



**Manchester
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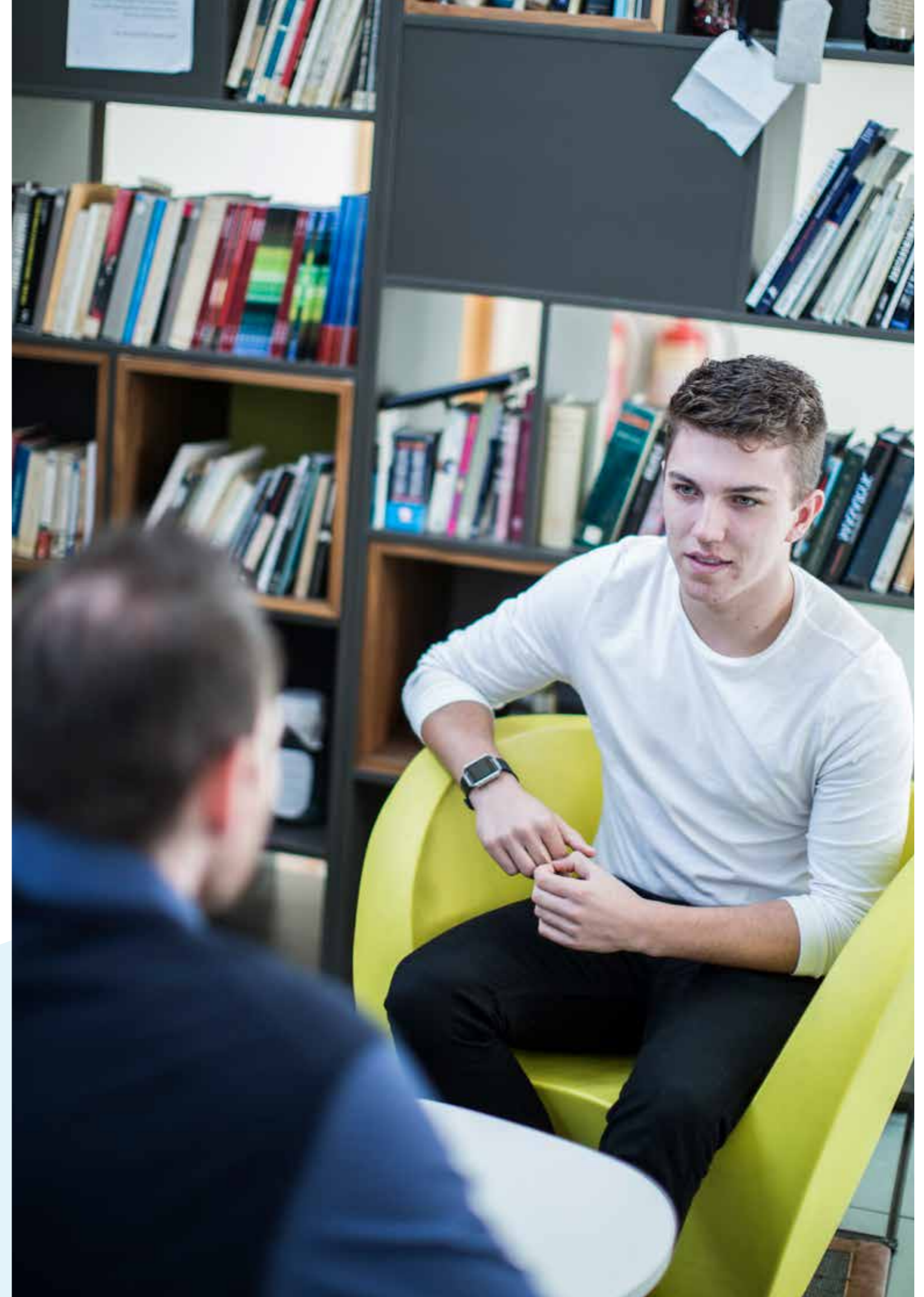
2021 – 2025

Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy



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VICE-CHANCELLOR'S INTRODUCTION

Mental health and wellbeing is an essential component of student success. By supporting our students' mental health, we can ensure they are in a better position to learn, to develop and to succeed. This is why we have been investing in improving our student mental health and wellbeing services.

It is also vital that we support the mental health and wellbeing of our staff. By doing so, colleagues are better able to deliver high quality research and teaching, and to provide the professional services that underpin our mission.

For these reasons, we have adopted our vision to be a University that creates a healthy setting, promotes good mental health and wellbeing, and enables all students and staff to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Through the actions set out in this strategy, I am confident that we can deliver this vision. Our objectives commit us to delivering high quality support; to building supportive partnerships; to using data to understand better what is needed and what works; to shaping our ways of working; and improving our physical environment – all to deliver a healthier organisation.

Our first objective is about culture: each of us must be part of this. Together, we can create an environment in which our whole community feels able to discuss their mental health, to seek assistance and to receive the support they need.



Professor Malcolm Press
Vice-Chancellor
Manchester Metropolitan University



OVERVIEW

This strategy adopts a whole University approach to mental health and wellbeing, which will underpin our approach for both our students and colleagues.

It builds on existing activity and recent investment in supporting student wellbeing through the University's Student Services and will deliver one of the four interconnecting programmes of work in the University's People Strategy. Policies and practices delivered as part of this strategy will also be embedded into other strategies, including our Digital Strategy, our Estates Strategy, and our Equality and Diversity Strategy.

Our strategy reflects the approaches taken by the Universities UK Framework for mentally healthy universities,¹ and by the Mental Health at Work Commitment.² It also aligns with the the Student Minds University Mental Health Charter.³

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Project Board has overseen the development of the strategy, which has been informed by extensive consultation with a wide range of colleagues and student representatives from across the University, together with a review of relevant research on support for mental health and wellbeing in a higher education context.



OUR VISION

Our vision is to be a University that creates a healthy setting, promotes good mental health and wellbeing, and enables all students and staff to thrive and succeed to their full potential.

This strategy explains how we will achieve this vision, by taking a whole-university approach that touches every aspect of life at Manchester Met. The focus of this strategy is on mental wellbeing. However, we also recognise the importance of physical wellbeing, and the relationship between these two aspects of our health. The benefits of physical wellbeing on mental health will be addressed within the action plan that accompanies this strategy.

This strategy applies to:

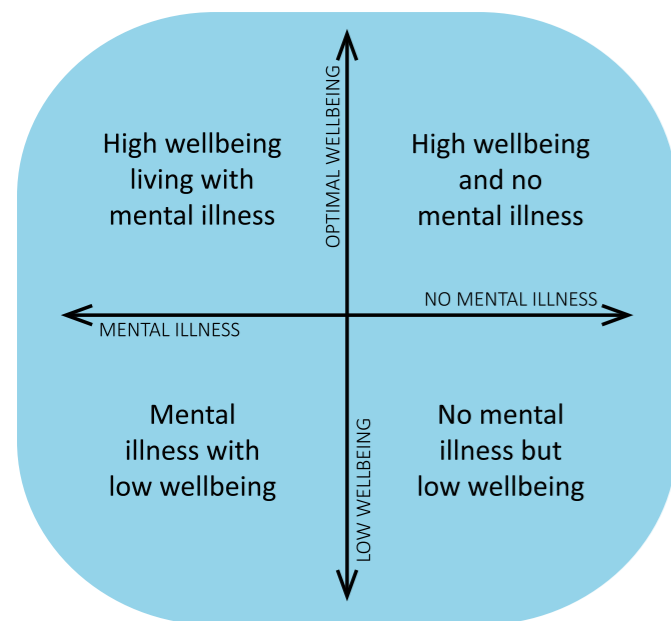
- All students enrolled at the University
- Applicants awaiting enrolment who have mental health issues
- Staff directly employed by the University

The Higher Education Policy Institute's report, *The Invisible Problem? Improving Students' Mental Health*⁴ explains that mental health and wellbeing are universal, and that everyone's mental health will shift along a spectrum over time. Universities UK describes the dual continuum of mental health and wellbeing - as demonstrated in the illustration below. While some people will join our community with known mental health issues, others may develop or recognise issues while they are with us.

We want to help students and staff move towards, and maintain, good mental health and wellbeing, whether or not they live with mental illness. We recognise good mental health and wellbeing as 'having the emotional resilience to cope with everyday pressures, enjoy life and undertake productive work while having a belief in one's own and others' worth'.⁵

The mental health and wellbeing of our colleagues and students is impacted by a number of influences, including those beyond our University community, and beyond our ability to control or mitigate - such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In evaluating the delivery of our strategy, as well as our progress in achieving our key performance measures, we will be mindful of the changing environment and its influence on mental health locally, nationally and internationally.

Mental health and wellbeing: dual continuum



Mental health refers to a spectrum of experience, from good mental health to mental illness and distress.

Wellbeing includes wider physical, social and economic experience.

Source: University UK's *Stepchange: mentally healthy universities*



CASE FOR ACTION

There is a compelling case for universities to position mental health as a strategic priority. This mental health and wellbeing strategy has been driven by regulatory duties, increased disclosure of mental health, demand for support services and a recognition that good mental health allows students and staff to achieve their full potential.

Regulatory, duty of care and social responsibility

The University has an obligation to support the mental health and wellbeing of our people. We are committed to protecting the health, safety and wellbeing of all our students and all of the staff we employ directly – as far as is reasonably practicable.

Increased disclosure of poor mental health

Much has been shared in the news and in research on the increased disclosure of poor mental health in children and young adults. Over the last 20 years, the number of students disclosing a mental health condition to their higher education institution (HEI) in the UK has increased exponentially. In the 2007/08 academic year, this number stood at 1,260 postgraduate and 8,415 undergraduate students. In 2016/2017 this increased to 8,040 postgraduate, and 49,265 undergraduate students.⁶

Disclosure of poor mental health and wellbeing has also increased in the workplace. According to the Mental Health at Work Commitment (2019), 39% of staff in the UK experience poor mental health, at least in part because of their work.⁷

Students

1 in 6 young people aged 16-24 has symptoms of a common mental disorder such as anxiety or depression⁸

In the UK

33% of our students' exceptional-factors claims cited mental health* – in addition, a further 7.3% cited personal or emotional issues

At Manchester Met

Staff

in 2018/19 the main cause of working days lost through sickness absence was mental ill-health⁹

Mental ill-health was the main cause for staff absences in 2018/19, accounting for **28%** of all absences

* Exceptional factors are short-term, unexpected events that have a serious impact on a student's ability to perform in assessments.

Demand for support services

There is a marked increase in students seeking support for mental health and wellbeing across the UK. The Institute for Public Policy Research states that 94% of HEIs reported an increase in demand for counselling services between 2012 and 2017, with 61% of HEIs reporting an increase above 25%. Some HEIs have up to 1 in 4 students using, or waiting to use, counselling services.¹⁰

The number of students using our own counselling and mental health services more than doubled between 2013/14 and 2019/20, rising from 1,258 to 3,164. As the student population grew very little during this period, this is a significant increase – both in real terms and as a proportion of the student body. This is in stark contrast to our staff, where the services and interventions which support their mental health are currently underused. During 2020, 177 members of staff (4.26% of our workforce) used the Employee Assistance Programme, down from 184 in 2019.

A 2017 study, *Thriving at Work: the Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers*,¹¹ concludes that the UK faces a major challenge, as the stigma surrounding mental health in the workplace stands in the way of open discussion of the issues.



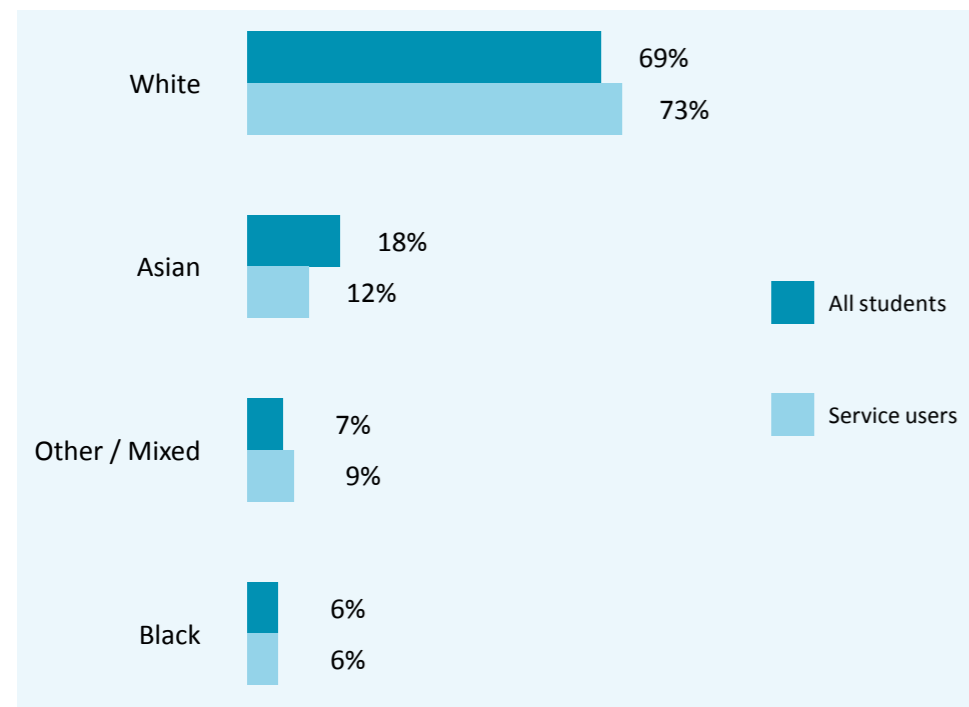
Equality of access to support

Manchester Met is proud of our diverse community of staff and students.

The need for accessibility requires services to be culturally competent. Recent reports have raised concerns that some support services across UK universities may not understand the experiences and needs of particular student groups such as Black, Asian or minority ethnic students, LGBTQ+ students, international students and postgraduate students.^{12 13 14} Both national data and data gathered through student consultations led by Student Minds during the formation of The University Mental Health Charter¹⁵ indicate that a lack of informed cultural understanding from support staff could result in students not accessing support or not returning after a first appointment.^{16 17}

The equality of access diagram below breaks down the ethnic groupings of our student body as a whole, and of the students using our counselling and mental health services. This shows that our White and other/mixed ethnicity students are more likely to use these services, while Asian students are proportionally less likely to be service users. The proportion of Black students using the service was aligned with the proportion of Black students in the student population generally.

Equality of access to support



Impact on student learning, retention and progression

Mental health problems can damage a student's academic performance, affecting their energy level, concentration, dependability, mental ability and mood. Research also suggests that depression is associated with lower grades and that a combination of depression and anxiety can increase this association. Mental illness has also been linked with failure to progress.¹⁸

Universities UK reports that there is 'strong evidence that good mental health has a positive impact on a person's learning, creativity, ability to concentrate and overall performance levels'. They also state that the link between good health and learning gain continues into employability, as employers seek graduate recruits who are 'health and wellbeing literate'.¹⁹

Attracting talented staff and supporting students to achieve their full potential

To achieve our strategic ambitions, we must attract and retain highly talented staff, provide an excellent learning experience and help our students make the most of their potential. We aim to be a University where people thrive and are supported to do their best.

Student Counselling and Wellbeing service users compared to Manchester Met student population by ethnicity for period of 2016/17 to 2018/19



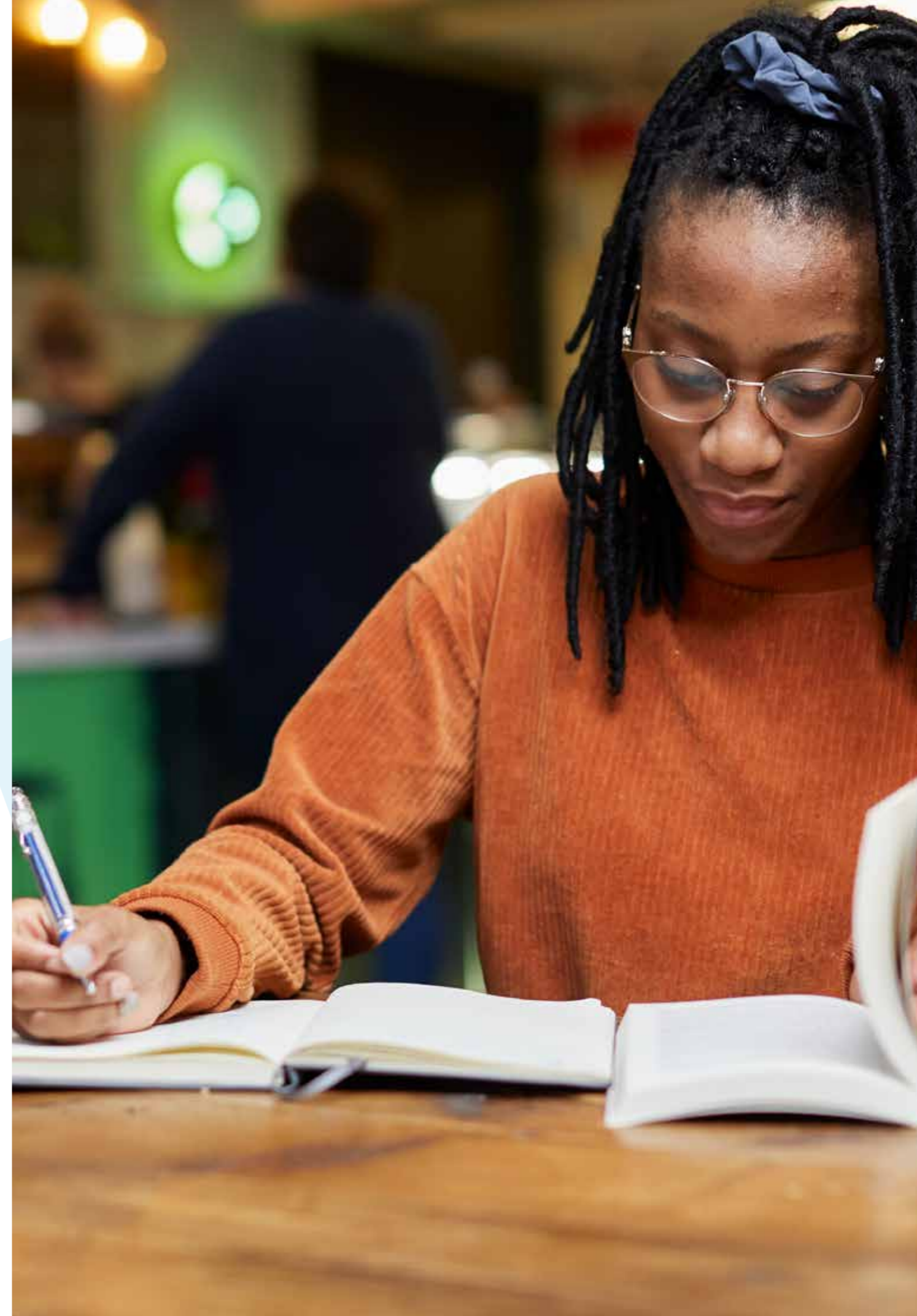
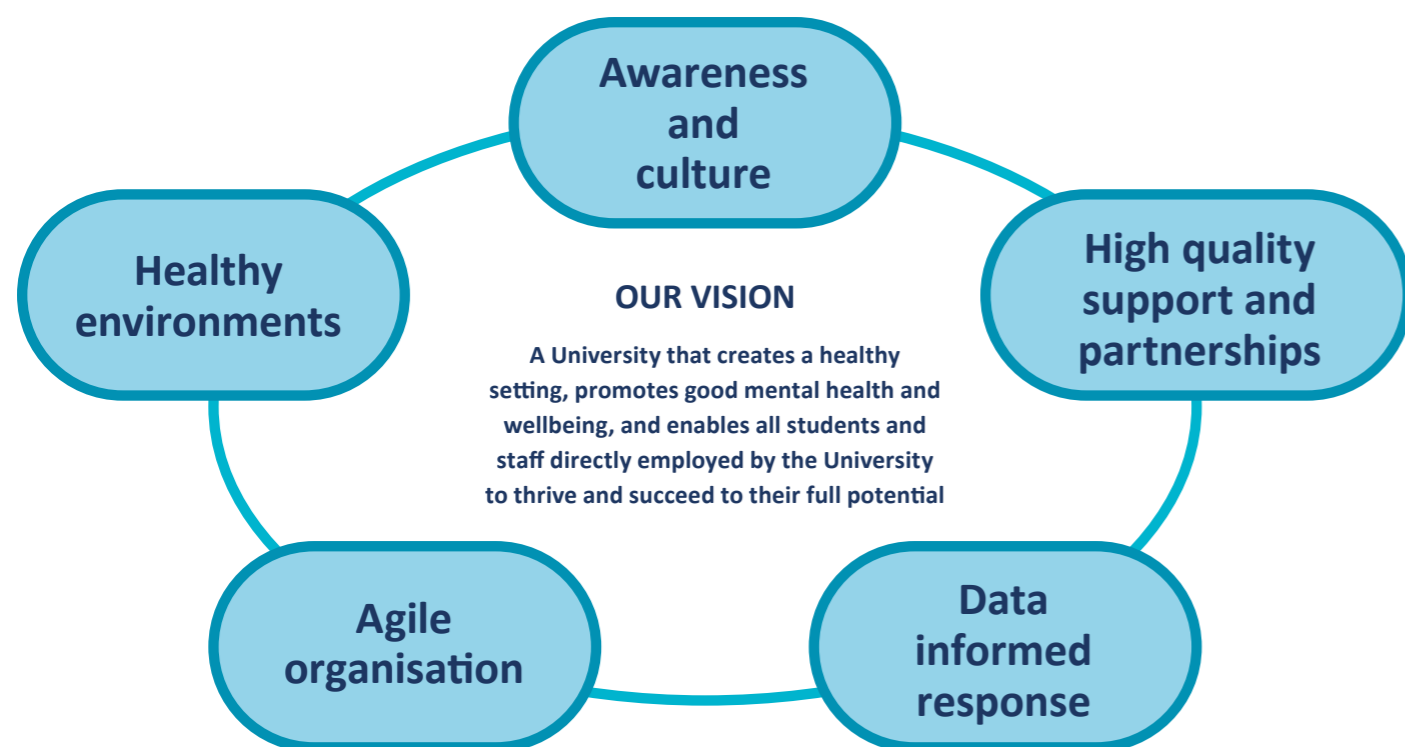
STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES AND RESPONSE

This strategy builds on solid foundations with the practice and activities already supporting mental health and wellbeing at the University. But, however strong those foundations, the growing challenges of this agenda mean we must do more to deliver on our commitment to our students and staff.

We have set five strategic objectives to provide a framework for our actions over the next five years, to ensure our whole organisation can deliver our vision: to be a University that creates a healthy setting, promotes good mental health and wellbeing, and enables all students and staff directly employed by the University to thrive and succeed to their full potential.

To meet these objectives, we will respond both with proactive measures, designed to create an environment which helps reduce the causes of mental ill health or threats to our people's wellbeing, and with reactive measures, responding to people experiencing poor mental health and wellbeing. Our action plan details the steps we will take over the next five years.

Manchester Met's framework for mental health and wellbeing



OBJECTIVE 1: AWARENESS AND CULTURE

Objective: Develop a greater awareness of mental health and wellbeing throughout our workforce and student body – fostering a culture of openness which enables staff and students to recognise and acknowledge poor mental health in themselves and others.

Creating and maintaining a culture that helps our people thrive is only possible if we are open about mental health and sensitive to wellbeing. When people feel comfortable acknowledging their state of mental health, they will more likely seek help, engage in self-help and support other people in managing their own mental health and wellbeing. Mental ill-health can be as debilitating as physical ill-health – we must put as much emphasis on supporting good mental health as we do on supporting good physical safety.

While the University offers an excellent range of mental health and wellbeing support for staff and students, the evidence shows that these services are not reaching everyone who needs them. There are people with mental ill-health going unsupported.

Through our staff consultation, we have found that some of our people are reluctant to report when sick leave is a result of mental ill-health, while some are uncomfortable discussing the impact of mental health issues on their work. And, although some of our student services are oversubscribed, there are others which are underused – particularly the services designed to support self-help or to reduce the risk of conditions deteriorating.

Our strategic response:

Making an open attitude to mental health and wellbeing a part of our University's culture will require a variety of different interventions over a number of years. These will include: staff training; raising the visibility of the support services available to staff and students; gaining an understanding of the barriers to using these services; and continuing to actively engage with external campaigns that address the stigma around mental health.

Leadership is particularly important in fostering an open culture. The implementation, resourcing and governance of this strategy will be crucial in demonstrating our leaders' support and commitment: mental health and wellbeing must be recognised and embedded into other key University strategies.

Through our award-winning, innovative Rise programme, we will continue to develop a responsive portfolio of opportunities to help students understand their own

wellbeing and develop their skills for peer-support. The content will be available as online courses and activities which broadly help students enhance the wellbeing of others through low-intensity interventions (for instance, through the implementation of student-devised art-based workshops).

OBJECTIVE 2: HIGH QUALITY SUPPORT AND PARTNERSHIPS

Objective: Provide high-quality, well-utilised, efficient and effective support to staff and students by developing appropriate strategic partnerships.

It's vital that we provide our staff and students with the support they need to produce their best work, unhindered by poor mental health and wellbeing.

We must keep building on our ability to support the wellbeing of our staff and students. This is key to preventing and reducing the impact of poor mental health on the University community, such as the consequences for student performance as well as the number of working days our staff lose to mental ill-health.

It's worth noting the role that sport and physical activity can play – the physical benefits are well known, but the broad evidence of its positive influence on wellbeing is often overlooked. The British Active Student Survey 2019/20 shows that those who are regularly active have enhanced personal and mental wellbeing are less likely to feel a sense of anxiety and isolation and are more likely to feel a sense of social inclusion and happiness.²⁰

It's important that we continue to develop and maintain valuable strategic and operational partnerships. Universities UK recommends two areas of focus for these partnerships. On one hand, we should work with parents, schools, colleges and employers during student transitions. On the other, we must work closely with the NHS to improve and coordinate access to care. It is also important to work with mental health charities and organisations.

Our strategic response:

We must make the best use of our resources to provide the most efficient and effective support possible. It's also vital that we seek external recognition for excellence to promote the support we offer.

To make the biggest difference we can with the resources we have, we will keep developing and evaluating our services for both staff and students – ensuring our support meets their needs at every step.

We will look to increase the scale and reach of our services by extending the types of support we offer. In particular, we will offer more services that can be delivered at scale without extensive resources – like workshops and self-help courses, together with advice and therapy delivered digitally.

MMU Sport has an important role to play – encouraging all our students and staff to develop positive health and lifestyle behaviours by providing and promoting opportunities for regular physical activity. These programmes include the Active Campus (turn up and play) activities, exercise referral scheme and the MCR Met Moves initiative, which rewards people for being active.

As research increasingly demonstrates the benefits of diet on mental health,²¹ Manchester Met harnesses its academic and professional expertise in nutrition and wellbeing – on and off campus. MetMUunch is a global, award-winning, student-led social enterprise focussing on nutrition, wellbeing and sustainability. It has a vital contribution to make and will continue to bring together a community of students to deliver events and online resources for the benefit of Manchester Met's staff, students and the wider community.

We will work in ever-closer collaboration with local NHS services via the Greater Manchester Student Mental Health Hub, while looking to help improve services for students with the most severe mental health needs by working in partnership with the statutory sector. We will also continue to work in collaboration with our strategic partners, such as Nuffield Health.

Furthermore, we will consider any further partnerships that can strengthen the support we offer during key transitions in a student's life – from college to university and from university to employer.

OBJECTIVE 3: DATA-INFORMED RESPONSE

Objective: Use data analytics and research to target and inform the development and evaluation of support services for staff and students.

Achieving objective two – delivering efficient and effective support – will require evidence. By making the most of the University's data and research expertise, we can develop and deploy evidence-based interventions and practices. This approach offers assurance that we are making best use of our resources to achieve our strategic vision.

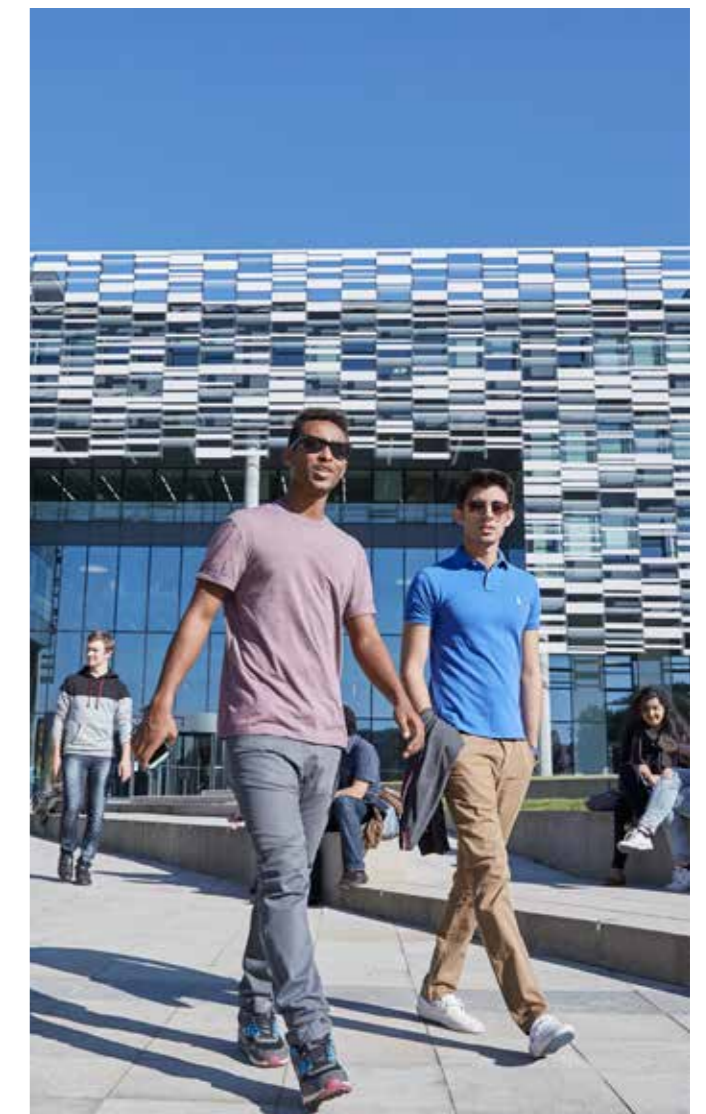
However, a rigorous and independent evaluation of our work in this area shows that we have not utilised these practices and interventions as fully as we could. Effective information sharing is critical to identify students and staff who are at risk, to assess that risk, to take appropriate action and to identify gaps in our support.

Our strategic response:

The University has extensive data that we can harness to help us monitor and evaluate our support for mental health and wellbeing for staff and students. We are in an ideal position to access specialist academic expertise for systematic and rigorous reviews of the interventions central to our strategic ambitions.

The University is also rich in data on student behaviour, which we will use to reach those students who need our services, whether proactive or reactive. In the same way that universities use analytics to identify students who need enhanced support with their learning and motivation, we will use analytics to identify students who are at risk due to their declining mental health.

We will also target interventions and shape the support we offer staff, using sickness and other relevant data to ensure colleagues are supported to return to work and avoid any recurrences. As such, we will aim to investigate any correlation between absence data and engagement with our Employee Assistance Programme.



OBJECTIVE 4: AGILE ORGANISATION

Objective: Evaluate and adapt the way we work, with the aim of enhancing mental health and wellbeing.

Organisational agility is an approach that involves adopting and developing the behaviours and capabilities that can help us be more adaptive, creative and resilient when dealing with complexity, uncertainty and change. This is particularly important during the global COVID-19 pandemic.

There is a wealth of evidence on the organisational and individual benefits of agile working – including its power to improve mental health and wellbeing, as well as supporting better organisational outcomes.²²

By developing new agile working practice and protocols, we can maintain good working relationships across the organisation. There is also evidence of a demand for increased agility from colleagues over recent years, together with a growing expectation from prospective candidates for both Academic and Professional Services roles.

Our strategic response:

From a staff perspective, we will work towards becoming a more agile organisation through a shift in culture, working behaviours and focus on workplace themes. This will help our staff perform in their roles while recognising the factors that could impact their (and others') mental health and wellbeing.

From a student perspective, we will continue to invest in and promote the use of digital platforms that deliver engaging, accessible and effective content and support, allowing students the flexibility to schedule their learning around personal commitments – in line with the University's Digital Strategy. In addition, we will augment information and technology to deliver personalised education at scale.

OBJECTIVE 5: HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

Objective: Develop and remodel the University's buildings and infrastructure to support better mental health and wellbeing, while making support services on campus more visible.

A healthy-settings approach aims to make the places where people learn, work and play as supportive as possible to mental health and wellbeing. As such, as we develop our campus, we must preserve and enhance those features of our buildings and infrastructure that support this approach.

This demands a whole-system perspective, encompassing a range of factors which can reduce the impact of our working day on our wellbeing – from new and remodelled buildings, to changing work practices and new approaches to digital technology for work and learning.

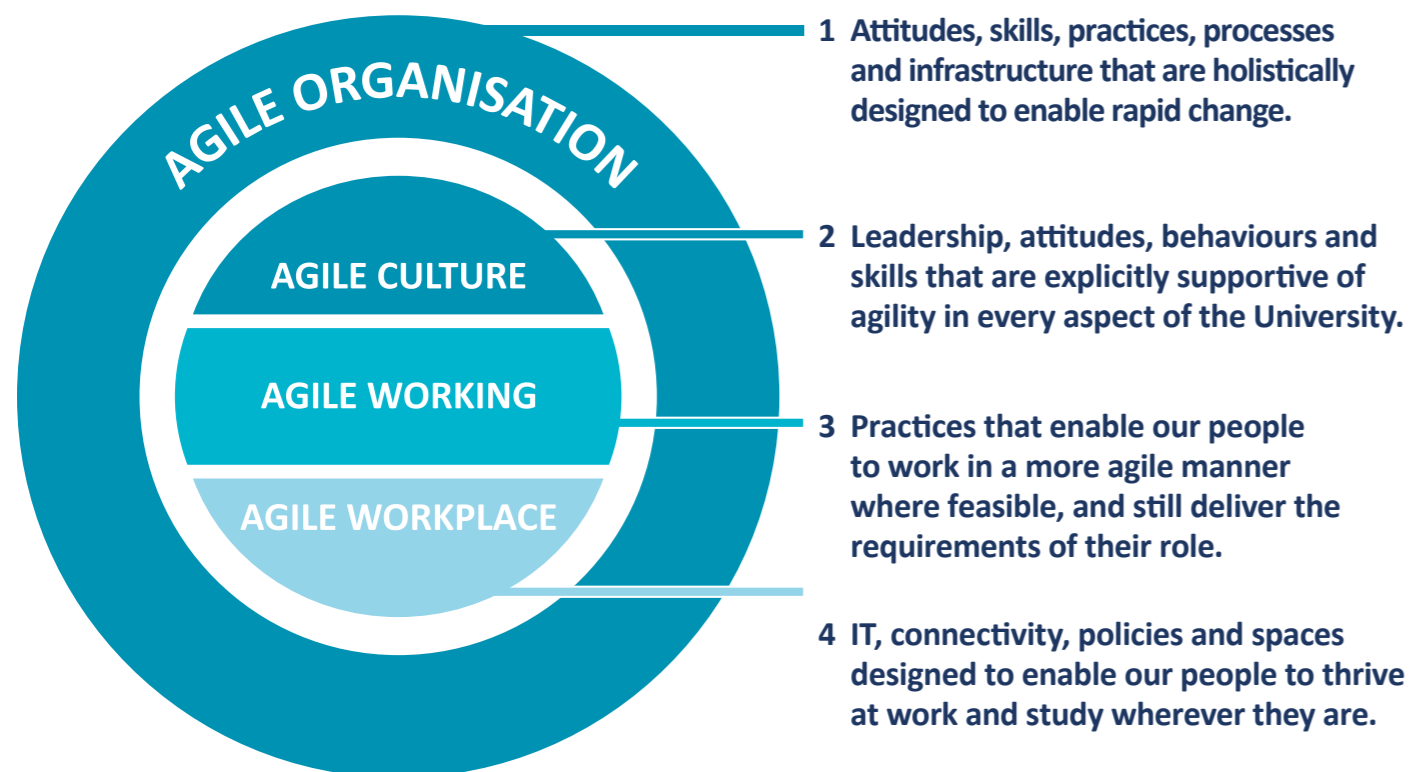
Our strategic response:

Whether designing new buildings or remodelling our existing estate, we will aim to maintain our emphasis on quiet space, natural light, green spaces and other aspects that promote good mental health and wellbeing.

We will assess our own student accommodation against the *British Property Federation Student Wellbeing Guide*²³ and continue to collaborate with private accommodation providers and Manchester City Council – communicating our priorities in terms of safety and design standards.

With the recent development of our Counselling and Mental Health suite and Student Hubs, we have already provided improved facilities while making our support services more visible. And, with the planned development of the All Saints Library, we will have opportunities to make further improvements to our student spaces and service offering in the near future.

Approach to achieving an agile organisation



MONITORING AND REVIEW

To deliver this strategy, the University has formed a Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group. Colleagues and students from across Manchester Met's community will be represented in the group's membership. The Strategy Group is responsible to the University's Executive Group, via its People Strategy Board. Progress will be reported against the action plan that accompanies this strategy. Performance of this strategy will be assessed regularly by a set of measures in the action plan, maintained by the Strategy Group. The Strategy Group will also ensure mental health and wellbeing considerations are embedded into other strategies and initiatives across the University.

This strategy has been prepared during the COVID-19 crisis, a time of unprecedented change and uncertainty. As such, it's likely that there will be substantial changes in the medium term (eg the way social distancing could change our learning and working environment).

While this strategy is intended to cover 2021 to 2025, the evolving picture of how work and learning might emerge from the COVID-19 crisis means that our aims, approach and plans may also need to evolve. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Group will therefore direct a review of our strategic objectives and actions in 2022, ensuring that our strategy offers an effective framework for achieving our vision, before reporting their findings to the People Strategy Board and the University Executive Group.



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