



Blackpool Sixth Form College Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing Through Smoother Transitions

The Blackpool Sixth Form College is based on a single, modern campus with a community of 2,055 students (all full-time study) and 212 dedicated staff delivering a range of learning programmes seeking to promote resilience by increasing opportunity. Set in a geographical area that presents many socio-economic challenges the college attracts students from across the Fylde Coast, with approximately half of the students coming from Blackpool itself. Tremendous efforts have been made to support the educational progress of students and promote good mental health and wellbeing across the college community.

The Challenge - Improving Mental Health and Wellbeing Through Smoother Transitions

The transition from high school to further education for many students is both exciting and challenging. For some the anticipation of moving into a new learning environment can increase stress and have a negative impact upon mental health. At Blackpool Sixth Form College improved information sharing with partner schools has helped to identify applicants with mental health conditions who may need additional support to manage this significant life event.

Planning into Practice

A member of the additional support team has established links with SENCOs from all partner schools and meets twice per year to work together to plan the right for applicants, including students with mental health conditions, to ensure a smooth and successful transition to college. A transition plan is developed which may include a key worker being allocated, who has completed mental health first aid training, and a series of supported visits to college to help students to feel comfortable in the new environment prior to enrolment.

Establishing an environment that fosters and promotes mutual respect, learning and inclusivity has been recognised to support mental health and wellbeing; not only for new students but for all of our College community. At Blackpool Sixth Form College Pastoral Mentors deliver sessions to all students on resilience, mental wellness, healthy lifestyles, resilience and coping with stress and anxiety. Outside agencies have also been invited in to College to support preventative/awareness raising work with students. The NHS and local Connect Counselling Service worked in partnership to deliver sessions to small groups of students on coping with exam stress and anxiety. Connections with outside agencies and established referral pathways are in place and managed by the safeguarding team who refer students to targeted support (Adult



Mental Health Services) through the Single Point of Access (SPA) as required. The welfare officer has developed strong and effective links with outside agencies including The Hub who provide advice on substance misuse and The Butterfly Project and Phoenix Project for young people who self-harm. The College also recognise that in order to meet the needs of students whose learning is impacted by mental health conditions it is important to provide some help and support on site. A counselling service offering one-to-one support to about 200 students each year is currently in operation. A robust Fitness to Study Policy is in place with operational guidance that ensures that reasonable adjustments and support is in place for students whose learning is impacted by their mental health conditions. Two dedicated members of staff act as key workers to ensure that appropriate support is in place so students are able to keep up with their studies.

Improving staff awareness of mental health issues has been fundamental to developing an environment that supports mental health and wellbeing at Blackpool Sixth Form College. A programme of training and development has been delivered by experts in the field since 2015 and has included topics from basic mental health awareness to dealing with more specific issues in relation to suicide and risk. By improving knowledge and building skills staff are now more confident in recognising the signs of mental health problems early, enabling them to sign post those who need it to further help and support.

Measuring success

The retention for rates for students with mental health conditions has improved over the past 12 months - 89.5% compared to 76.7% in 2015-16. By supporting students to stay in college and supporting them to manage mental health difficulties effectively they have a better chance of building resilience and achieving greater success in their future studies. Currently, students with mental health conditions supported by the Fitness to Study process are predicted to achieve at or above their target grade in 67% of their courses compared to 44% in 2015-16. The on-site counselling service obtained feedback from those who have accessed its services. Students were asked to rate how they felt on a scale of 0-8, with 8 the highest rating, at both the start of and end of counselling. The average rating at the start of counselling was 1.17 and average rating at the end of counselling was 5.88; thus indicating clear and significant improvements in mood as a result of the intervention.

Future developments

- Extend the number of staff trained in mental health first aid.
- Increase awareness raising of mental health issues and resilience with students through pastoral programme.



- Student mental health forum being set up.
- A small group of staff to be trained to act as a mental health early help team

Key Learning

- Make links with key staff from your catchment high schools. Discuss ideas and strategies that will help support all students make a smoother transition.
- Ensure that information sharing is made possible in order to support those students who might need things to be done differently. You might need to establish a written agreement as a partnership.
- Share learning with feeder schools, staff teams and wider organisations. Try delivering some joint training to open discussions and bring people together.
- Establish an environment that supports mental health and wellbeing for all in your college community. This will help to make the transition for more anxious students much smoother.
- Having an experienced member of staff in place to support students who need additional help requires good training. Make the most of staff development opportunities for key personnel.