



MENTAL HEALTH AND APPRENTICESHIPS

KIRKLEES COLLEGE CASE STUDY

Background

Kirklees College trains approximately 2,000 apprentices in over 30 occupational areas across the Kirklees and Calderdale regions.

Polly Harrow, Head of Student Services talks about the level of need for mental health across the whole college and why the college started to improve the support provided for its apprentices.

[Kirklees interview -1](https://youtu.be/TCowoD9wrE8) (<https://youtu.be/TCowoD9wrE8>)

Supporting apprentices with mental health needs

Kirklees College was already providing effective support for full-time students with mental health needs and in recognising that its apprentices would require the same level of support it put in place the following measures:

- **Progress Coaches.** Here Polly Harrow explains their role, how they work alongside tutors and assessors and employers. [Kirklees interview – 2](https://youtu.be/TJ9lxKI9rHM) (<https://youtu.be/TJ9lxKI9rHM>)
- **Welfare Checks.** While few apprentices declare mental health needs, the level of issues and concerns are nevertheless high. All apprentices have 3 welfare checks per year and priority is given to those apprentices identified at induction as being at risk. The welfare checks are an opportunity for apprentices to open up about barriers and challenges they face. Support is then put in place.
- **Learning Support.** Polly Harrow explains that there are two strands to the support provided. One strand is the support to enable apprentices to cope with life outside of their apprenticeships such as homelessness, financial issues, health and wellbeing. The second is the support to enable apprentices to learn. This can include anger management, stress management, mindfulness as well as regular contact with Progress Coaches. [Kirklees interview – 3](https://youtu.be/OleQBbgvT6M) (<https://youtu.be/OleQBbgvT6M>)
- **Policies and Processes.** Kirklees College is clear that it is not doing anything different for apprentices with mental health needs but is trying to ensure that they have the same entitlements as all students. [Kirklees interview – 4](https://youtu.be/EKWy1RnSTLg) (<https://youtu.be/EKWy1RnSTLg>)

‘WE HAVE TO INTEGRATE OUR APPRENTICES MORE’



Impact of supporting apprentices with mental health needs

The use of Progress Coaches and the improved support to apprentices is new this academic year and data on impact is not yet available. However, signs are showing that the increased level of support is having an impact on health and wellbeing but also on attendance, punctuality and study skills.

[Kirklees interview - 5 \(https://youtu.be/BGJeXrGpJWo\)](https://youtu.be/BGJeXrGpJWo)

Staff training and support

All staff have access to staff development to help them support apprentices with mental health needs. This includes mental health awareness on conditions such as depression, anxiety and suicidal thoughts. Staff can also do the Mental Health First Aid training and Mindfulness training.

The college is trying to create a coaching culture within the organisation and is working to provide staff with the opportunities to develop skills to support all learners develop resilience, build confidence and self-esteem, critical thinking skills and respect for themselves and others. The college sees these as important personal and social skills outside of the skills required within the competency frameworks, especially for apprentices who are already in the workforce.

It is also recognised that on occasions, working with apprentices with mental health needs can raise issues for staff members. All staff are offered supervision when they work with apprentices who disclose their mental health and wellbeing needs. This is provided on an ad hoc basis, staff can take it up as and when they feel the need.

Team meetings are also a time when staff can receive support from their peers. Structured discussions enable staff to check out how they dealt with situations, ask for feedback and ideas with how they could have dealt with them differently. Polly Harrow knows that staff have to have their own level of resilience in the work they do and knows that this can have an impact on staff wellbeing, but explains that *'there are just some things you don't need to have to carry around with you'*.

Employer Engagement

Progress Coaches are able to work alongside the college staff who engage with employers ensuring that any concerns are picked up quickly and that apprentices are well supported in the workplace. Kirklees College finds that on the whole its employers are very considerate and concerned to support apprentices who are faced with challenges.

Business development model

Kirklees College draws down the funding to support apprentices with mental health and wellbeing needs. The college evidences all the work that is done to support apprentices, including any costs for reasonable adjustments, time spent with apprentices, as well as co-ordination and any actions taken.

Kirklees College has made an investment in the Progress Coaches knowing that they will eventually be able to draw down funding in time for the work that they do. However, the college also sees this as part of its business model for providing timely and effective support for employers, but especially in providing better services for its apprentices, ensuring that they have the same entitlements as all students and preparing them for a sustainable working future.

