

TOWARDS HEALTHY LEADERSHIP

A tool for leaders to have conversations about mental health and wellbeing and how this affects their institution's culture and strategic priorities



Executive Brief

Healthy leadership

CREATING THE RIGHT CONVERSATIONS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

INTRODUCTION

From Professor Steven West

Thank you for getting involved with this important work.

This tool has been designed to equip senior leaders in universities with a simple and practical way to explore, through conversations, mental health and wellbeing in the contexts of their own culture and strategy.

This is an opportunity to open conversations, build self-awareness, share experiences and consider potential from the leadership perspective.

The initial idea came from the desire to approach mental health and wellbeing in a fundamentally different way in universities – to recognise this as a driver of performance. It stems from a belief that healthier people live more fulfilled lives, make better leaders and perform better - a win win for the staff and students as well as the university itself.

It's about looking through the lens of university leaders and exploring the potential of working with mental health and wellbeing (particularly their own) in a more strategic way to improve performance – led from the top in a joined up way for the institution.

The tool and this guide is the result of the input and guidance of 12 university VCs across the UK – all with different institutions but the same mission – to positively impact the experience of students and staff. They have worked in close collaboration with Mark Watson and his team.

Challenges around dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, racial inequality and tough economic conditions have only increased the importance of this work.

The approach taken to developing the tools involved getting to grips with how universities function as businesses at a high level, understanding how the people who lead them are seeing things and setting up conversations that bring out the potential of looking at mental health and wellbeing in a holistic, joined up and positive way (i.e. not just looking at it from a deficit point of view).

At its core, this is a leadership challenge that involves changing the way university leaders behave and act in improving the conditions for their students and staff.

It's about bringing an understanding of mental health and wellbeing into the way the university is run and how investing in one area will impact on others (e.g. investing in the mental health and wellbeing of staff will positively impact on the mental health and wellbeing of students).



The vision is to build on the work already underway through the Stepchange framework and Student Charter and create mentally healthy places to learn, work and live that impact not just on the lives of students and staff but on the reputation and success of the university, as well as the communities and economies in which these institutions operate.

We believe this work has never been more important and we want to get as many universities joining in these conversations as possible to explore the potential of the role played by leaders (the ambition is that universities will be able to run this tool themselves, following a short facilitation support session from Mark Watson and his team).

This tool is a first of its kind for this sector and this guide has been put together to help give the context around the tool as well as providing support for the person/people running the sessions – it will continue to evolve the more people get involved.

I look forward to continuing to work with you on this exciting and important project.

Professor Steven West



“Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don’t just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn’t just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards.”

Theodore Zeldin



Tool overview

THE APPROACH

We’ve chosen a conversation tool as the approach to supporting leaders in this context. Unlike many traditional approaches to communicating within organisations (e.g. email, powerpoint, training days), conversation tools equip leaders to take the lead in creating engaging and personally meaningful experiences for their teams.

It’s about opening up conversations around important areas so that people can draw their own conclusions and decide the best course of action for them. It’s an approach that recognises the multidimensional nature of modern leadership and one that seeks to bring to the fore the many different aspects of being an effective leader.

The tool has three parts that have been designed as a series and to be run in the order shown here.

The **3 parts** involve

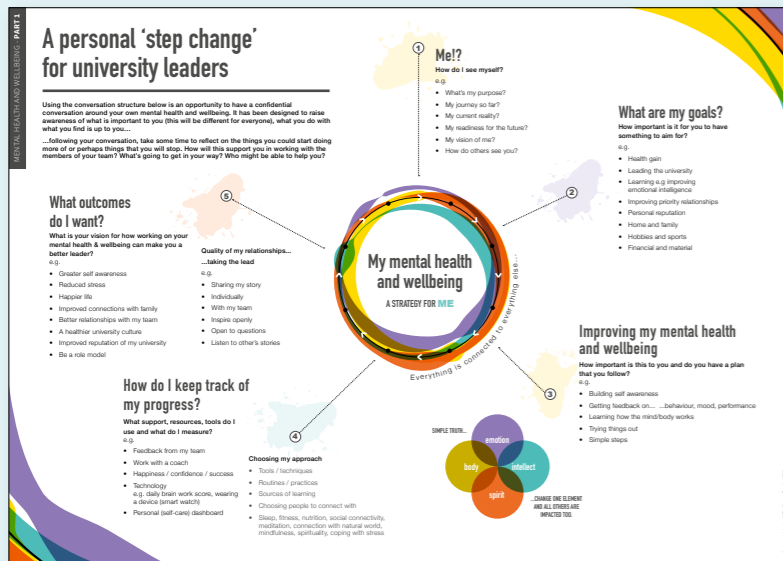
- focus on the individual
- stepping back to consider the whole university
- coming together to focus on how the leadership team will work better

For part 1 of the tool you will need to decide if members of your team will work one-on-one with an independent facilitator or alternatively, use the material’s prompts and questions to support personal reflection.

For part 2 and 3 there is the option to have the tool externally facilitated with your team – Mark Watson who has led the design and development of this tool with a group of 12 vice-chancellors – or you could possibly use someone within or working with your team.

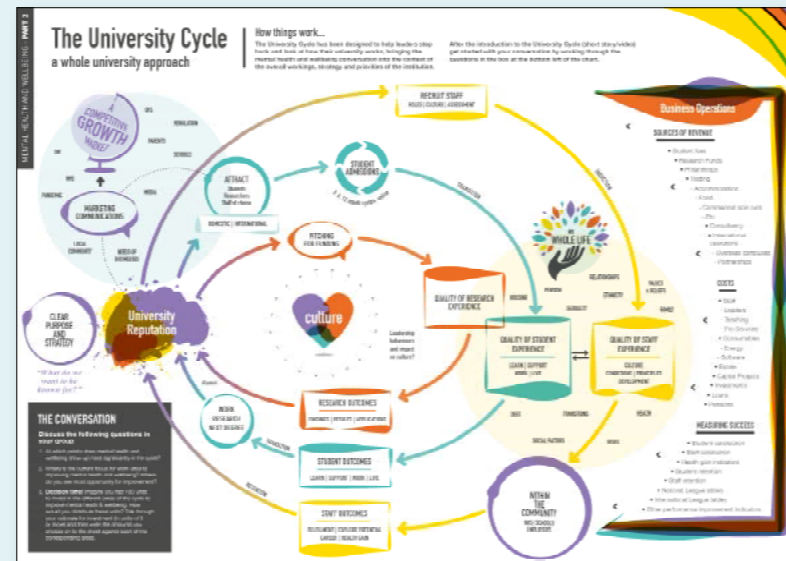


PART 1 A PERSONAL 'STEP CHANGE' FOR UNIVERSITY LEADERS



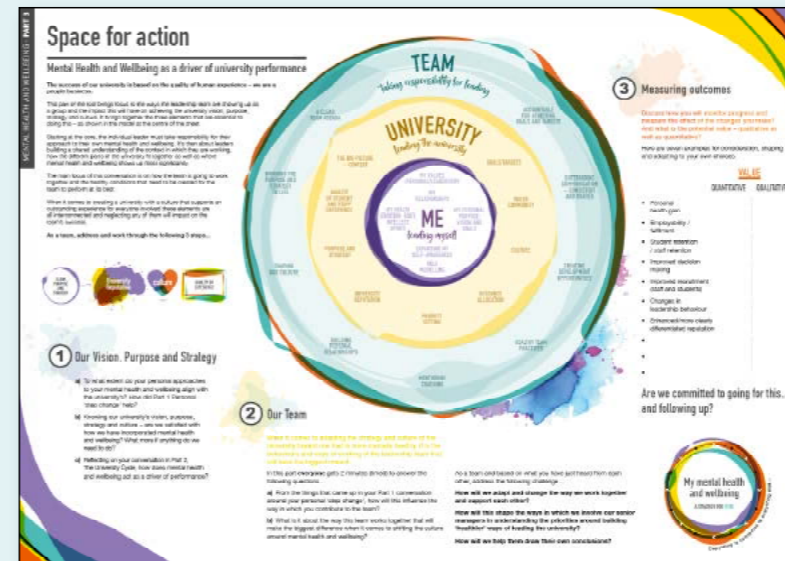
- A mentally healthy university needs its leaders to be self-aware, and to be conscious of how they approach their own mental health and wellbeing.
- Self-reflection part of the tool that immerses leaders in what mental health and wellbeing means to them, on a personal level (how they actively manage their own health) and in terms of the impact they have on the university.
- Prepares leaders to share their experiences, thoughts and ideas for action with the rest of their team.

PART 2 THE UNIVERSITY CYCLE



- This is about stepping back and taking a look at how the university works as a whole – the big picture.
- To consider where mental health and wellbeing impacts the performance of the university in a positive way.
- This part of the tool provides the right starting points, 'hooks', for strategic level conversations and gets leaders thinking about and discussing where they would prioritise investments in resources to improve mental health and wellbeing.

PART 3 SPACE FOR ACTION



- Part 3 brings focus to how the leadership team will need to come together as a team and how they influence the culture of the university – bringing collective awareness to the effectiveness of the team.
- It starts by connecting with the current vision, purpose and strategy of the university – to ensure the team are happy that mental health and wellbeing is sufficiently incorporated.
- Then each team member will get the chance to reflect and share how they are seeing the challenges of the team in realising the vision, as well as how they will contribute.
- The final part gets the team considering how they will measure outcomes.



WHAT YOU'LL GET FROM THIS GUIDE

- This guide is here to help give you, the facilitator responsible for running the tool, a reminder of the context and vision for this work as well as practical direction when it comes to using the tool and opening further conversations.
- It will help you think through how to use the tool in the context of your university and how to run each part of the tool with some useful prompts and suggestions.
- It also covers some of the frequently asked questions that have come up when the tool has been run during the pilot and beta testing process.
- Ideas around how to use the tool in a flexible way – when, who, how often.

Further information

If you would like to know more about the tool, please contact

John de Pury at Universities UK – john.depury@universitiesuk.ac.uk


Or

Mark Watson at The Watson Practice – mark@thewatsonpractice.com

The tool will be available to buy in a box that provides all the physical materials to run the conversations for a team of up to 15 people. Multiple packs and custom packs will be made available subject to demand.

Single boxed packs will be available from The Watson Practice – lead@thewatsonpractice.com

These conversations will benefit from expert facilitation of the tool, tailored to your university's requirements. This will be available from The Watson Practice as above. Please contact Mark to discuss.



“What lies before us and what lies behind us
are small matters compared to what lies within
us. And when we bring what is within us out
into the world, miracles happen.”

Henry David Thoreau



Universities UK



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