



Wellbeing At London Metropolitan University

About LMU

London Metropolitan University (LMU) is one of London's most diverse universities. As well as providing access to students, many of whom would otherwise have been unable to enter higher education, LMU transforms lives through excellent education. Many of LMU's students come from sections of society that are disadvantaged when accessing education and employment. LMU gives them the skills to stack the odds in their favour. The university had a total of 9,714 students in 2018–19, of whom 64% were from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background. 69% were mature students (34% were aged 30 or older), 14% had a known disability and 142 distinct nationalities were represented.

The Challenge

The professional services staff manage a huge variety of challenges. These include requests for help with academic studies, housing, money and wellbeing issues. They also provide multiple services to their academic colleagues.

The professional services staff are well supported internally through their line managers and from specialist teams within the university. However, the university faces significant financial challenges in a competitive higher education marketplace and has an ambitious plan for the future to deliver. There has been a number of organisational changes in the past few years and demands on, and expectations for, the professional services staff are therefore complex. Staff can feel overwhelmed and it is very easy to become fatigued in this environment.





P E A R

Our solution

We created a programme, Reflective Professionals, for staff to support their wellbeing at work. The team at PEAR wanted to help the professional services teams understand and influence the behaviours, thoughts and feelings of students and colleagues. Using attachment theory we wanted to help staff recognise the ways their customers might respond to psychological threat.

We introduced the concept of the 'mask', the front that all of us wear when at work and in our dealings with other people. We explored the function of the mask, acknowledging how it helps and sometimes hinders.

We spent significant time examining the overt feelings of anger and covert feelings of shame and guilt that their customers experienced during their interactions with professionals. It was crucial for staff to clearly recognise their boundaries. They take on significant responsibilities and it is helpful to understand the protective factors that lead to good mental health and wellbeing.

Within the programme there was an opportunity for staff to safely explore their frustrations and when feelings of resentment might develop. We provided support for staff to acknowledge and process these feelings.

Part of the programme was about practising and improving interpersonal skills. Practical people skills such as assertiveness and concepts such as attunement helped staff develop the competencies to collaborate better with others. We also focused on how to work with imperfect processes, systems and the organisational boundaries that all large and complex organisations have.

The programme design consisted of 3-hour sessions for five days over a normal working week. This allowed staff time to learn, reflect and do their daily work. As well as individualised planning to build reflective capacity there was a follow up session with participants six-months after the programme was delivered. This session focused on sustaining the changes participants had initiated.

The Impact

The programmes are ongoing and so far, eight cohorts have completed them. We measured impact on completion of the course and after six months. On completion, 97% of participants would highly recommend the programme to colleagues.

After six months:

- 92% of participants have put the training to use in their everyday work
- 55% of participants feel able to train their colleagues on what they have learnt
- 61% were more positive overall towards their employer due solely to this programme

"We successfully rolled out the programme to over 100 staff and have been very impressed as to how well the delivery met our requirements and the brief. Due to the overwhelming positive feedback from delegates we are continuing to deploy the programme more widely."

Rosemary Benson, Principle Professional Development Manager