



MENTAL HEALTH AND APPRENTICESHIPS

WIGAN ADULT LEARNING CASE STUDY

Background

Wigan Council have over 390 apprentices employed throughout all their services as well as being an apprenticeship learning provider through their adult learning services.

The support provided to apprentices sits within a wider health and wellbeing strategy developed by the borough. Within the 'Deal for Health and Wellness' plan for the borough, it states that through partnership working with residents, industry and council employees it will 'Support people to live well, helping those who are unemployed into work and training and helping them benefit from the fastest growing economy in the UK'.

Alex Ashall – Wellbeing Co-ordinator for the Council, and once an apprentice herself, explains how they hope that this holistic and whole council initiative will make a difference.

[Wigan interview – 1 \(https://youtu.be/CJxis4VHOUA\)](https://youtu.be/CJxis4VHOUA)

Supporting apprentices with mental health needs

Out of the 393 apprentices with Wigan Council, only 6 have a declared mental health need. Helen Daniels – Skills and Learning Manager with the Adult Learning Service knows that the number is much higher. She explains that many apprentices do not declare mental health problems because they are worried that it will affect their employment chances. She also explains that many people do not identify the feelings of low mood, sadness, anxiety or anger as being a mental health problem. She also realises that many apprentices face challenges because of family and relationship problems, homelessness, debt, alcohol or drug issues, for example, which may mask mental health needs or be the trigger to developing mental health problems. Knowing about and supporting the

mental health of apprentices is important in enabling them to succeed but is also part of the council ethos to look after the workforce, maximise productivity and effectiveness and take responsibility for their own mental health and wellbeing.

- **Recruitment and induction.** The apprentice service seeks to ensure that all apprentices are able to talk about the challenges they face and concerns they have at all stages. There is a culture of openness and all staff and apprentices feel able to ask questions and talk about issues. Applicants are asked at recruitment about mental health needs, and also again at induction and at regular reviews.
- **On-programme support.** As apprentices are employees, they are eligible for all the entitlements of other employees such as flexi-working, Employee Assistance Programme, awareness raising sessions etc., but as apprentices they are also provided with access to the Remploy Mental Health Support Service, supported by the Safeguarding Policy, provided with a workplace mentor and receive regular IAG sessions.

[Wigan interview – 2 \(https://youtu.be/N_aCXfw4IRs\)](https://youtu.be/N_aCXfw4IRs)

Adjustments are also made to the workplace and in learning, these might include: providing quiet areas to sit and work; more frequent 1:1 sessions with the mentor; confidence and motivation building by breaking tasks into smaller steps; providing frequent constructive feedback; and, recognising successes.

- **Assessment.** Helen Daniels explains that assessments can be a worrying time for apprentices, especially for older apprentices for whom earlier experiences of education and exams are often negative.

[Wigan interview – 3](https://youtu.be/url8-lukw20) (<https://youtu.be/url8-lukw20>)

Staff training and wellbeing

- As employees of the council, staff have the same entitlements and responsibilities under the 'Deal for Health and Wellness'. This includes access to the Employee Assistance Programme and access to the Health Management Team. Appraisals have been renamed 'My Time' so that they are more employee-led. Each workplace has Health and Wellbeing Champions, and there are regular sessions raising awareness and providing information on dementia, menopause, anxiety and depression for example.
- Staff are also trained in working with learners and apprentices who may have mental health needs and on developing their own resilience.
- Opportunities are also in place so that staff can talk about their work, discuss how they dealt with issues and share ideas and good practice. Peer support and professional dialogue is encouraged.
- Line managers also maintain an overview of how staff are working with learners and apprentices, ensuring that boundaries are maintained and if necessary, assigning a different member of staff to an apprentice if that staff member appears to be over-involved or upset.



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ARE GOOD FOR YOUR
MENTAL HEALTH’**