



# The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter



Department  
for Education

Teaching ☒

**Supporting documents:** The development of this charter has been informed by a range of existing resources and frameworks including: the Mental Health at Work Commitment; The Association of Colleges' Mental Health and Wellbeing Charter; The Framework for Ethical Leadership in Education; the National Education Union's Mental Health Charter; and the Valued Worker Scheme (endorsed by NASUWT, GMB, Unison and Unite).

# Foreword

Everyone working in education has gone above and beyond the call of duty during the Covid-19 pandemic in continuing to teach a broad and balanced curriculum, and in adapting their institutions to ensure all students and staff can return safely. Despite the challenges, we've seen exemplary leadership, innovation and resilience in the profession.

Whilst many of the issues this charter seeks to help address are not new, it is more important than ever that wellbeing and mental health are at the forefront of education policy. In launching this charter, the whole

sector has come together to make a commitment to protect the wellbeing and mental health of those who work in our schools and colleges.

I would like to thank all of those who work in education for all that they have done, and continue to do, to educate and support young people.

**The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP**

Minister of State for School Standards  
May 2021

# **wellbeing(n):** **A state of complete physical and mental health that is characterised by high-quality social relationships.<sup>1</sup>**

**We believe that everyone working in education should have the opportunity to enjoy the highest possible standard of wellbeing and mental health.**

We are united in our view that improved wellbeing among education staff is a key outcome for education policy. Our education staff are a precious resource: valuing them, and their wellbeing and mental health, is a duty we all share.

Not only is this a good thing itself, it is critical in recruiting and retaining high quality education professionals now and in the future. It is also crucial in securing better outcomes for young people, including regarding their own wellbeing and mental health.

We want to see a sector that is free from mental health discrimination, guided by emotional intelligence, and characterised by supportive, nurturing cultures. A sector where the conditions are such that every member of staff can thrive.

We recognise that everyone has a role to play in creating and sustaining those conditions, including government, leaders, employers and education staff themselves. In signing this charter, we signal our intent to come together with people across the system with the shared aim of improving wellbeing at every level.

We will hold ourselves accountable in the delivery of the commitments set out below and will uphold the Principles of Shared Understanding that underpin them.

Association of Colleges

Association of School and College Leaders

Charles Dickens Primary School

Confederation of School Trusts

Department for Education

Education Support

Kensington Primary School

Learning in Harmony Trust

Meadow High School

Mind

National Association of Head Teachers

NASUWT

National Education Union

Ofsted

Reaseheath College

Tapton School

What Works Wellbeing

<sup>1</sup> This definition was agreed by the Department for Education's Expert Advisory Group on Education Staff Wellbeing. Schools and colleges should use this working definition as a basis for discussing what wellbeing means for them, in their organisation.

# The Department for Education

We recognise that the Department for Education (DfE) shapes the policy environment that state funded schools and colleges operate in, and that our policies can have both direct and indirect impacts on the wellbeing of education staff. DfE will work in partnership

with the sector, leading the way in protecting, enhancing and promoting wellbeing.

DfE recognises that we have a different relationship with the Further Education (FE) sector. The approach to implementation will reflect that.<sup>2</sup>

## We will:



### 1. 'Design-in' wellbeing

We will integrate wellbeing into DfE's school workload **policy test**, where appropriate, considering the impact of policy changes on staff wellbeing.



### 2. Support the sector to drive down unnecessary workload

We will continue to work with the sector to drive down unnecessary workload and promote the Workload Reduction Toolkit. We will work to remove unnecessary burdens, including improving how we collect data.



### 3. Measure and respond to changes in staff wellbeing

For the secondary and primary sectors, we will measure on an ongoing basis the levels of anxiety, happiness, worthwhileness, life satisfaction and job satisfaction across the profession, using established metrics and methods. We will track trends over time and build this evidence into policy making. We will also continue to take the advice of sector experts on wellbeing and mental health.<sup>3</sup>

We will engage with FE sector bodies to understand insights into staff mental health and wellbeing within the sector. Where appropriate we will build this evidence into policy making.

<sup>2</sup> Definition of colleges covers further education colleges, sixth-form colleges, independent specialist colleges, dance and drama colleges, independent learning providers, local authority providers, designated institutions, employer providers and higher education institutions that provide further education and/or apprenticeship training up to and including level 5.

<sup>3</sup> This will include building wider wellbeing evidence into policymaking, such as measures of mental health stigma reduction.



#### 4. Ensure that DfE guidance meets user needs

Where appropriate we will ensure DfE guidance covers staff wellbeing. We will also develop guidance based on the needs of educational professionals, focusing on what they need to know and do. We will publish GOV.UK content aimed at education professionals only during working hours (unless, for specific guidance documents, there is a significant user need not to do so, or there is a legislative requirement).



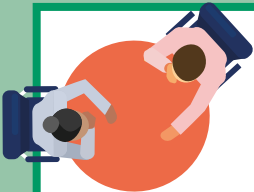
#### 5. Champion flexible working and diversity

We commit to establish school cultures, and encourage FE settings, to support and value flexible working at all career stages. We will also strengthen our efforts to promote diversity in the sector – eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.



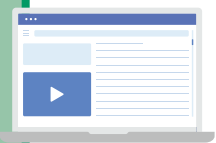
#### 6. Break down stigma around mental health

We will build staff wellbeing and mental health into DfE's wider communications strategy on recruitment and retention, linking to existing campaigns that aim to tackle mental health stigma in our society.



#### 7. Embed wellbeing in training and professional development

We will continue to strengthen support for professional development. We will ensure that training and development is underpinned by the Standard for Teachers' Professional Development and that it includes mental health and wellbeing where appropriate. We will also ensure that teacher training and professional development continues to include a focus on managing pupil behaviour effectively.



#### 8. Improve access to mental health and wellbeing resources

We will work to improve access to high quality mental health and wellbeing resources online, with a particular focus on those that help employers and staff deliver the 'organisational commitments' as set out on the next page.



#### 9. Review

We will review progress made against our commitments in 2023. We will also review the impact of this charter in helping to protect, promote and enhance wellbeing among education staff.



Ofsted recognises that we have a dual role to play in protecting and enhancing the wellbeing of education staff. First, we are committed to making sure our requirements of schools and colleges on wellbeing are clear. Second, we recognise that education staff can feel that inspections are a source of stress.

- 1 We will ensure that inspectors take staff wellbeing into account in coming to their judgements and monitor this through quality assurance and evaluation.**
- 2 We will review whether the framework is having inadvertent impacts on staff wellbeing (for example, creating unnecessary workload) and take steps to alleviate any issues.**

- 3 We will continue to clarify that we do not expect providers to create documentation for inspection, to try to reduce administrative workload. We will also be clear that:**

- we do not grade individual lessons or people
- we do not require evidence from any lesson visit that could be used in capability/disciplinary proceedings or for the purposes of performance management
- we do not require lessons to be planned in a certain way or for lessons plans to be provided to inspectors
- we do not require schools or colleges to prepare for inspections
- we do not require schools or colleges to provide information in any specific format

# Organisational commitments

In signing this charter, this school, college or trust commits to placing wellbeing and mental health at the heart of our decision making. We will support staff to make positive choices for their own wellbeing and encourage a collegiate culture across and between all roles in the school or college. **Specifically, we commit to develop a long-term strategy for improving staff wellbeing that will:**

## **1 Prioritise staff mental health**

We will:

- tackle mental health stigma within the organisation, promoting an open and understanding culture
- give the same consideration and support to mental health as physical health, including in the management of staff absence
- fulfil our legal duty to control the risks associated with work-related stress in the education setting so far as is reasonably practicable
- channel support to individuals whose role is known to have a significant emotional component. This might take the form of peer support, supervision, and/or counselling
- ensure that staff understand the real benefits that sensitive pastoral support can have, while also recognising where their limits are as non-specialists. We will therefore ensure there are opportunities to increase joint working in support of pupils, as well as routes to refer for specialist support

## **2 Give staff the support they need to take responsibility for their own and other people's wellbeing**

We will empower staff to take ownership of their own wellbeing and look out for the wellbeing of others. This will include ensuring that all staff are familiar with the

different dimensions of wellbeing, including mental health, financial wellbeing and physical wellbeing. We will ensure that staff know how to access appropriate guidance, support and tools, and that their use is encouraged throughout the organisation.

## **3 Give managers access to the tools and resources they need to support the wellbeing of those they line manage**

We will work to provide managers with tools, resources and training to support their staff. We will not, however, expect managers to provide professional wellbeing support for which they have no professional training, and will ensure that there are clear routes in place to escalate for further support.

## **4 Establish a clear communications policy**

We will provide clear guidance to all stakeholders (internal and external) on remote and out-of-school/college hours working, including when it is and isn't reasonable to expect staff to respond to queries. This should not necessarily include preventing staff from accessing email at 'unsociable' hours if it suits them personally.

## **5 Give staff a voice in decision-making**

We will constantly strive to improve the ways in which the voice of staff is included in the decision-making process across the college or school. (This may also include engagement with key stakeholders, such as recognised trade unions and others.) In particular, we will proactively seek to draw upon the experience of those with mental health issues and/or of discrimination, ensuring that, as per commitment, they are able to share their experience confidently and safely.



**6 Drive down unnecessary workload**

We will work proactively to drive down unnecessary workload, making use of available tools (such as the Workload Reduction Toolkit for schools).

**7 Champion flexible working and diversity**

We will work to create a supportive culture around flexible working. We will agree an approach that not only recognises employees' legal right to request flexible working but acknowledges that for some staff working flexibly can be a key means of protecting and enhancing their personal wellbeing.

We will work to promote diversity – eliminating discrimination, and advancing equality of opportunity.

**8 Create a good behaviour culture**

We will work with staff and pupils to maintain and implement a school-wide behaviour policy. All staff and pupils will have a shared understanding of how good behaviour is encouraged and rewarded, and the sanctions that will be imposed if pupils misbehave. We will support teachers to create calm, safe and disciplined environments, which allow teachers to teach and pupils to learn. Our approach will go hand-in-hand with understanding and supporting pupil mental health issues.<sup>4</sup>

**9 Support staff to progress in their careers**

We will ensure that staff are able to pursue professional development without adversely impacting their own or other people's workload. In schools, we will ensure that any professional development activity is aligned to the Standard for Teachers' Professional Development.

**10 Include a sub-strategy for protecting leader wellbeing and mental health**

We will ensure that all those with strategic decision-making responsibility (including as appropriate governors and trustees) should collaborate to develop a sub-strategy specifically for protecting leader mental health. This should include access to confidential counselling and/or coaching where needed.

**11 Hold ourselves accountable, including by measuring staff wellbeing**

We will measure the wellbeing of staff using recognised tools and metrics and be transparent about results. We will monitor trends over time, and act in response to changes.<sup>5</sup> Further, we will work with staff and relevant stakeholders (this might include parents, recognised trade unions and others) to agree an approach to organisational accountability on our commitments, giving due consideration to workload.

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<sup>4</sup> Please refer to DfE's guidance on mental health and behaviour: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mental-health-and-behaviour-in-schools--2).

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to charter's host page [www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/education-staff-wellbeing-charter) for guidance on these tools and their limitations.

# **Annex:**

## **Principles of shared understanding**

### **1. Wellbeing is subjective (but it can be measured)**

The signatories of this charter recognise wellbeing as a sense of ‘how we are doing’ that includes, but is not limited to, our physical and mental health, and the quality of our social relationships.<sup>6</sup> Wellbeing can therefore be described as a state of total health that is not merely the absence of disease or illness.<sup>7</sup> Schools and colleges should use this working definition as a basis for discussing what wellbeing means for them, in their organisation.

While wellbeing is itself subjective, signatories also recognise that there are indicators that can and should be measured. In the UK, the National Wellbeing Programme at the Office for National Statistics has drawn upon the expertise of leading academics from around the world and national debate within the UK, and now reports on a range of indicators in its national wellbeing data sets. For organisations, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing’s workplace wellbeing question bank includes a list of questions that can be used by employers to measure and monitor the wellbeing of employees.

### **2. Wellbeing has multiple benefits**

In England, the state-funded school system employs almost one million people<sup>8</sup> (FTE), with an estimated further 216,500 in the FE sector.<sup>9</sup> The signatories of this charter recognise that the wellbeing of these people is something that should be promoted, protected and enhanced for its own sake.

In addition, the whole of the education system needs to attract and retain high-quality professionals. Improving the wellbeing of staff, including by creating supportive cultures, is a crucial means of increasing and safeguarding workforce supply in the long-term. Wellbeing is not the only factor involved in recruitment and retention, but it is recognised that improving wellbeing in the sector can help to both increase the chance of keeping current talent, and heighten the appeal of the sector to new talent in the long-term.

### **3. Wellbeing is holistic**

The wellbeing of individuals is affected by many interrelated factors. This means that levels of low or high wellbeing are rarely due to just one factor, and that the issue should be looked at holistically. The signatories of this charter recognise that not all such factors are unique to education staff. Equally, there are many critical factors outside of the workplace (like access to key services<sup>10</sup>) that are beyond the scope of this charter, and outside the influence of signatories.

There are many evidence-based frameworks that aim to capture the drivers of staff wellbeing inside the workplace.<sup>11</sup> The Department for Education used the following evidence-based model from What Works Wellbeing<sup>12</sup> as a reference point during its engagement with the expert advisory group on education staff wellbeing. It sets out five main drivers of wellbeing in the workplace, some of which overlap.

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<sup>6</sup> This follows the definition set out by both What Works Wellbeing and the Office for National Statistics.

<sup>7</sup> This follows the definition of health set out by the World Health Organisation.

<sup>8</sup> School workforce in England (2019) total FTE is 945, 805. Includes all teachers and support staff.

<sup>9</sup> Education & Training Foundation (2020) figure is headcount and is an estimate with caveats. See report.

<sup>10</sup> There are 10 dimensions of wellbeing under the National Wellbeing Programme: governance, relationships, economy, health, finance, personal wellbeing, where we live, occupation, education and environment.

<sup>11</sup> Those considered to be in the development of the below framework include Flourishing Across Europe and PERMA+

<sup>12</sup> What Works Wellbeing, 2018

- 1 **Health:** Including mental and physical health. In education, there is often a focus on stress caused by excessive workload (especially hours worked) and lack of recovery time.<sup>13</sup> Importantly, pupils and students can also present with highly complex emotional needs, including mental and physical health issues. This can directly impact the health of those who support them.<sup>14</sup>
- 2 **Security:** Including working conditions, safety, bullying and harassment, and financial security. Equality and diversity are of particular importance here, especially where a member of staff has protected characteristics that they feel make them vulnerable to discrimination.<sup>15</sup>
- 3 **Environment:** This is a broad category that in education can cover both:
  - (a) The organisational environment: including the physical environment (school or college facilities) and systems (such as the availability and efficaciousness of flexible working arrangements). This may also include the degree to which a member of staff identifies with organisational values.
  - (b) The policy environment: including the policies of the government of the day, and public perceptions of the status of the profession.
- 4 **Relationships:** In particular, the degree of support and respect an individual has from immediate colleagues, line managers, and leadership. It can also include relationships with parents.
- 5 **Purpose:** In particular, high-quality job design. For education staff, this can mean:
  - the right type of work for the individual
  - a sense of ‘belonging’ – including shared organisational goals and vision
  - the opportunity to develop and demonstrate competence, and progress in their career
  - an appropriate degree of autonomy

## 4. Wellbeing is a shared responsibility

We recognise that the responsibility for wellbeing and mental health must be shared across the entire education system. There is no single panacea or golden bullet to improving wellbeing. It must be a long-term and concerted effort from people across the system, each fulfilling their responsibilities, many of which are covered by a range of existing frameworks and legislation.

- a) **DfE and associated non-ministerial departments:** The policy environment determined by DfE and its agencies interacts with local school and college cultures to affect individuals working in education. Good policies will support employers, leaders and staff to care for themselves and for colleagues. The department recognises that the government has a different relationship with providers of further education and will tailor its approach to implementation accordingly.
- b) **Employers:** All school and college employers have a duty to protect the health, safety and welfare of their employees. This includes their mental health, and taking reasonable steps to prevent work-related stress. This duty is detailed in a range of legislation, including but not limited to:
  - The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974;
  - The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (as amended);
  - The Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013; and;
  - The Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002
- c) **Governing boards:** Governors have a critical role to play in influencing the overall culture of the organisation – including ensuring that this produces a supportive environment for staff. As set out in the ‘Governance Handbook’, this means ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>13</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>14</sup> DfE, 2018

<sup>15</sup> DfE, 2019

<sup>16</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/788234/governance\\_handbook\\_2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/788234/governance_handbook_2019.pdf)



- d) **Senior leaders:** Senior leaders play a critical role in shaping the culture of a school and college, and can have delegated responsibility for fulfilling the employer's legal commitments on health, safety and welfare. It is important to emphasise that senior leaders are also employees whose wellbeing and mental health is of paramount importance, and firmly within the scope of this charter.
- e) **Individuals:** Everyone at every level carries responsibility for their own self-care and personal decision-making, though that decision making can only ever make the

best of the broader context. Individuals also have a clear responsibility to look out for the wellbeing of others. Education staff should play an active role in influencing their culture, including in challenging policies and practices that threaten their own or others' wellbeing. The signatories of this charter are expected to work to provide individuals with the support and training they need to fulfil these responsibilities, and to ensure that it remains culturally safe for staff to discuss and debate matters of wellbeing and mental health within the school or college.



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