compassionate culture across the university.

In consultation with our community, we will develop an action plan that is proactive and focused on supporting mental wellness and resilience as well as addressing poor mental health. We will be informed by the latest research and will work together, collaborating with students and staff to formulate relevant and measurable actions.

Strategic goals

Leadership

There will be clear articulation by senior leadership that mental health and wellbeing are to be at the forefront for all areas of Imperial.

We will:

- ensure University Management Board members take overall responsibility for the proactive implementation of processes, resources and tools that support a mentally healthy university, acting as role models and advocates for the implementation and success of our strategy
- ensure that senior leaders in all departments are aware of the mental health and wellbeing work that is being carried out, and that they are involved in the review and development of mental health and wellbeing services
- set up a governance structure around mental health and wellbeing that allocates ownership for embedding and reporting on actions and their impact
- ensure all leaders are aware of any concerns about the workload of their staff and are supported to work with members of staff to ensure workloads are appropriate and manageable
- ensure managers and supervisors are properly resourced and trained to allow quality conversations on mental health and wellbeing issues and signpost to further support services

Belonging

We will continue to build and maintain a culture of compassion and care that encourages a sense of belonging and enables students and staff to maintain their own wellbeing.

We will:

- promote an environment where students and staff can freely raise questions and concerns
- recognise that our students and staff form a diverse community, with a range of lived experiences, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, abilities, sexual orientation, and gender identities. We will work towards removing barriers of access to any group in our community
- create more opportunities for student and staff peer support schemes and networks, with specific emphasis on areas that may currently be overlooked

Collaboration

We will identify and signpost links to resources and pathways to improve the experience of those using our services and provide students and staff with routes to support and training.

We will:

- strengthen our collaboration within internal services, promote existing resources across Imperial, work together on common initiatives and respond to the needs of our community
- develop and improve external partnerships with NHS primary mental health services, and other providers such as mental health charities, to further support our community and share best practice
- support the NHS to have the resources it needs to provide the specialist support that is beyond the capability of universities
- set up systems that enable us to manage cases in a clear and transparent way, while respecting and upholding confidentiality



Strategic goals (continued)

Prevention

We will take a proactive approach to support student and staff mental health and wellbeing, and seek to embed a culture that prioritises good mental health.

We will:

- encourage positive lifestyle choices for students and staff, providing advice around the benefits of looking after themselves, striving for a good study/work–life balance and managing their own wellbeing
- actively promote and give visibility to mental health role models across the College
- reduce the cultural stigma associated with mental ill health and encourage timely disclosure, as appropriate
- build a supportive community that is equipped to cope with change and adversity
- provide evidence-based guidance to our students and staff around the use of harmful substances and addictive behaviours (such as gambling and gaming), as well as advice about where relevant support can be found
- provide support for students who have experienced sexual trauma and continue to work to create a culture of consent through training and specialised reporting processes
- support those who experience unacceptable behaviours and strengthen our commitment to addressing all incidents of bullying and harassment
- commit to developing and implementing a suicide aware university strategy

Early intervention

We commit to working collaboratively to promote positive wellbeing and intervene where appropriate when mental health issues are made known to us.

We will:

- increase understanding of mental health and wellbeing across our community
- support students and staff to share experiences of mental health and create an open and supportive culture through joint campaigns and activities that promote a culture of mental wellness
- encourage social connection and integration, to tackle feelings of loneliness or isolation
- identify and reduce barriers for accessing and engaging with supportive resources available at the College
- seek to create services and resources that are designed to meet the particular needs of university students and staff
- recognise mental ill health as an occupational risk, in line with the Health and Safety Executive management standards for staff

Support

We commit to promoting the delivery of effective mental health and wellbeing support services for students and staff through increased resources.

We will:

- ensure the mental health and wellbeing needs of all student and staff groups are recognised and addressed appropriately
- raise awareness of the support already provided, while taking action to reduce stigma and normalise that it is okay to not be okay
- review the mental health and wellbeing support and its impact on a regular basis and adjust this support accordingly
- recognise that not everyone's experience of, and needs around, mental health will be the same and our support needs to be flexible to accommodate this diversity
- commit to providing culturally diverse and responsive support for students and staff of all backgrounds
- commit to providing specialised support for students and staff, for example those with neurodivergent needs, or time-appropriate trauma-informed psychological support

Education

We seek to educate in a way that is mindful of those struggling with mental health or wellbeing issues so that students still have the opportunity to demonstrate their attainment and are supported towards the best possible outcome.

We will:

- give students and staff the tools and language to enable them to talk to one another about their own wellbeing, encouraging an open dialogue and reducing stigma
- when designing and enhancing our courses, consider the overall distribution of workload associated with learning activities, assessment and feedback, and how students will be supported through key milestones and challenges
- review the insights provided by student analytics to enable early intervention and targeted support
- clearly signpost departmental and College-wide additional learner support and refine processes for learners with specific circumstances
- where possible, embed teaching about mental health and wellbeing into our programmes for students
- continue to provide opportunities and resources for staff with student-facing responsibilities to learn more about mental health and wellbeing, both with reference to supporting themselves and others
- commit to creating a culture of learning that, by default, supports our community's educational needs and journey

Transitions

We will support and guide our students and staff as they enter, move within, and leave Imperial.

We will:

- communicate with new students and new staff starters, sharing key information about what to expect and what support we offer, to enable a smooth induction into university and work life
- provide specifically targeted support with resources, advice and networks for groups of students who may find transitions particularly challenging
- support exiting students with clear information about what to expect once they leave university, and with external services to enable a smoother transition out of university support and into something different
- highlight support available to students and staff returning from time away from the College – such as interruption of studies, study abroad and parental leave
- increase the support given to students and staff at other key times (for example: transition into a new academic year, transition between terms, transition between levels of study, transition in and out of roles, transition from study to employment)

Evidence-driven

We commit to take an evidence-based approach to the design and evaluation of our mental health and wellbeing support.

We will:

- listen to our students and staff to understand their lived experiences and respond in an appropriate and supportive manner
- take an evidence-informed approach to design interventions and services
- embed regular evaluation of the support provided into our approach, using key performance indicators set out in the action plan to ensure it remains effective and relevant



Appendix

Definitions

Within this document we use the following terminology and definitions:

Mental health

“refers to a full spectrum of experience ranging from good mental health to mental illness.” (*Student Minds University Mental Health Charter*)

Wellbeing

“encompass a wider framework, of which mental health is an integral part, but which also includes physical, emotional and social wellbeing.” (*Student Minds University Mental Health Charter*)

Mental wellness

“is an internal resource that helps us think, feel, connect and function; it is an active process that helps us build resilience, grow and flourish.” (*Global Wellness Institute*)

Excellence

“We aim for quality in everything we do, taking pride in our work, delivering impact (making a positive difference) through our passion and commitment.” (*Imperial College London, College Values and Behaviours Framework*)

Achieving excellence

Excellence is one of our core College Values, aimed to guide our ways of working and our behaviours. While excellence can be a driving force for some, it can add pressure for our students and staff. We recognise that if left without a proper context, our driving value of excellence might lead to unhelpful behaviours and thoughts, such as competition and perfectionism. Imperial will support every individual in their personal journey towards achieving their goals, with the understanding that excellence will not be possible to achieve if we do not put the wellbeing of our students and staff at the centre of our priorities and values. We aspire to be known as much for the quality of our achievements as for our supportive environment that enables students and staff to give their best.



