



**ASKHAM BRYAN
COLLEGE**

Learning is in our Nature.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

2021-2026

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Our vision is for Askham Bryan College to have a holistic approach to wellbeing, encompassing the needs of staff and students during their journey at college, with a preventative approach to build mental fitness but also to ensure an inclusive support package is in place for those in need of extra support.

Context

The mental health and resilience of students and staff has become a focus of increasing concern in the UK in recent years, with evidence from colleges and universities suggesting that large numbers of students and staff are experiencing poor mental health.

The number of students declaring a pre-existing mental health difficulties to ABC on has increased since 2017-2018 from 49% to 57% in 2020-2021. There have also been increases in demand for services to support student mental health, particularly in the last 2 academic years.

This increase in demand is felt across the spectrum of mental illness. Evidence suggests that staff are responding to increasing numbers of students experiencing high levels of serious mental illness, including suicidal ideation and self-harm.

This is concerning for a number of reasons, not least because of the relationships between mental health and effective learning and performance, and physical health. Data from the Office for Students in 2019 showed that students experiencing mental illness are more likely to withdraw from university, to underperform academically and are less likely to secure higher level employment or go on to post-graduate study .

In addition, the mental health of staff is a growing area of focus, with evidence indicating that there has been a significant proportion in the number of staff accessing support through our third-party support service for staff for reasons of mental health – 56% of all calls in the last year. Anecdotal evidence from academic staff has highlighted the potential negative impacts of supporting ill students.

Given the severe negative consequences that poor mental health can have for learning, achievement, health and life, the wellbeing of our community at ABC is clearly an important issue that requires attention, resource, expertise and action.

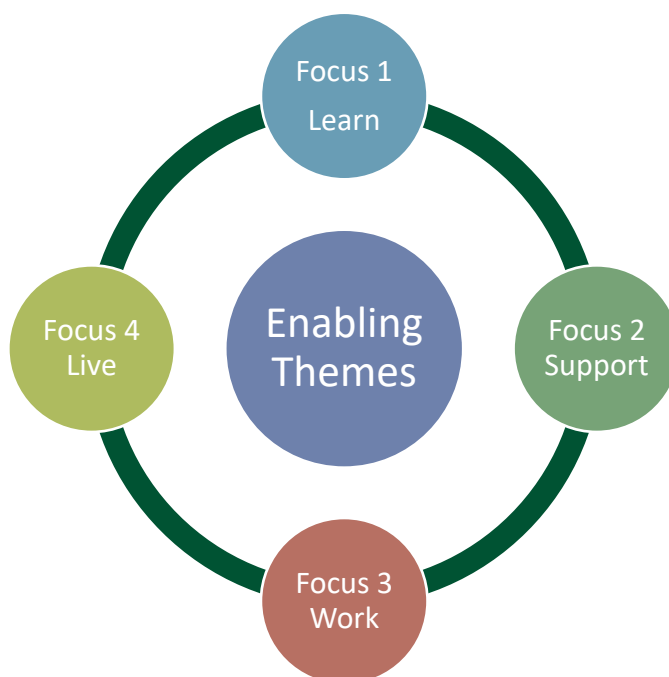
As a college we acknowledge the duty of care we have towards our students and staff. A substantial new financial commitment was supported in 2017-2018, for example, with the establishment of the Student Wellbeing offer to students. We offer a 24/7 resource to staff for their support needs, through Health Assured.

We also recognise that to effectively support our students and staff, adopting a whole college approach will elicit the most robust responses to the issues. This requires resourced, effective and accessible mental health services and proactive interventions. It must provide an environment and culture that reduces poor mental

health, as well as supporting good mental health, and facilitating staff and students to develop insight, understanding and skills to manage and maintain their own wellbeing.

This strategy sets out our aims, how we hope to achieve them and the expected impact of those interventions.

Our approach is broken down into four distinct streams of activity, all supported by a set of common enabling themes:



Learn	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition into College • Learning, teaching and assessment • Progression
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support services • Risk • External partnerships and pathways • Information sharing
Work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff wellbeing • Staff development
Live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive interventions and a mentally healthy environment • Residential accommodation • Social integration and belonging • Physical environment
Enabling Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership, strategy, and policy • Student voice and participation • Cohesiveness of support across the provider • Inclusivity and intersectional mental health • Research, innovation and dissemination

FOCUS 1: LEARN

Transition into College

The journey into college life starts well before the first day of term for students. It begins at the very first Open Day, first look at the website or first conversation. We aim to ensure measures to support transition begin from pre-application and continue through application, pre-entry, arrival, induction and through the first year.

To achieve this, we will:

- Adopt a whole college approach to ensure prospective students and current students' needs are met, to allow them to access open events, online events, assistance with applications and transition visits.
- Ensure every student accesses the Induction Programme during the first weeks of term.
- Offer students regular appraisals and/or one to one sessions with course managers to check on wellbeing, academic integration and social connectedness during the first year.
- Plan for more effective management of students declaring MH issues on application / enrolment
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This will result in the following outcomes:

- Prospective students will feel comfortable and able to access events which will result in a higher recruitment rate.
- Students will know where to access vital contact details for safeguarding and mental wellbeing support as well as advice on wellbeing and details for external agencies.
- Students will be monitored closely and relevant support offered quickly if needed, resulting in increased retention and achievement.
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And we will measure this by:

- Analysing the student 'first impressions' SPOC
- Analysing counselling and wellbeing referrals.

Learning, teaching and assessment

Students choose to attend Askham Bryan College because of the high quality teaching and varied curriculum available. They value the contact between themselves and their Course Managers and seek to benefit from the experiences they are given access to, to enhance their wellbeing, knowledge and skills. Therefore, we must consider the impact of teaching and curriculum planning on our students and minimise unnecessary stress caused by poor planning, excessive workload, unclear assessment objectives or teaching and learning methods.

We must also consider the role our academic staff play in our student's wellbeing. They are considered to be the 'first port of call' for students experiencing emotional

distress but many feel underprepared and under-qualified to appropriately respond to the needs of the student. However, in signposting to the appropriate services at the earliest opportunity and by considering the wellbeing of students when planning the curriculum, academic staff can bridge the gap that may temporarily appear.

This will result in the following outcomes:

- The curriculum will be well planned, avoiding excessive workload and unnecessary stress.
- Students will benefit from having a clear plan and understand what is expected of them.
- The individual needs of the student will be met.
- Academic staff will have a clear understanding of their role in providing support for students and how they can refer on/signpost to Student Services.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure academic staff consider the wellbeing of students when planning the curriculum, taking potential excessive workload into consideration.
- Ensure the curriculum is designed to facilitate students to gain knowledge and skills at an appropriate pace.
- Ensure the needs of individual students are considered and acted upon.
- Equip academic staff with the means to support students and ensure there is no gap between academic staff and Student Services to enable a smooth transition into specialised support for the student.
- Provide support for academic staff in coping with students experiencing distress.

We will measure this by:

- Monitoring curriculum and lesson planning (Quality Team)
- Feedback from lesson observations and 'deep dives'
- Recording the number of students who present with emotional distress linked to curriculum, workload or teaching issues.

Progression

Students face a range of challenges as they move between academic years, levels, courses and into the world of work. Many of these challenges are planned transitions and can be managed but others may be unwanted, forced or unplanned. Dealing with change can be unsettling mentally and may require some additional support in the form of pastoral support, CEIAG or support from outside agencies. We aim to provide all students with support and embed skills needed to deal with ongoing transition situations.

This will result in the following outcomes:

- Confident and resilient students able to manage change
- Positive progression routes

- Fewer students withdrawing from courses because of mental health difficulties.

To achieve this, we will:

- Ensure students are prepared for the multiple, ongoing transitions they will encounter as they move through their student journey by teaching them skills in resilience.
- Support students as they navigate unplanned changes in their study programme, for example, through absence because of illness.
- Ensure students are provided with excellent advice and guidance to ensure they feel confident in their choices for their progression as they come to the end of their college journey.
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And we will measure this by:

- Retention statistics
- Progression data – Increase in HE applications
- Numbers of students becoming NEET

FOCUS 2: SUPPORT

Support services

The support services at College are a key element to ensuring students feel safe, heard and cared for during their time in Further and Higher Education at Askham Bryan. There are many types of support available and several teams within the college contribute to the support given. Student Services, Learning Support, Employability and Careers among others all play their part in ensuring the student's needs are met in terms of factors which contribute to their wellbeing. We aim to provide a wide range of support services which respond to students who may be experiencing mental health problems as well as services which support students with issues that may have a negative impact on their wellbeing e.g. financial issues, disability, faith etc.

We aim to use the services in a proactive and forward-thinking manner to train our students to be resilient and able to manage issues that may impact their wellbeing in the future.

This will result in the following outcomes:

- Increased retention of students who encounter issues during their time at college.
- Increased attendance of students who are experiencing issues which impact their wellbeing.
- More resilient students who can manage future challenges.

To achieve this we will:

- Ensure the Mental Health and Wellbeing Teams are invested in and fully resourced to enable the college to offer the services needed.
- Invest in staff training to increase the range of services available and ensure staff's knowledge and skills are up to date.
- Ensure the services are accessible to all students and the needs of particular student groups (BAME, LGBTQ+, LAC etc) are taken into consideration.
- Monitor the services carefully to ensure they are effective and safe.

We will measure this by:

- Measuring retention, achievement and attendance figures of students who have used the wellbeing services.
- Gaining powerful qualitative data from students who have used the services.
- Analysing data from the SPOC.

Risk

The risk relating to suicide and mental health crises is ever growing with more students coming forward to report suicidal ideologies than ever before. Suicide can impact the whole student population when a tragic event occurs, leading to an increased need for support and outreach services.

As a college, we aim to provide a safe and supportive environment which rejects the stigma of suicide and mental ill health and encourages students to report concerns at an early stage. We aim to work with staff, students and external agencies to plan prevention, intervention and postvention activities in college.

This will result in the following outcomes

- Reduced risk of suicide in the college community.
- Reduced stigma of mental ill health.
- More students experiencing mental ill health will seek help.

To achieve this we will

- Invest in staff training to help them recognise signs and symptoms of mental ill health.
- Support staff to support their students in a safe and confident manner.
- Undertake preventative work with students to help them build resilience and mental fitness.
- Provide professional support (internal and external) for students who are experiencing distress or suicidal ideology.

We will measure this by

- Monitoring and analysing data from the Wellbeing Service to determine whether there has been an increase in the uptake of support services.
- Analyse SPOC data to see if students are satisfied with the level of support they have received.

External partnerships and pathways

Building and maintaining effective working relationships with external agencies and partners is essential to ensure a collaborative, cohesive and consistent package of care for students who need support with their mental health. Askham Bryan College students travel into college from a large geographical area and therefore we work with many different local authorities to access support for students. We also work with local primary/secondary health care providers (e.g. in the case of local GP's for residential students) and third sector providers.

We aim to work together to ensure there are no gaps in the care for the student, caused by inefficient care plans. We will take proactive steps to build relationships with the NHS, social care and third sector agencies to work collaboratively with a shared understanding over each other's roles and responsibility.

This will result in the following outcomes:

- A full care package around the student
- A full and maintained list of contacts in local authorities, agencies and health care services.

To achieve this we will:

- Ensure contact is maintained with essential services to promote good relationships.
- Use third sector services to enhance the enrichment offer for students, for example, invite charities into college for mental health awareness events.
- Work with essential services to support the student back into education.

We will measure this by:

- Analysing student satisfaction on the SPOC and Wellbeing data

Information sharing

College recognises the importance of information sharing between practitioners and local agencies. This includes ensuring arrangements are in place that set out clearly the processes and principles for sharing information within the College and with children's social care, the safeguarding partners, other organisations, agencies, and practitioners as required.

Where relevant and appropriate we will ensure that information is also shared with families, guardians, spouses, or relevant people in the lives of our students.

FOCUS 3: WORK

Staff wellbeing

Some pressure at work is inevitable. A total elimination of this pressure is neither possible nor desirable but it is important that this pressure does not become sustained

stress. Excessive stress is a health issue and a real concern for all involved and the College has a duty of care to help in whatever way we reasonably can.

As a college, we aim to continuously foster a culture that supports good staff wellbeing and tackles workplace conditions which may lead to heightened levels of stress. We will provide an environment where all staff can speak informally with their colleagues and line manager about their wellbeing management, without fear of stigma. We aim to harness key actions within our People Plan to ensure this type of environment.

This will result in the following outcomes

- An inclusive and caring environment which values personal wellness.
- An appropriate level of access of services provided by our employee assistance programme.
- A low frequency and duration of absences resulting from work related stress.

To achieve this we will

- Investigate pinch points that exist within the employee experience and seek ways to reduce and mitigate stress, as well as other mental health issues in the College workplace, underpinned by our commitment to the AoC's Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter.
- Champion approaches to work which value what is important, encourages a healthy life/work balance and develops personal resilience.
- Use sickness absence metrics and exit interviews data to identify common themes and allow us to address recurring areas of concern.

We will measure this by

- Capturing key observations and insights through means such as staff voice, exit interviews and pulse surveys.
- Consistent and central analysis of absence trends and occupation health referral information.
- Drawing on analytics associated with the access levels of our employee assistance programme.

Staff development

The recent pandemic had placed many staff members who are in non-mental health specialist roles, into a position of having to respond to mental health problems and wellbeing concerns. Working within a learning environment through difficult and unrepresented times has inevitably meant that as a collective workforce, staff have had to pull together to support their students and colleagues alike.

We aim to increase the confidence and base line ability of staff to deal with initial anxieties related to mental health, to help staff feel comfortable and equipped to deal with the increasing likelihood of these concerns emerging. We will blend into our staff development offer elements which embed knowledge and a positive attitude towards mental health and wellbeing, whether through explicit *Mental Health at Askham Bryan College* training or through implicit means by highlighting wellbeing benefits as part of *Managing your time and workload effectively*.

This will result in the following outcomes

- An increased confidence and ability to respond to instances of poor mental health, underpinned by a good base knowledge of mental health concerns.
- A good awareness of ways staff can use the day to day functions of their role to support good wellbeing.
- A workforce with a sound understanding of tools and resources that can be used to support students and staff in managing their mental health and wellbeing.

To achieve this we will

- Create, curate and promote resources which will help to develop the knowledge of staff on issues associated with mental health.
- Ensure that themes which support the development of personal resilience is embedded across our suite of core programmes, including induction, talent, management and leadership development.
- Establish a credible staff development offer specifically targeting the understanding of mental health e.g. *Level 2 in Mental Health Awareness*.

We will measure this by

- Obtaining feedback from line managers, staff and students on the impact of formal and informal development.
- Monitoring uptake of staff development opportunities related specifically to mental health awareness.

FOCUS 4: LIVE

Proactive interventions and a mentally healthy environment

Research has consistently shown that most students and staff who experience poor mental health do not access formal support and it is widely appreciated that there is no single approach to mental health support that works for everyone. While medication, therapy/counselling and behavioural interventions can be effective for many, for each of these approaches there is a proportion of the population that experiences no improvement.

It is not unsurprising that as a learning institution, our aim is to continuously grow as a mentally healthy environment, through a blend of constant and ad-hoc interventions, adoption of best and modern practices, as well as robust self-assessment and reflection – embedding this ethos into the entire fabric of Askham Bryan College life.

This will result in the following outcomes

- Askham Bryan College is a place which promotes the mental health of all members of the community through education, actively encouraging healthy behaviours and attitudes.
- The College has a track record of taking steps to create a culture in which individuals feel safe and supported to disclose when they are experiencing poor mental health.

- The College will ensure an environment that facilitates and makes it easy for individuals and groups to adopt healthy behaviours.

To achieve this we will

- Use the indicators which form the AoC's Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter as a means to conduct analysis of our environment.
- Reduce stigma associated with experiencing poor mental health, underpinned by a warm, understanding and reasonable approach.
- Develop working practices which incorporate a degree of flexible, hybrid and agile possibilities to getting work done.

We will measure this by

- Observing 'distance travelled' between self-assessment exercises, being able to clearly identify key changes over periods of time.
- Codifying the benefits of new working practices, through pulse survey activity.

Residential accommodation

Our site at York has accommodation for students studying both FE and HE programmes, under and over 18, as well as accommodating some of our Apprentices when they attend for block release study.

We recognise the importance of the availability of support for students who are, in many cases, staying away from home for the first time.

Social integration and belonging

It can be very daunting for students arriving at college for the first time, especially those who are living away from home. It is vital for college to establish a socially integrated, inclusive community to provide stability, encourage new friendships and ensure students do not feel isolated or lonely. Social isolation can contribute to mental ill health and lead to lack of achievement, loss of confidence and low mood.

We aim to promote an inclusive and integrated community for both residential and day students, as well as staff members. Members of the college community should feel safe to voice opinions, try new things, encounter different beliefs and cultures and be able to seek support should they begin to feel lonely.

This will result in the following outcomes:

- Students and staff will feel part of the community.
- Students will feel safe and secure in their friendship groups.
- Students will not feel lonely or socially isolated.

We will achieve this by:

- Working closely with our Student Union to increase fun and positive activities, clubs and societies, therefore encouraging students to participate and increase their sense of belonging.

- Working closely with the wardening team to introduce and maintain a Residential Wellbeing Programme, aimed at individual wellbeing and encouraging community spirit.
- Ensuring students and staff are aware of the support available (wellbeing support/counselling/external agencies) and encourage them to use the services should they need to.

We will measure this by:

- Analysing retention figures
- Analysing student experience data from the SPOC
- Holding Student Voice Focus Groups throughout the year

Physical environment

There is a growing body of evidence that our physical environment and how we interact with it, has a significant impact on our mental health and wellbeing. Given the amount of time that many staff and students spend on College grounds, there is a clear need to consider how the physical environment can be used to improve the wellbeing of the Askham Bryan College community.

We aim to leverage a mindful approach to the management and development of our campus environments, keeping at the heart of our approach the delicate balance that exists between improving our resources for the learning experience, protecting our green space and capitalising on the natural capital of our beautiful grounds.

This will result in the following outcomes

- Our curriculum will be underpinned by an ethos which combines technology with nature, enabling students to take advantage of learning outdoors.
- A redesigned central campus at York which promotes wellbeing, by effectively accommodating elements such as natural lighting.
- A reimagined residential accommodation offer for our students, working our physical space in a way which promotes and supports healthy living.

To achieve this we will

- Ensuring good communication with key stakeholders on project work derived from the Estates Plan – ensuring mental health is considered throughout.
- Play to our natural resources and beautiful landscape, ensuring that it remains a vibrant part of who we are, keeping our green space protected and prominent.
- Encouraging staff and students to engage with nature wherever possible.

We will measure this by

- Staff and student insights captured through standard and pulse survey activity.
- Accessibility surveying of the site.
- Observing progress against the Estates Plan.

ENABLING THEMES

Leadership, strategy, and policy

- College wide strategy: We will adopt a whole college approach to mental health - this will require a commitment to ongoing improvement, embedded across the whole institution and evident in practice, processes, behaviours and culture. Leaders will ensure that the college takes a strategic approach to mental health, that this is identified as a priority and that appropriate resources are allocated. They will also influence the value the community places on wellbeing through leading by example.
- College policies and procedures. We will ensure that mental health and wellbeing are genuinely embedded through the consideration of mental health in the College strategy and associated documents, (e.g. the Curriculum Plan, People Plan and Estates Plan) and operational policies and procedures (e.g. disciplinary, complaints, mitigating circumstances arrangements and fitness to study policies). We will ensure that our strategies and policies are designed with wellbeing in mind and that they do not disadvantage or pose a risk to mental health or those experiencing mental illness.
- Visible and effective College leadership committed to improving mental health: We will ensure that this plan does not 'sit on a shelf' with no influence over day-to-day practice and that it goes beyond a reactive approach to mental illness. Our aim is to seek mental wellness of the whole College population and we acknowledge the impact of environment, culture, community and day to day activity on mental wellbeing. Unless we consider mental health across the institution, there will inevitably remain pockets of poor practice, missed opportunities for improvement and the potential for activity that actually causes or contributes to harm. We have ensured that engagement in the development of the strategy from across the college community has been sought, representing different groups, experiences and views.
- We have also ensured that this plan is informed by research, internal evidence and comprehensive evaluation of current practice. This will continue beyond the publication of this strategy, in order that we can respond flexibly to new findings and understanding, to ensure the ongoing development of healthy environment, interventions, culture and support.

Student voice and participation

- Student and staff involvement in the development of mental health provision, in order to develop interventions and services that are effectively responding to need
- Student voice and participation in shaping key College plans that affect mental health (e.g., teaching and learning)
- Student and staff voice, participation and co-creation of services and responses to mental health.
- Processes for students and staff to raise concerns and highlight issues which may positively or negatively impact on their mental health.

Cohesiveness of support across the College

- Collaboration and cohesiveness across and between the Student Services team, curriculum staff and other support services to ensure effective information sharing that enables high quality and appropriate support and intervention.
- Development of a shared language and understanding of the services on offer for staff and students
- Collaboration and cohesiveness across and between the

Inclusivity and intersectional mental health

- In the development of plans and services we will consider staff and students who may face additional barriers to success and challenges to their wellbeing due to their background, characteristics, aspects of identity, e.g., LGBTQ+ students, BAME students, care leavers, carers, disabled students, mature students, first generation students, international students, students for whom English is a second language and others (this is not an exhaustive list)
- We will also consider students who may face additional challenges due to their mode of study, relationship to campus or status as non- traditional students e.g., online learners, part time students, postgraduate students, students on professional placements and apprentices.

Research, innovation and dissemination

- Supporting research into student mental health and wellbeing.
- Supporting evidence informed innovation and the testing of new interventions.
- Supporting collaboration across the sector.
- Supporting dissemination of good practice and new evidence.
- Closing the gap between support services practice and research.