



*Clare Bates has been a wellbeing advocate since the scheme launched and works in the **Department of Physics**...*



What attracted me to becoming a wellbeing advocate

I didn't volunteer straight away to be an wellbeing advocate; I was concerned that because I was in HR, people may feel wary about coming to talk and look for support. However I have a manager who is very passionate about wellbeing and she felt we needed to get more people on board, so I volunteered to take part in the scheme.

How Wellbeing works in the Department of Physics

We are a large department consisting of over 1,000 people once you factor in researchers, visitors, support staff and students and to reflect this we have seven wellbeing advocates across the department. As the 'Lead' wellbeing advocate for the Department I have arranged termly catch ups to talk about any themes that we have seen emerging and any concerns that we might have.

We have a comprehensive section on our Intranet that deals with mental health and wellbeing which employees can access and receive signposting to a number of support services. We also created a wellbeing advocate poster which is displayed on screens across the department, so people are familiar with our faces. I believe that once people are familiar with the concept, wellbeing gets more embedded in the culture.

As the department prepares to bring staff back to work following the Covid-19 lockdown, HR is producing a Return to Work document. The wellbeing advocates have agreed to be listed as a source of contact for those preparing to return. Sometimes we all receive so much information, it is difficult to remember what you have seen, and where so I have developed a crib sheet to help our wellbeing advocates to be clear about what the University is offering in terms of wellbeing, should they be contacted by their colleagues.

“Don't be daunted at the beginning, do one small thing that might help your department”

Wellbeing Week at the Department of Physics

In 2019 and 2020 we have held a Wellbeing Week in which a variety of events for staff have been put on. Events ranged from Nordic Walking to a comedy performance. They have been hard work to organise but there has been a real buzz around the department during and after the events.

Dealing with challenges

It is important to accept that you cannot force wellbeing on people. Everyone is looking for something different when it comes to wellbeing; some people are happy with being directed towards specific guidance, some people are keen to get involved in activities. You might experience resistance when you suggest something new, there's always an element of fear when you announce that you want to do something different but try not to be daunted by this, if you feel like it's a good idea, proceed with it.

Also accept that sometimes things don't work out – that's totally fine, move on and try something different, that's just part of learning. You might plan something and only six people go – don't be disheartened, that's six people who you have helped in some way; that's a success!

The importance of senior support

We have emphasised to line managers the importance of encouraging staff to take time out for wellbeing activities, reassuring them that they are not going to get penalised if they attend. Sometimes employees need to see the action happening from senior members of staff to feel confident to go to events during working hours.

“ The best thing about being a wellbeing advocate is to feel like you are making a difference to the wellbeing programme and that although sometimes it feels slow, the things we do today, staff in years to come will thank us for. Changing culture does not happen quickly. ”