PEOPLE DIRECTORATE

Wellbeing at Work Strategy 2024-2029

OXFORD BROOKES UNIVERSITY

Introduction

This strategy is one of a **framework of enabling strategies** supporting the University's People and Culture pillar. Wellbeing has been identified as a priority for our People and Culture strategy and is a prominent feature of the **employee experience** we wish colleagues to have.

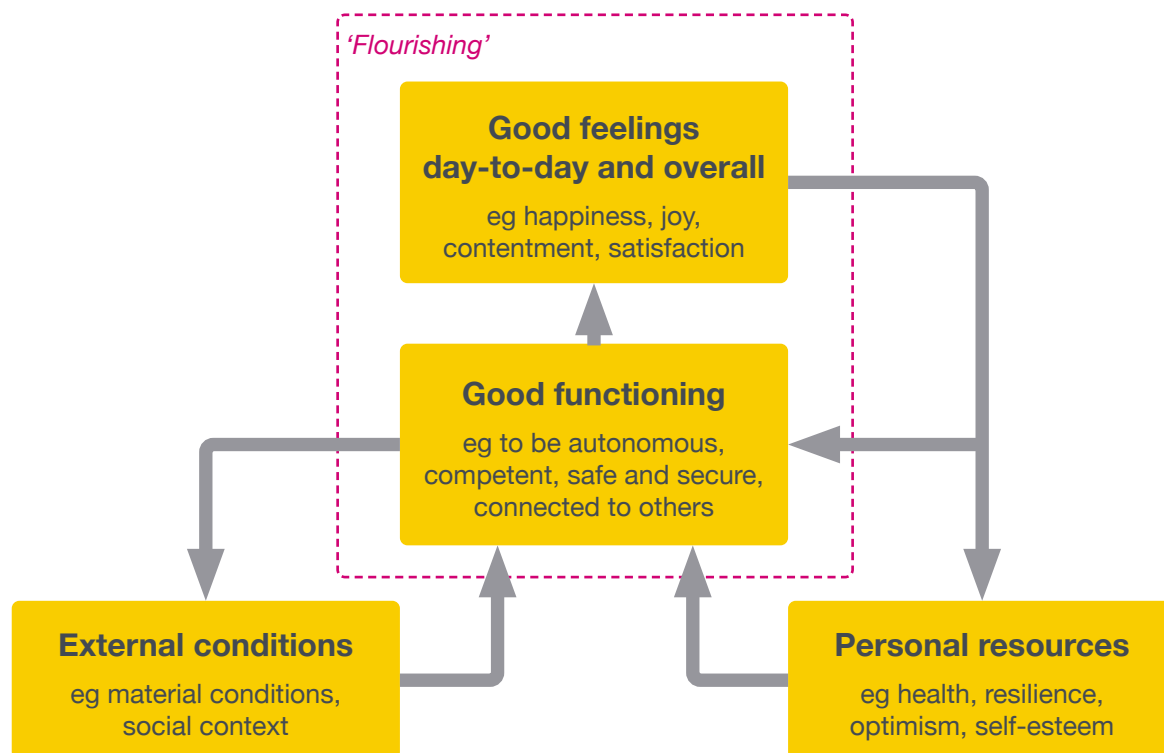# What is wellbeing and what influences wellbeing at work?

Wellbeing is more than just the prevention or absence of ill health. The Centre for Wellbeing at the New Economics Foundation (NEF) suggests that the concept of wellbeing is made up of two elements beyond this: 'feeling good' and 'functioning well'.

'Feeling good' is about the presence of positive emotions in our lives such as happiness, contentment, enjoyment, curiosity and engagement. This doesn't need to be all the time, and we are all different, but we all need to feel positive emotions some of the time.

'Functioning well' is about our ability to meet our basic human needs beyond survival. These include experiencing positive relationships with others, having some control over our lives, and having a sense of purpose or achievement.

The diagram below helps illustrate what can influence a person's general sense of wellbeing. It shows that both external conditions and an individual's personal resources will impact their sense of wellbeing and ability to flourish.

The dynamic model of well-being

'Flourishing'

**Good feelings
day-to-day and overall**
eg happiness, joy,
contentment, satisfaction

Good functioning
eg to be autonomous,
competent, safe and secure,
connected to others

External conditions
eg material conditions,
social context

Personal resources
eg health, resilience,
optimism, self-esteem

To impact workplace wellbeing, we need to understand what influences it. NEF use a tailored version of the dynamic model to understand well-being with specific reference to work.

The dynamic model of wellbeing at work
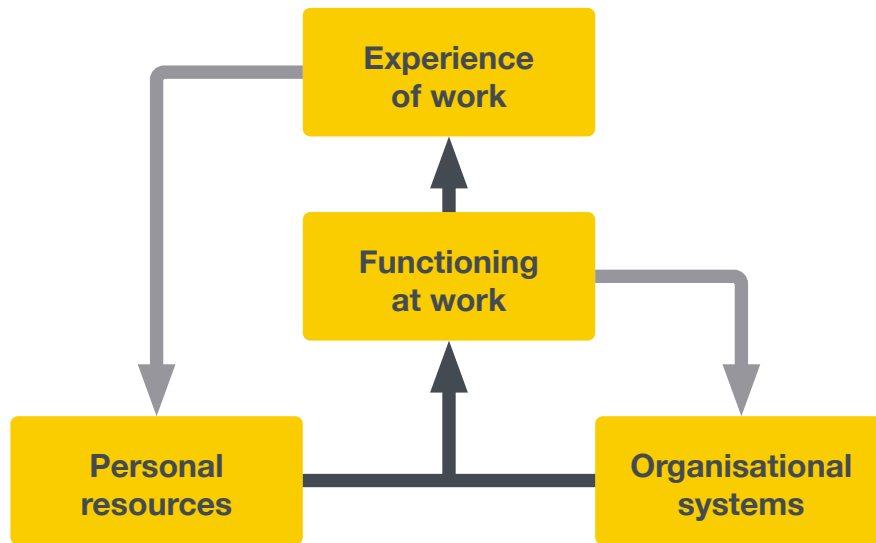
In this version, personal resources remains unchanged, whilst external conditions refers to the conditions associated with the place of work, and is re-labelled as **organisational system**; good functioning refers specifically to aspects of **functioning at work**, and becomes functioning at work; and the category of good feelings day-to-day and overall focuses on the feelings experienced by an individual while they are at work, labelled **experience of work**.

Reading from the top: an individual's **experience of work** (how they feel) is influenced by how they are **functioning at work** (what they do). This in turn is dependent on both the **organisational system** they work in and their **personal resources** (who they are). The curved arrows illustrate other important feedback loops with experience of work feeding back into personal resources and functioning at work feeding back into the organisational system

For more information on these models see the **New Economics Foundations** website

As outlined in the models, external conditions include a range of factors including those within work and those outside of it. External conditions also include those outside of the workplace such as relationships and family, financial concerns and so forth. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to wellbeing needs to consider a broad range of factors in relation to external conditions as well as recognising the role of personal resources. However, practically an employer has varying degrees of influence and control in some of these domains. Nonetheless, organisations can introduce measures that can have a positive impact on employees in terms of information, guidance and support.

In the context of wellbeing at work, there is a focus on the **organisational system** when it comes to thinking about external conditions. Research highlights a number of common factors in the organisational system that impact wellbeing (**Appendix 1**). These factors are within the remit of an organisation to be able to influence and ensure appropriate controls and mitigations are in place to reduce the potentially detrimental impact not only on an individual's wellbeing but also the impact that might have on the wider functioning of the organisation as a whole.

Our strategic approach

The University seeks to take a holistic approach to wellbeing. In line with best practice, the strategy seeks to address three levels of intervention; primary; secondary and tertiary. Tertiary-level interventions focus on supporting people if they experience ill health; secondary interventions are about proactively improving wellbeing and strengthening personal resources, whilst primary-level interventions are aimed at addressing the organisational system previously discussed, ensuring an environment that actively enables wellbeing.

This means working to:

- Actively reduce or **mitigate stressors/ill-health** factors that exist in the workplace, replacing them with those which help build and strengthen factors contributing to health and wellbeing so that we can flourish;

- Supporting people to improve their wellbeing and strengthen their personal resources including external factors outside of the workplace;

- Ensuring effective measures are in place where people are adversely impacted by ill health.

Help and support

Improving wellbeing and strengthening personal resources

Actively addressing stressors and creating a healthy workplace

Actively addressing stressors and creating a healthy workplace

The importance of a 'good day at work'

Good Days at Work is an evidence-based model developed by wellbeing experts Robertson Cooper. It advocates that workplace wellbeing is fundamentally about creating 'good days at work'. This involves individuals routinely experiencing:

- Positive experiences: they feel excited and motivated

- Task achievement: they can get their work done

- Social relationships: they have positive connections with their colleagues

- Meaningful work: the work they do makes an impact and has purpose

Meanwhile, NEF advocates a rounded approach, which focuses on helping employees to strengthen their personal resources; flourish and take pride in their roles within the organisational system; function to the best of their abilities, both as individuals and in collaboration with their colleagues and have a positive overall experience of work.

These elements are reflected in our **employee experience** which forms a key part of the ambitions in our People and Culture strategy. The work to implement that strategy will therefore heavily underpin this part of our approach to wellbeing at work.

The organisational system and prevention and management of work-related stress

A key focus of this first ambition is the 'organisational system' and the **factors** that can lead to work related stress and other adverse outcomes in the workplace.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) defines stress as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them". Stress develops when the pressures upon us exceed our ability to cope. Legislation requires organisations to effectively manage risks in the workplace and this includes the management of work-related stress. Employers have a legal duty to protect employees from stress at work by doing a risk assessment and acting on it.

Ensuring the University has a comprehensive risk-based **Stress Management framework** is a central to the implementation of this strategy. The **2023 Wellbeing Survey** was based around measures relating to the organisational system as well as personal resources. This information provides us with insight into 'where we are now'. It served to identify a number of potential work-related stress risk factors within the 'University system' to be addressed via a **University stress risk assessment**.

There will also be a focus on building and strengthening a culture that actively supports wellbeing, for example by working to reduce stigma relating to mental health, increasing awareness, leader's role modelling positive behaviours and ensuring policies support and reinforce this.

What success looks like for this ambition:

For individuals	For managers	For Brookes
I see Brookes taking proactive steps to prevent and manage work-related stress. I believe that Brookes' culture actively supports wellbeing (including mental health) I feel that the provisions made appropriately consider and address how my specific identities and lived experiences might affect my wellbeing. I experience 'good days at work' more often than not	I am aware of my own impact on individual and team wellbeing and am encouraged to address any areas which might negatively impact this I understand my role in proactively managing work related stress and see that the University's policies and processes enable me to do this. I know what factors lead to a 'good day at work' for my team and feel supported and encouraged to make it happen.	We take proactive steps to understand and effectively manage risks relating to workplace stress informed by best practice / HSE guidance. We ensure that our organisational culture actively supports wellbeing including leader's role modelling, clear communication and commitments, employee voice, policies, resources, EDI etc We ensure that everyone involved in the management/ supervision of staff receives effective training and development activity in relation to wellbeing.

Improving wellbeing and strengthening personal resources

We fully recognise the impact, both positive and negative, that work can have on individual wellbeing. However, we also recognise the role that an individual's 'personal resources' play in this dynamic (as per the diagrams on page 1 and 2). Our approach therefore includes looking at how we can support individuals to build and sustain these personal resources, such as physical and mental health, resilience and self-esteem with reference to best practice and research such as the New Economics Foundation's (NEF) **'five ways to wellbeing'**.

Resilience is the ability to adjust to, and cope with, adverse situations and effectively recover back to a place of wellbeing. It is acknowledged that the concept of resilience can be contentious due to concerns such as victim blaming, normalising adverse conditions and ignoring wider structural issues. It is essential to recognise that individual resilience alone cannot and should not be the sole focus and must be balanced with efforts to address systemic factors. However, when included as part of a holistic approach, which includes efforts to address the primary causes of workplace stress,

resilience building remains an integral part of a workplace wellbeing strategy. This is because it is simply not possible to remove all potentially adverse situations in what is an uncertain and unpredictable world and therefore if people do not have sufficient levels of resilience to adjust and cope with this, their wellbeing will be impacted to a greater degree than it might otherwise have been. Increasing our resilience is an essential way of maintaining our wellbeing in the long term.

Finally, this level of strategic intervention seeks to provide support in relation to wider external conditions that are not work-related but nonetheless can impact wellbeing. In most instances, these are outside the control of an organisation, for example, the financial impact of a relationship breakdown, a personal legal dispute or the impact of a wider social phenomenon. Organisational policies such as flexible working and management support are part of this however, comprehensive organisational wellbeing approaches also seek to provide some level of resource to support individuals in mitigating the impact of these external conditions.

What success looks like for this ambition:

For individuals	For managers	For Brookes
I feel supported in building and maintaining my physical and mental health and personal resources. I have access to resources and support that can support me with issues that might impact my wellbeing outside of the workplace	I have been equipped with the knowledge and skills to proactively enable team and individual wellbeing and personal resources I know what is on offer to support team members if they have concerns or issues outside of the workplace and can signpost them effectively.	We take proactive steps to both inform and enable staff to improve their wellbeing & personal resources (events, resources, information) We provide a range of wellbeing related benefits (informed by the needs of staff) We provide effective training to support managers in improving wellbeing within their teams.

Help and Support

Not coping is human – we don't want to make it another burden to carry.

This level of strategic intervention is about ensuring that colleagues can get appropriate and effective help and support if they do experience an adverse impact on their health and wellbeing. This covers both mental and physical health. It is about ensuring appropriate provision from any 'immediate action' through to rehabilitation and return to work. This includes access to expert advice as appropriate for both the individual and their line manager.

1 in 3 absences at work in the UK are now due to stress, anxiety or depression and 1 in 4 of us will develop a mental health problem at some point in our lives. Mental health is therefore a prominent consideration, which is about ensuring that we have appropriate measures in place to get the help and support people need and that people feel confident in accessing it. This includes but is not limited to, ensuring effective measures are in place to support staff affected by work-related stress.

There is a need to ensure alignment between this strategy and key employment policies such as sickness absence, capability and drugs and alcohol policies incorporating aspects such as reasonable adjustments.

Activity at this level includes a recognition of the important role that line managers play in the process which means ensuring that they are adequately trained and equipped in areas such as mental health and stress management as well as being familiar with the wider help and support available. It is the case that good management practices in general underpin a wider culture of wellbeing. Leadership and management development more generally sits within the Personal and Organisational Development Strategy.

What success looks like for this ambition:

For individuals	For managers	For Brookes
I know where and how to easily access effective help and support if my wellbeing is adversely impacted	I understand my day-to-day role and responsibilities in supporting the wellbeing of my team.	We provide options for people to access help, support and guidance in addition to their manager/PD
I would be confident that I could speak to my manager about any wellbeing issues I might have.	I have been equipped to be able to recognise potential wellbeing issues and to provide initial support to my team members	We provide access to relevant information and resources at times and in ways that suit individual needs (including counselling)
	I can proactively signpost people to additional support if required and know where to go for further advice	Our people management policies work to provide ways to effectively address and support wellbeing issues
		We provide expert advice to managers and employees (mental and physical health)
		We provide appropriate training, processes and tools to support managers (eg stress action plan/return to work etc)

Appendix 2 provides a one-page summary of the strategic ambitions and descriptors of success.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and the link with wellbeing

Impact on wellbeing

An individual's specific identities and/or diversity can have an impact on their wellbeing at work. For example, employee mental health is linked to experiences of inclusion and diversity in the workplace. When someone feels different to their colleagues due to factors such as gender, sexual orientation, race and/or ethnicity this can result in a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing.

There is various research that shows that minoritised groups are at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems. For example, Business in the Community's (BITC) 2019 Mental Health at Work: Time to Take Ownership report states that overall, almost 2 in 5 (39 per cent) of employees had experienced poor mental health where work was a contributing factor, however, for BAME employees it was almost one in two (47 per cent). Recent studies also highlight that LGBT+ people are at higher risk of experiencing mental health problems. This can be further exacerbated because they can face barriers when accessing mainstream mental health services.

To be effective, we recognise that our wellbeing provision needs to be inclusive and accessible to all employees factoring in flexibility and an ability to meet individual needs as well as consideration of how someone's diversity might impact their experience, identity, understanding and willingness to engage. For example, can people see themselves reflected in the people involved in providing guidance and support and is there confidence that they will be sufficiently aware of and competent to address cultural and other factors. We will strive to involve diversity of voice and experience in the design and delivery of well-being programs to help with this.

EDI approach supporting wellbeing

The University's EDI approach looks to increase inclusion and therefore reduce the underlying drivers impacting workplace wellbeing. The **Anti-Harassment and Discrimination Policy** and underpinning framework specifically seeks to address issues relating to discrimination, bullying and harassment that impact the wider culture and experience of working relationships. The experience of bullying and harassment is a key risk factor for work-related stress.

Wellbeing in support of EDI

As well as EDI activity supporting wellbeing, research demonstrates that improving workplace wellbeing also serves to improve inclusivity. For example, if we are distracted by a cognitively taxing task, or we are under emotional or physiological stress, we limit our mental resources available for social perception and become more reliant on stereotypes for our judgments and to guide our responses. We become more at risk of falling foul of unconscious bias. In contrast, individuals with lower levels of stress are less likely to rely on such heuristics and biases to drive their responses.

Also, when organisations actively design wellness initiatives such as physical activities that accommodate for the needs of different employees, they can be used to promote inclusion as well as wellness by encouraging positive interaction between employees with diverse identities and experiences. Therefore, in the process of implementing the strategy we will be cognisant of how it can also positively contribute towards inclusivity.

Legislation and frameworks informing our strategic approach

Legislation:

The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 require employers to assess the risk of stress-related ill health arising from work activities. The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 requires an employer to take measures to control that risk.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is Britain's national regulator for workplace health and safety. They provide a range of guidance on stress and mental health in the workplace including the **Stress Management standards**.

Frameworks:

1. **Roberston Cooper**
   Robertson Cooper's **Six Essentials** and **Good Day at Work** model.

2. **New Economics Foundation (NEF) Centre for Wellbeing**
   Well-being at work: A review of the literature Michaelson, et al (2014)

3. **University Mental Health Charter**
   The University has signed up to the **University Mental Health Charter Framework** which provides a set of evidence-informed principles to support universities to adopt a whole-university approach to mental health and wellbeing. The charter is composed of 18 themes mapped around four domains. This includes a 'Work' domain consisting of two themes:

   - **Staff wellbeing** which includes workplace culture, interventions to support good staff wellbeing and support for staff who are experiencing problems with their mental health.

   - **Staff development** which covers staff training and development in relation to mental health, including role-specific training and manager training.

This Wellbeing at Work strategy is informed by the charter framework and will provide the roadmap for the achievement of the work domain elements of the charter. The University's Personal and Organisational Development strategy that focuses on Staff development will further support the Staff Development theme.

APPENDIX 1

Factors in an organisation that impact wellbeing and associated examples of good practice

What are the risks?		What is good practice? (As far as is reasonably practicable*)
RESOURCES AND COMMUNICATION	People don't feel appropriately informed or equipped to do their roles	**People are informed and equipped to do their job:** • They know what is happening in the team and wider organisation • They receive regular and constructive feedback • They have adequate training/guidance for all aspects of their role • They have the necessary equipment and resources to do their jobs effectively.
CONTROL	People don't feel they have enough say in how things are done	**People feel they have an appropriate sense of control:** • They have some freedom to work in a way that suits them (autonomy) • They have a say/involvement in decisions that most impact them • They have an opportunity to make suggestions and share ideas • They have input/influence over individual objectives and performance targets • They are not subject to excessive supervision • They are encouraged to use their skills, abilities and initiative to do their work.
BALANCED WORKLOAD / DEMANDS	People don't have appropriate work-life balance / have excessive or inadequate workloads	**Jobs are realistic and manageable and people are supported to address any workload concerns so they can cope with the demands of their jobs:** • They do not work excessively long hours or routinely work unsociable hours • They do not feel that work (incl work-related travel) interferes inappropriately with home/personal life (work-life balance) • They are not routinely subjected to unrealistic deadlines and generally feel they have sufficient time to do their work well • Jobs are designed to be within the capabilities of colleagues. • They are not overloaded by technology and/or other systems/processes • They are supported to manage their time/workload • Concerns about workload/demands are listened to and addressed.
JOB SECURITY	People feel insecure in their jobs	**People feel a level of security in their jobs and that where any changes impacting job security are made, such as restructures, these will be handled considerately:** • There is adequate and timely colleague consultation on changes and opportunities for colleagues to influence proposals. • People involved in restructures/change are provided with adequate support to adapt to the changes • There is not an over-reliance on temporary contracts • They feel that their skills and roles are developed so that they do not become 'redundant' in the future.
CHANGE	People are negatively impacted by change due to lack of understanding / engagement / notice etc	**People feel that wider organisational change is well managed and efforts are made to mitigate potentially negative impacts of change:** • Timely information is provided to enable people to understand the reasons for proposed changes. • There are opportunities to input and influence proposals before decisions are finalised • If necessary, colleagues are given training to support any changes in their jobs. • Colleagues are aware of timetables for changes and the potential impact of any changes to their jobs. • Colleagues have access to relevant support during changes.

What are the risks?		What is good practice? (As far as is reasonably practicable*)
WORK RELATIONSHIPS	People are negatively impacted by poor or unsupportive relationships with colleagues or managers / experience discrimination, bullying or harassment	**People experience collaborative and supportive relationships at work and are not subjected to unacceptable or inequitable behaviours:** • They experience a conducive attitude and behaviours from their line manager • Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff and this is role-modelled by senior managers • Social support from colleagues and a generally positive and supportive climate within their team • People are encouraged to share information and recognise others' efforts and achievements. • Inter-personal conflict within teams is addressed promptly and effectively • Clear standards of acceptable behaviour • There are policies and procedures to prevent or resolve unacceptable behaviour • They and their line managers have an awareness of systems and support available to address concerns such as bullying.
JOB CONDITIONS	Exposure to dangerous, unpleasant or unmotivating working conditions / concerns are not addressed / lack of opportunity to progress	**People experience a decent, safe physical working environment and conditions that support overall job satisfaction, motivation and engagement:** • They are not exposed to any physical hazards or risk of violence • The working environment is appropriate for the work and takes into account individual needs such as disability, neuro-diversity. • They can spend time on work that is interesting, sufficiently challenging and personally rewarding/meaningful • They can use their strengths and further develop their skills and expertise • There are opportunities to progress/achieve career aspirations • There are systems and support in place where they have to deal with difficult situations or people • They feel that their pay and benefits are fair compared with others and the work they do.
ROLE	Roles and responsibilities not clear, conflicting/ unclear requirements on people	**People understand their role and responsibilities:** • They have clear and specific job goals • They have relevant information to support them in understanding their role and responsibilities • They have a wider understanding of the goals and priorities of the team/department and how they contribute to these • They are clear on who is responsible for what within their team/department • As far as possible, the different requirements placed upon colleagues are compatible. • Systems are in place to enable colleagues to raise concerns about any uncertainties or conflicts they have in their role and responsibilities.

* The term "reasonably practicable" refers to the standard of care that employers and duty holders are expected to meet when ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of their employees and others affected by their activities. According to the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and other related regulations, employers and duty holders are required to take all reasonably practicable measures to ensure the health and safety of individuals in the workplace. This means that they must do what is reasonably feasible and within their control to eliminate or minimize risks to health and safety. Determining what is "reasonably practicable" involves considering the level of risk, the severity of potential harm, the availability of resources, and the state of knowledge and technology at the time. Duty holders are expected to take a proportionate and balanced approach, weighing the costs and efforts of implementing control measures against the potential benefits in reducing risks.

APPENDIX 2

Wellbeing at Work Strategy on a page

OUR AMBITIONS	What success will look like		
	For individuals	**For managers**	**For Brookes**
Help and support When people are adversely impacted	I know where and how to easily access effective help and support if my wellbeing is adversely impacted I would be confident that I could speak to my manager about any wellbeing issues I might have.	I understand my day-to-day role and responsibilities in supporting the wellbeing of my team. I have been equipped to be able to recognise potential wellbeing issues and to provide initial support to my team members I can proactively signpost people to additional support if required and know where to go for further advice	We provide options for people to access help, support and guidance in addition to their manager / PD We provide access to relevant information and resources at times and in ways that suit individual needs (including counselling) Our people management policies work to provide ways to effectively address & support wellbeing issues We provide expert advice to managers and employees (mental and physical health) We provide appropriate training, processes and tools to support managers (eg stress action plan / rtw etc)
Improving wellbeing and strengthening personal resources Strengthening and enabling at individual and team level	I feel supported in building and maintaining my physical and mental health and personal resources. I have access to resources and support that can support me with issues that might impact my wellbeing outside of the workplace	I have been equipped with the knowledge and skills to proactively enable team and individual wellbeing I know what is on offer to support team members if they have concerns or issues outside of the workplace and can signpost them effectively.	We take proactive steps to both inform and enable staff to improve their wellbeing & strengthen personal resources (events, resources, information) We provide a range of wellbeing related benefits (informed by the needs of staff) We provide effective training to support managers in improving wellbeing within their teams.
Healthy workplace / stress management Actively reducing or mitigating stressors / ill-health factors and improving the factors that positively contribute to a well workplace	I see Brookes taking proactive steps to prevent and manage work-related stress. I believe that Brookes' culture actively supports wellbeing (incl mental health) I feel that the provisions made appropriately consider and address how my specific identities and lived experiences might affect my wellbeing. I experience 'good days at work' more often than not	I am aware of my own impact on individual and team wellbeing and am encouraged to address any areas which might negatively impact this I understand my role in proactively managing work related stress and see that the University's policies and processes enable me to do this. I know what factors lead to a 'good day at work' for my team and feel supported and encouraged to make it happen.	We take proactive steps to understand and effectively manage risks relating to workplace stress informed by best practice / HSE guidance. We ensure that our organisational culture actively supports wellbeing including leader's role modelling, clear communication and commitments, employee voice, policies, resources, EDI etc We ensure that everyone involved in the management / supervision of staff receives effective training and development activity in relation to wellbeing.