

STUDENT-LED MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING STRATEGY 2023-2025





FOREWORD

Undertaking a University degree offers life-changing experiences that can be genuinely transformative.

At Bangor, we want all our students to be able to make the most of the opportunities available to them, to develop as individuals both within their chosen subject areas, and beyond. We want our students to find enrichment through the connections that they make and the skills that they learn. A positive approach to mental health and wellbeing is a key priority for Bangor because we know it enables our students to maximise the benefits of University life.

Like all universities, we are experiencing the challenges of a post-pandemic environment. Our current and future students will have experienced educational disruption, social isolation and unprecedented change. The unfamiliar territory we've all needed to navigate has changed the ways in which we interact, and despite the best efforts of schools, colleges and universities, it has inevitably undermined the opportunities for community connection. It's important now, more than ever, that we work together to understand the needs and experiences of our diverse student community as we pursue our university-wide, holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing.

Our students' voices have shaped and led the development of this strategy, and I'm delighted that this collaboration is firmly embedded within the implementation and evaluation of the strategy's objectives. This partnership working builds on a long history at Bangor of working together to empower and support student participation in our university and the wider community.

The University has set ambitious targets within our Strategy 2030: A Sustainable World for Future Generations. This Student-led Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy is an important contributor to many institutional priorities, not least of which is our commitment to an excellent student experience. Our institutional values of inclusivity, integrity, respect, sustainability and transformation are also clearly reflected within this strategy's themes.

Thank you to everyone who has provided input to shape this strategy and particularly to our student body whose input and voices will continue to shape our approach to student mental health and wellbeing here at Bangor University.



**Professor
Andrew Edwards**

Pro-Vice Chancellor

INTRODUCTION

Every student's experience of university is shaped by their mental health and wellbeing.

Together, Bangor University and Undeb Bangor are committed to an holistic approach to student mental health and wellbeing. We share a vision where students not only achieve their potential academically but also thrive as individuals, developing skills and behaviours to support their current and future wellbeing.

Mental health and wellbeing are understandably high on students' agendas. Every year it features amongst Sabbatical Officers' campaigns, and our students are passionate and eager to share their voices, experiences and ideas with the University on how to improve and develop support and resources.

Understanding students' lived experience is key to ensuring that this strategy is meaningful and effective. Opportunities for us to hear and understand these experiences are embedded within the strategy, and Undeb Bangor are an influential part of the strategy group that will take this forward. The innovation of the Students as Consultants project, initiated by Undeb Bangor, has created a genuinely student led model for consultation and co-production. Students are empowered to explore issues that matter to them and to their peers through facilitating meaningful discussions and feedback. We're excited to see how the Students as Consultants project can be developed, alongside other student voice initiatives, over the next few years to strengthen our shared strategy and work.

Working together has been an important part of the development of this second iteration of our strategy. It builds on the innovative work that created the original strategy in which both Undeb Bangor and the University were committed to ensuring students had meaningful opportunities to shape the strategy and have their priorities included. We're looking forward to continuing this partnership work so that students have shared ownership of this strategy and its development, as well as ongoing input into its implementation.

We know that everyone experiences mental health differently. Through our holistic approach we want to ensure that this strategy is inclusive, flexible and adaptive, taking a whole university approach to student mental health and wellbeing and recognising the diverse needs of all of our students. By responding to the changing needs of students, Bangor University will ensure that the student voice is embedded not only in this strategy, but also in its outcomes.

Nyah Lowe
President, Undeb Bangor

Elsie Pearce
VP Education, Undeb Bangor

Mair Rowlands
Director, Undeb Bangor

Gian Fazey-Koven
Head of Student Support & Wellbeing

A CHANGING CONTEXT

We are launching this refocused strategy within a post-pandemic context.

It's important to acknowledge that across our university we share experiences of disruption, uncertainty and disconnection. We share too the concern, expressed in institutional, local and national conversations, that Covid-19 will have a deep and ongoing impact on mental health and wellbeing, particularly on those whose education has been disrupted. The impact on young people has been significant, and our own students have identified social isolation and loneliness as having a major impact on their mental health and wellbeing. Our shared vision for this strategy has emerged from these experiences and reflects not only the work we need to do, but the optimism, drive and determination we share to do it. Despite the challenges of the last few years, we have found opportunities to innovate, develop new skills, and increase our capacity to adapt and change. We're bringing all of these lessons learnt into our continued commitment to responding to the priorities, needs and personal perspectives of our students.

In the spring of 2022 Undeb Bangor, working with Student Support & Wellbeing and funded by HEFCW, commissioned a piece of work to introduce a new and innovative approach to collecting and understanding the experiences and views of our students. The Students as Consultants project trained and empowered a diverse group of students to consult with their peers by collecting qualitative data from across the student body at Bangor. A complex picture emerged, and these findings, combined with input from pastoral and specialist professional staff, have bolstered and refocused this strategy. Students who led the consultations and who participated in

the project were universally positive, agreeing that they wanted more opportunities to participate and lead the conversation about mental health and wellbeing in this way.

The original strategy highlighted fundamental themes in which opportunities to further develop and improve can always be found. These encompassed: improving communications; encouraging wellbeing and healthy living; developing a sense of community; prioritising preventative work; ensuring the timely availability of support. These fundamental themes remain the foundation of our Student Led Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy and underpin our work to meet the challenges of the changing context of our post-pandemic experiences.

Student voice and the co-creation of this strategy is essential to understanding and reflecting the lived experience of our students. Our direction of travel is clear: we are committed to an holistic, student led approach that draws on our collaborative strengths to achieve a shared vision that supports positive mental health and wellbeing across our whole university community.



VISION

Our vision is to work together to deliver a post-pandemic University approach to students' mental health and wellbeing that is grounded in the lived experience of our students.

We want our students to be able to thrive academically and personally as part of a compassionate and supportive university community.

BUILDING BLOCKS

We are building on a strong foundation of collaboration, co-creation and dialogue between Undeb Bangor and the University, between staff and students.

Our existing pastoral system and support networks are a major strength, and there is a deep commitment to ensuring that mental health and wellbeing is threaded through all that we do. As a university community we are curious, interested in and open to the lived experiences of others.

We've drawn on national pieces of work as the building blocks for informing and shaping our approach. These have included UUK's Stepchange guidance, our own University Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-24 and UUK's Suicide Safer Universities (developed in collaboration with the charity Papyrus). In 2021 the University commissioned an independent

audit of our provision in light of the UUK's Stepchange Framework and the resulting recommendations have also fed into this strategy. Our work leading the Wales-wide myf. cymru project (which expands the provision of mental health provision through the medium of Welsh) has also informed our understanding.

We will continue to draw on best practice from across our sector, forming links with external providers and seeking to understand students' lived experience as we move forward to achieve our aims.



THEMES:

1.

COMMUNICATION THAT CONNECTS

2.

A POSITIVE APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

3.

OUR COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

4.

AN EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

5.

EASY TO ACCESS SUPPORT

THEME 1: COMMUNICATION THAT CONNECTS

We are committed to supporting and empowering students with timely, unambiguous and appropriate information on mental health and wellbeing resources and support.

We understand the value of using different ways to communicate key messages to students and the role this plays in encouraging students to proactively engage with their own mental health and wellbeing, particularly at key points in their academic journey.

Together with Undeb Bangor, we will foster opportunities for dialogue and feedback, working with our students to understand emerging mental health and wellbeing issues across the University. We want mental health information and signposting to be a golden thread within all that we do so that positive mental health behaviours are normalised in the daily life of our university community.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO OUR STUDENTS

Easy access to the right information and support is important to our students. Students have told us that they want more targeted information that encourages engagement, and they want to be able to communicate easily with the services that support them.



BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Our well-established, comprehensive pastoral support system is valued by students and staff; it's often one of the reasons students choose to study here. As part of our ongoing commitment to making our support as easy to access as possible, we are going to gather data to identify what works best for all our students.

TO MAKE THIS A REALITY WE WILL:

Ensure signposting to accessible support is effective throughout students' studies, particularly at known pinch points, transitions and periods of increased pressure and stress for students.

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Prioritise making information on **accessing support consistently easy to find and navigate.**

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Explore ways to diversify the means of disseminating information creatively and effectively across the University, raising awareness of the types of support available to students.

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Develop a single point of access, virtual and physical, for the different services within **Student Support & Wellbeing.**

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Extend our training programmes to further equip our staff with the right skills, knowledge and information to **signpost and refer effectively.**

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In partnership with Undeb Bangor, **expand our information gathering mechanisms to reach students who don't normally engage with support services** to better understand all students' current experiences and to **help identify emerging trends.**

This will incorporate a Student Mental Health & Wellbeing barometer exercise and the Students as Consultants model.



THEME 2: A POSITIVE APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

We will integrate healthy behaviour and positive mental health and wellbeing promotion within the University's educational mission and curriculum, encouraging the recognition of mental health as being just as important as physical health.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO OUR STUDENTS

Students tell us that they value an holistic approach to mental health and wellbeing. They want to live and study in an environment that offers opportunities to develop lifelong, healthy behaviours and encourages positive mental and physical health. Student consultants highlighted the continued importance of normalising mental health and wellbeing as a part of everyday life.



BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Bangor University is renowned for its beautiful surroundings, its free clubs and societies, and we are committed to the promotion of positive wellbeing amongst our staff and students. We have a Centre for Mindfulness Practice and Research, and our Student Support & Wellbeing service has a varied student offer to enhance wellbeing. Our Be Your Best at Bangor module, for all first and foundation year students, has integrated mental health and wellbeing content. Within this whole university approach we want to focus on finding new ways to positively promote and enhance mental health and wellbeing behaviours and attitudes.

TO MAKE THIS A REALITY WE WILL:

Embed opportunities to **learn and develop wellbeing knowledge** within our curricula to further **enhance our commitment to mentally healthy academic communities.**

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Reflect the links between positive mental health, physical activity and sustainability through **fostering active environments across the University**, seeking opportunities within our built environment to **promote and stimulate good health and wellbeing.**

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Review how we serve our diverse student body with our varied and open programme of extra curricular activities that provide social opportunities.

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Identify opportunities to enhance provision and promote uptake of physical and sporting activities through Undeb Bangor and Canolfan Brailsford.

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Draw on best practice in the sector to **review the use of digital resources to support health and wellbeing**, identifying any gaps in our provision.

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Strengthen and enhance our mental health and wellbeing training and support for staff, recognising the **positive connection between staff wellbeing and the learning and wellbeing of students.**



THEME 3: OUR COMPASSIONATE COMMUNITY

We will work to create communities where our students can thrive and where all members of our community are included, supported, respected and valued. We want students to feel that they belong and are connected to the University in a meaningful way. We will continue our whole university approach to support the development of knowledge, understanding and behaviours that ensure mental health and wellbeing are considered across all aspects of development and planning, fostering a compassionate and empowered community.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO OUR STUDENTS

Our students tell us that social isolation and loneliness have been features of the pandemic years and that feeling part of a university community is a key area of importance. The pandemic increased social isolation amongst communities in a way that could have long term impacts on wellbeing and mental health. They also told us that they shared an increased desire to help others and to make positive contributions to their community.



BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

As a University we have a strong history of community engagement and participation. Students arriving in their first year are supported during their orientation by volunteer Peer Guides, one of the oldest and most established initiatives of its kind in the UK. Within Undeb Bangor there is also deep commitment to volunteering reflected in the many projects led by students, as well as a wide range of clubs and societies that are free to join. Our Campus Life social programme in Halls focuses on easing the transition into student life and on building community where students live. Our Bystander Intervention Training, offered to all first and foundation year students, makes a significant contribution to a supportive and inclusive community. We also recognise that connectivity, understanding and belonging are significant contributors to mental health and wellbeing. Addressing loneliness and social isolation will be a key focus of our future enhancements.

TO MAKE THIS A REALITY WE WILL:

Continue to **champion equivalence of provision for Welsh speaking students**, including through our leadership of the Wales-wide Welsh medium mental health project: myf.cymru.

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Build on the success of projects like our Connect@ Bangor and Walk & Talk to **create new formal and informal opportunities to bring students together** (such as the planned Rathbone Wellbeing Garden).

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Work with our academic schools to **understand the particular personal and cultural needs of each school's diverse student groups**, so that we can **identify and address barriers to access**.

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Proactively **reduce risks associated with suicide** through our Suicide Safer Strategy.

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Offer students, who find themselves **supporting the mental health and wellbeing of a friend or housemate**, the support and resources to **safeguard their own wellbeing**.



THEME 4: AN EVIDENCE BASED APPROACH

We want our support systems, processes, and our approach to have a positive impact. This means ensuring that we are proactive in using evidence to identify what works and what doesn't. We need to be able to challenge assumptions, our own and others', so that we take responsible actions that are underpinned by evidence and professional expertise. Partnership working with students as the experts in their own experience is part of our evidence-based approach.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO OUR STUDENTS

Our students want to influence the services they use and to contribute to the positive mental health and wellbeing of their community. They are keen to be involved and to bring their knowledge, ideas and solutions to enhance the student experience at Bangor. They have also told us that when they participate in this way, they gain valuable skills and confidence, as well as a deeper sense of ownership and belonging.



BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

We value the work we do with Undeb Bangor and the relationship that exists which enables honest and open dialogue to the benefit of our students. We have well-established systems of collecting feedback that support robust evaluation of current practice and a strong culture of deploying evidence-based interventions (including enhanced use of students' engagement data to inform early interventions). We are committed to ensuring that the lived experiences of students that underpinned the original Student Led Mental Health Strategy continue to inform this second iteration and to exploring ways that we can build co-production into our support service development. By doing so, we will continue to ensure that what we offer is effective, appropriate and based on a shared understanding of the changing mental health and wellbeing needs of our student community.

TO MAKE THIS A REALITY WE WILL:

Communicate how we monitor quality, use feedback and enhance provision.

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Work with students as partners in shaping mental health and wellbeing support, **recognising they are the experts in their own experience**, and evaluating the effectiveness of our work together.

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Continue to develop and enhance our use of learner analytics to **build responsive support systems** for students who are struggling to engage.

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Benchmark our services against national standards, like the CCAPS measure for counselling, wherever possible.

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Ensure the efficacy of our professional partnerships with local health services by identifying and reporting on shared clinical outcomes.



THEME 5: EASY TO ACCESS SUPPORT

We will empower students to seek appropriate and timely help. This means we will focus on identifying barriers, tackling stigma, and ensuring that staff can support positive help-seeking behaviours amongst students. It also means building on what students tell us works and being prepared to change how we do things. We will work strategically with external agencies, statutory organisations and funding bodies to gain maximum resources to help us meet the support needs of students through their academic journey.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO OUR STUDENTS

Our students have highlighted that they value different types of support and want clear information about the range of options available to them. They want the pathways to accessing that support to be as clear and simple as possible and the delivery to be flexible.



BUILDING ON OUR STRENGTHS

Bangor University offers a range of services and support to students through integrated services within Student Support & Wellbeing. A wide variety of helping interventions are available to students, including specialist support and assistance to students experiencing emotional, psychological, behavioural or interpersonal problems. We have a proactive pastoral support system that links academic schools with support services. Staff, including Personal Tutors and Residential Life teams, benefit from our longstanding commitment to staff development, including Mental Health First Aid training, and a broad range of training, e-learning packages, online signposting guidance and direct access to expertise within Student Support & Wellbeing. We are committed to making a wide range of support as easy to access as possible within an holistic approach. Through collaboration and partnership, we'll increase our capacity to do so.

TO MAKE THIS A REALITY WE WILL:

Continue to strengthen our links with external stakeholders and providers to improve collaboration and communication and improve our students' access to externally provided support.

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Ensure prospective students have access to guidance about how they, and any mental health professionals involved in their care, can ease the transition into university.

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Improve service visibility and awareness of our specialists' expertise by raising the profile of Student Support & Wellbeing staff across the University.

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Provide more detailed protocols, with clear and well communicated routes for escalation, to support staff responding to students in distress.

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Evaluate our current information management systems across the University and identify enhancements for improved case management.



NEXT STEPS

This strategy outlines our vision, commitments and overall direction of travel. An implementation plan will be developed to accompany it, mapping out how and when we'll deliver these objectives. Our Student Led Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy group includes Undeb Bangor and staff from across our university community who are passionate about student mental health and wellbeing.

Our partnership is embedded within this strategy group, and we share responsibility for strategic oversight and ensuring that students' lived experience continues to inform and shape the initiatives that are developed as a result. The strategy group is also responsible for receiving reports from the Suicide Safer Strategy Group and the Alcohol Awareness Group. We will conduct an annual review and report our progress through the University's

Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group, and we'll share lessons learnt and measures of impact with the whole university community.

We're looking forward to making this strategy a reality, working together to meet the challenge of giving all our students the best opportunity to thrive, academically and personally, in a compassionate and supportive university community.

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