



Queen Mary
University of London

Wellbeing handbook

First edition



Welcome

Wellbeing — it's a word we hear a lot these days. As ways of working and societal dynamics shift, the spotlight on striking the right balance is increasing. Our understanding of what wellbeing entails, and its importance, is getting better.

But first, **what does wellbeing mean?**

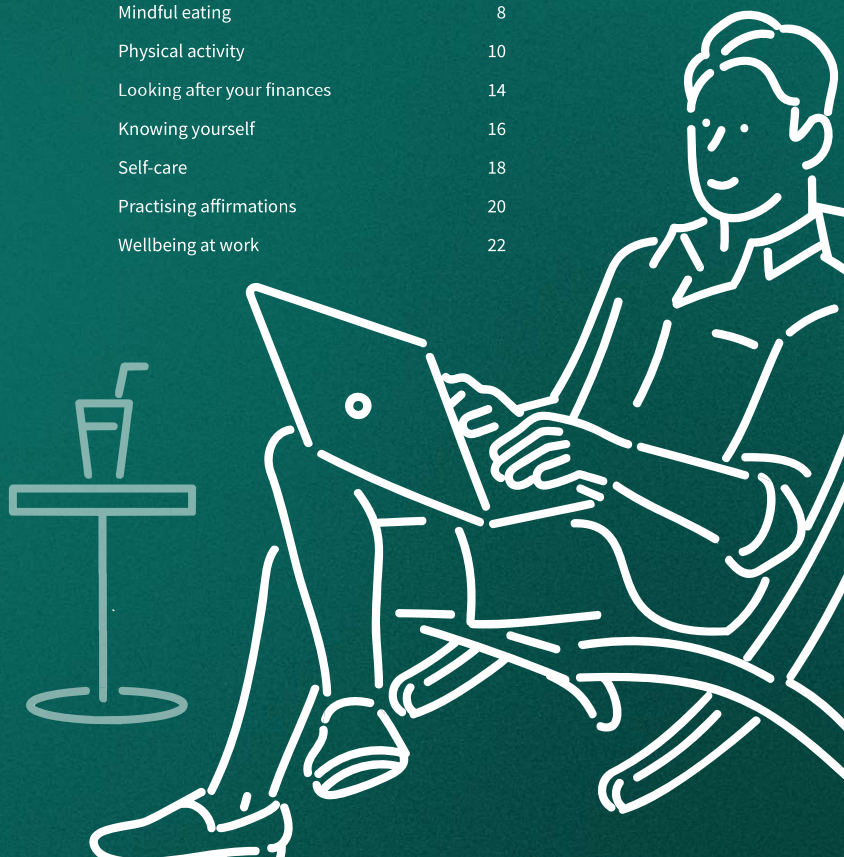
Simply put, it's "*the state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy*" (Oxford English Dictionary). Ideally, we'd inhabit all three states simultaneously! However, we each have several stressors in our life: work, family, relationships, finances, mental and physical health, to name a few. These stressors can cause negative emotions to arise. When this happens, we may take care of our wellbeing less, especially if we try to stop these negative emotions. All emotions are natural. It's about developing a healthy relationship with these emotions.

This is where this handbook can hopefully help. Through the guidance, information and self-help techniques provided, you can create autonomy in developing skills to manage your emotions — and protect your wellbeing.

Remember, if you are struggling to manage by yourself, you can always reach out to support services. There is a wide range of support available for you at Queen Mary which you can find more about in this handbook.

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Sleep hygiene

Often in times of stress, it's restful sleep that's impacted the most. Even in times of little/no stress, sleep issues are still common. Many careers are sedentary and entail hours of screentime, both of which affect our sleep. Throw in stressors related to work, family, money etc — and the negative emotions that complement these stressors — and it's easy to see why many of us sleep so badly.

What makes good sleep hygiene?

Sleep hygiene will look slightly different for each person, but the fundamentals remain the same: your sleep environment and your habits should be geared towards having the best, most restful sleep you can. Here are some simple ways to improve your sleep:

1. Try to have a fixed bedtime based on your wake-up time.

It's widely advised that adults should aim for seven hours sleep per night. You should also factor in some time to wind down before you go to bed — half an hour is a good benchmark.

2. Wind-down time should follow these rules:

- No screens (ideally an hour before bed). Electronic devices cause mental stimulation and the blue light from screens disrupts melatonin production, the hormone we need to sleep.
- This may mean setting some important boundaries with work — we go into more detail in our *Wellbeing at work* section.
- Keep the lights dim (for the same reason as above).

3. Keep a consistent night-time routine.

This will help send the message to your brain that it's time to sleep.

4. Our daytime habits impact our sleep too.

Try to do the following:

- Get as much exposure to daylight as you can to regulate your circadian rhythms.
- Be physically active.
- Reduce alcohol, nicotine and caffeine intake. Each of these interferes with sleep.

5. Optimise your sleep environment as follows:

- Have a comfortable mattress, pillow, duvet and sheets.
- A cooler room is better, around 18C is optimal.
- Ensure all light is blocked out, and noise too.
- Try a calming scent in your bedroom, like lavender.

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Diaphragmatic breathing exercise

Research suggests that diaphragmatic breathing before bedtime aids melatonin production, a sleep-inducing hormone that promotes relaxation.

- 1. Put one hand on your upper chest and one hand on your stomach.** This is so you can feel your diaphragm move as you breathe.
- 2. Inhale slowly through your nose.** You should be able to feel your stomach expand while the hand on your chest remains as still as possible.
- 3. Exhale through pursed lips, tightening your stomach muscles at the same time so that your stomach moves back in.** As with inhaling, the hand on your upper chest should be as still as possible.

Note: you can also do this exercise at any time of day whenever you need a moment to relax and mitigate the effects of any stress or anxiety.

Foods and nutrients that promote restful sleep

There is research to show that certain nutrients can promote restful sleep. See if you can incorporate these into your evening meal (and where possible avoid heavy meals close to bedtime).

- Lycopene (contained in red and orange-coloured foods)
- Complex carbohydrates
- Vitamin C
- Selenium (found in nuts, red meat and shellfish)
- Lutein/zeaxanthin (found in leafy green vegetables that are rich in stress-reducing calcium)
- Calcium increases tryptophan, the amino acid that the body uses to make sleep-inducing serotonin and melatonin
- Bananas for their potassium and magnesium content, which help relax muscles
- Chamomile tea has long been championed for its relaxing properties, and with no caffeine, it's a suitable option to have before bed.

Guided meditation exercises

Sleep meditation is a great, natural and inexpensive way to encourage the onset of a restful night's sleep. Please follow these QR codes to access some free online resources which we hope you will find helpful.



Falling Asleep Meditation
meditationment.com/meditation-for-falling-asleep



A 20-minute guided meditation for sleep
mindful.org/a-mindfulness-practice-for-better-sleep

Better Sleep app

This app allows you to design your own mix of relaxing sounds, creating a soundscape for a sleep-friendly environment. It can also be a really useful tool for setting up a white noise background if you work in a busy, loud or stressful environment.



Better Sleep
betersleep.com

Calm app

Tap into the power of a good bedtime story! The Calm app offers a huge repository of stories to relax and drift off to, as well as other sleep resources.



Calm
calm.com



Mindful eating

Mindfulness simply means showing awareness to the present moment, while accepting with compassion your feelings, thoughts and sensations. When applied to eating, "[it] goes beyond the individual. It also encompasses how what you eat affects the world. We eat for total health," (*Mindful Eating, Mindful Life*, Thich Nhat Hanh and Dr Lillian Cheung).



Why try mindful eating?

Mindful eating may sound daunting and time-consuming, but the tips and guidance in this section aim to break it down in a way that is realistic and applicable, bearing in mind the demands on your time and money.

Mindful eating basics for work

1. Take a lunch break that's free from (stress-inducing) distractions.

- Use your full hour unless there are genuine reasons not to. Block it out in your calendar so no meetings can be booked during this time.
- Try and leave your desk for at least part of this time. Go outside if the weather allows. By changing your environment, you can also help to clear your head. A gentle walk will also aid with digestion. There are lots of fabulous walking options near Queen Mary (eg Mile End Park, Stepney Green Park) or you can look up suitable routes on apps such as GoJauntly, or use TFL's Walk London resource.



Walk London (TFL)
tfl.gov.uk/modes/walking/top-walking-routes

- Make sure your colleagues and line manager(s) are on the same page about respecting a proper lunch hour.

2. Consider the benefits of eating slowly.

- It takes approximately 20 minutes from the start of eating for your brain to get the message that you're full. By eating leisurely, you allow more time to digest your food, and will feel full at a more natural juncture.
- Eating mindfully also allows us to take more pleasure in our food and foster a positive relationship with it.
- Slowing it down and taking smaller bites is hard, and we're often up against time constraints. This is why having regular meals that aren't spaced too far apart (four hours is the ideal) is important.

Easy work lunch ideas



Easy vegan lunch recipe ideas
bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/vegan-lunch-recipes



Quick vegetarian lunch ideas
bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/vegetarian-lunch-recipes



Quick general lunchbox recipe ideas
bbcgoodfood.com/recipes/collection/lunchbox-recipes

Physical activity

We know about the benefits of exercise, and that physical activity is good for us. But carving out the time to take care of ourselves can be hard. Work, caring responsibilities, tiredness, stress — these all stack up. If you feel like you could be doing more, then you're not alone, and we hope you find this section a useful tool in making small, realistic changes that make you feel good.



Physical activity at work

Even if you sit at a desk for eight hours (or more) a day there are things you can do to stretch, improve your circulation, boost your energy and reduce the toll that sitting down all day takes.

- Look to see which desks are standing desks and take advantage of these. By using a standing desk occasionally, you will help to improve your posture and strengthen different areas of your body. Please follow the guidance on using them correctly so you can make the most of them.
- Qmotion is the Students' Union run Sports and Fitness Centre, located on the Mile End campus. It provides great facilities in a welcoming and safe environment. More information can be found on the Qmotion website.
- Talk to your manager, team and stakeholders about walking meetings, and which meetings are suitable to follow this model. These are a wonderful way to balance out the amount of screentime work often requires and are good for both mind and body.



Qmotion
qmsu.org/qmotion

Cycle to work scheme

The cycle to work scheme is open to all staff. Cyclescheme enables you to pay monthly towards a bike and bike equipment for your journey to work, with Queen Mary making deductions from your salary before tax and National Insurance.



Cyclescheme
cyclescheme.co.uk

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Desk yoga work out

One of the upsides to working from home is that you can do these exercises unobserved. The braver of you may even feel comfortable doing these in the office! These moves can be done as a standalone or as part of a wider routine.

1. Neck rolls (to be done very gently)

- Start with your head straight, your gaze forward.
- Gently tip your head to the left.
- Being careful and alert to any pain, roll your head backwards to the right.
- Roll your head forward back to the left.
- Repeat as many times as needed.

2. Cat-cow stretch

- Have both feet flat on the floor.
- Put your hands on your knees.
- On an inhale, arch the back and look up toward the ceiling.

- On the exhale, round the spine and let your head drop forward.
- Repeat for three to five breaths.

3. Spinal twist

- Sit sideways in your chair.
- Have both feet flat on the floor.
- Twist towards the back of the chair, holding the back of the chair with both hands.
- Turn yourself 180 degrees so you are facing the opposite side of the chair to do the twist on the other side.

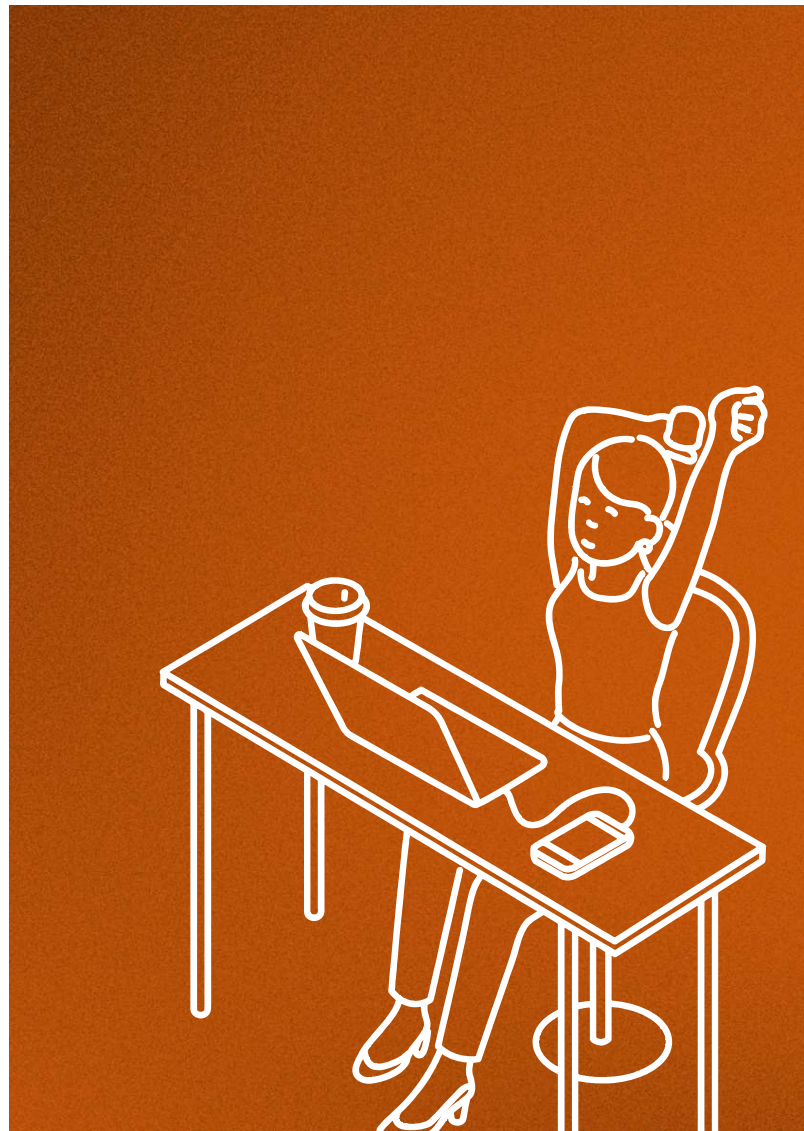


Yoga at your desk
Yoga With Adriene
youtube.com/watch?v=tAUf7aajBWE



5 Minute Desk Workout
youtube.com/watch?v=hLXQXbXsZdI

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Looking after your **finances**

The relationship between financial strain and anxiety has been the subject of much research. In response to recent research findings, Marc Rowland, Chief Executive of the Mental Health Foundation, said: "There are clear links between financial strain and poor mental health and for people experiencing both they are faced with a double taboo." With the cost-of-living crisis placing additional burden on so many people, seeking advice, taking control where possible, and preserving our mental wellbeing is even more important.



How to look after your finances – staff benefits, resources and services

As a valued member of the Queen Mary staff community, you are entitled to certain staff benefits and perks which hopefully make a difference to your finances.

Annual leave

If you're a full-time member of staff, your annual leave entitlement is 30 working days (though this may vary for some contracts), plus bank holidays and four paid holiday days when the University closes.

Season ticket loan

Once you've worked at Queen Mary for six months, you can get a season ticket loan to cover the full cost of your travel, and pay this back in monthly instalments, interest-free.

Free legal advice

You have access to free initial legal advice from our legal students, supervised by qualified solicitors and barristers, on matters such as family law, immigration law etc.

Free independent financial advice

Access to one session of free independent financial advice is available through a local Financial Adviser, who can provide advice on mortgages, life assurance, investments, ISAs and retirement planning. This service is independent of Queen Mary.

Pension Scheme

Queen Mary offers you membership of one of three Defined Benefit pension schemes, depending on your role and terms and conditions – USS, SAUL or NHS. They all offer excellent benefits including life assurance. We provide these via salary sacrifice which means you save on tax and NI. For more details visit our Pensions page or contact the Pension team.

The Money and Pension Service and Money Helper

The Money and Pensions Service and Money Helper offer free, clear and impartial money guidance. On the Financial Wellbeing intranet page there are some interactive tools which have been provided by Money Helper to support you.



Financial Wellbeing
qmul.ac.uk/staff-wellbeing/financial-wellbeing

Financial wellbeing and your money

All QM staff can enrol on this one-hour webinar, which covers financial wellbeing, cost of living pressures, tips on managing your money and free tools and resources.



Financial Wellbeing and Your Money
cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=228

Employee Assistance Programme

Our Employee Assistance Programme is available for all colleagues and offers a range of support including change support, financial management and counselling.



Employee Assistance Programme
qmul.ac.uk/staff-wellbeing/wellbeing-at-work/employee-assistance-programme

Knowing yourself

Our days may throw up a range of situations to deal with, but there's always one commonality — ourselves. Specifically, how we deal with stress, how we practice self-compassion and how we work on ourselves to protect our wellbeing. In all matters, we're accountable to ourselves, first and foremost.



Understanding stress

We're all familiar with stress. When unmanaged, however, it can be detrimental to our physical and mental wellbeing. Here you'll learn more about stress, and some tactics on how to better manage it.

Note: If stress is starting to overwhelm you, speak to your GP about support options, and speak to your line manager about work stress. For immediate support, Mental Health First Aiders are on hand at work for difficult situations during your work day. See more on page 24.

Why do we feel stress?

Stress and anxiety are our body's natural reaction to feeling threatened or under pressure. As you've probably experienced, these can be caused by a range of triggers such as work, family or financial pressure.

While pressure can be helpful in certain situations (eg when we have deadlines), motivating us to tackle our to-do lists, it can turn into feelings of distress. In turn, this can negatively impact our mood, health and relationships.

If you are stressed, common signs might include:

- Feeling overwhelmed
- Racing heart rate
- Feeling constantly worried
- Having trouble with sleep
- Change in eating
- Drinking or smoking more than usual

Some lesser-known signs are:

- Memory problems
- Headaches
- Digestive issues
- Irritability
- Grinding your teeth and jaw pain

How do we cope with stress?

Our stress coping mechanisms are as unique as we are, meaning there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution. Finding out what the best coping mechanisms for you are takes time, trial and error. To help you, try the activities below to start thinking about your individual toolbox of coping strategies.

Positive coping strategies may include:

- Mindful breathing
- Gratitude journaling
- Going for a walk
- Talking to a friend or family member
- Eating well and sleeping well (including practising good sleep hygiene)
- Hobbies, such as listening to music or being active.

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Self-care

We are often our own harshest critics, and it can take time to “unlearn” this ingrained behaviour. By understanding the nature of self-compassion, as well as the right questions to ask yourself, you can begin to treat yourself with more care. It’s interesting to consider: would we speak to our friends or family the way we often speak to ourselves? Maybe it’s time to treat ourselves more thoughtfully.



The elements of self-compassion

Self-care and self-compassion can mean various things. It's self-kindness instead of self-judgement; unfortunately, our brains have evolved to focus on the negative and therefore it takes practice to be kind to ourselves. It's common humanity instead of isolation; understanding that it is a part of being human and that we are not alone in this. It's mindfulness; being aware of what we feel or experience without holding on to difficult emotions as a reflection of ourselves.

The self-critic

Many of us have an inner critic who has been around for some time, and so the idea of challenging this with self-compassion is overwhelming. For example, we may believe a critical voice is a key part of motivating ourselves, but this approach tends to stop working at some point, as we struggle to deal with the side effects of the critic such as low mood and anxiety.

It's helpful to remember that easing the self-critic takes time, and things may not change straight away. But moving towards a self-compassionate response can improve our wellbeing as well as our self-esteem and feelings about ourselves.

Starting to practise self-compassion

When we notice we are struggling or feeling self-critical, it is helpful to do the following:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1. Show understanding
'It makes sense I feel this way because...' | 2. Show kindness
What would you say to a friend in your situation? | 3. Comfort yourself
Notice your emotions and think about what you need to feel soothed. |
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Practising affirmations

Why are affirmations important? And how can they help? We know it may seem counterintuitive, or even awkward, to acknowledge your own achievements – especially out loud! That said, practising affirmations can be a helpful way to maintain a healthy sense of self-integrity and self-identity.



Affirmations

“The self-system is activated when a person experiences a threat to an important self-conception or image ... these events are threatening because they have implications for a person's overall sense of self-integrity” (Sherman and Cohen, 2006).

In response, affirmations can help bolster self-worth, acting as “an opportunity to restore [one's] self-integrity” (Sherman and Cohen, 2006).

You don't need to necessarily say these aloud if you don't feel comfortable with that. Just try committing them to paper to reinforce the positive things you have done.

Today, I am proud of myself because...

Write down a problem you solved today.

What is something you've appreciated or liked about yourself recently?

What is the most creative thing you've done recently?

What is something you feel you have achieved recently?

What is your most recent act of kindness?

How would a friend or family member describe you in three words?

If you are struggling for some answers, what might you be able to do in future to support your sense of self?

Wellbeing at work

Resources, support and guidance

If you find you're struggling at work, for whatever reason, you need not feel isolated. You have access to resources that can help you to manage your workload, make you feel more in control, and which also boost your professional experience. We spend a large chunk of our lives at work, so we encourage you to make full use of these resources and take care of your wellbeing to the fullest.



Time/workload management

There's a famous Mark Twain quote that we'll paraphrase here: if the first thing you do each morning is to eat a frog, then you can look forward to the rest of your day, safe in the knowledge that the worst part of it is now behind you. *Eat the Frog* has since become a rule of effective time management — but there are plenty of others. Queen Mary's OPD (Organisational and Professional Development) team offers courses that help you optimise your time and skillset.

Time Management

From website: 'Improve your productivity, get things done, and find more time for what's most important with this LinkedIn Learning series which provides actionable time management advice in just a few minutes.'



cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=373

Project Management

From website: 'Explore fundamental project management principles in this concise e-learning program. Based on PRINCE2 concepts, it equips you for practical project management.'



cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=204

Minute Taking



cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=249

Effective Report Writing

From website: 'This workshop will equip learners to write concise, impactful and well-organised reports. Attendees will learn how to identify their audience's needs and expectations, plan and create impactful documents, and understand the Queen Mary context.'



cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=407

Presentation Skills

From website: 'This e-learning offers insights on effective presentation creation and delivery. Topics encompass audience consideration, planning, personal presentation, visual aids, and remote or hybrid scenarios. For practical experience, join a workshop to present to colleagues and receive constructive feedback in a supportive setting.'



cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/enrol/index.php?id=205

You can also take courses in *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*, *Mental Health Awareness* and *Aspiring Managers and Team Leaders*, to name a few. Take a look at the full list on the CPD platform.



CPD Training
cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/totara/dashboard/index.php



Wellbeing-related courses
cpd-training.qmul.ac.uk/totara/catalog/index.php?catalog_fts=wellbeing&orderbykey=score&itemstyle=narrow

Staff Wellbeing website

Queen Mary's HR Department offers a range of wellbeing support resources, as well as signposting workplace support available for our staff. Visit the Wellbeing website to access advice, wellbeing tips and more and visit the HR website to see information including information on wellbeing and the employee assistance scheme.



Staff Wellbeing
qmul.ac.uk/staff-wellbeing

Employee Relations team

If you need further support at work and aren't sure which route to take, you can contact HR's Employee Relations team. Their contact details can be found under the HR Teams heading.



Human Resources
hr.qmul.ac.uk/aboutus

Mindfulness sessions

Our chaplain, Ella Sharples, is available to talk, provide help and advice. You can also find mindfulness sessions for both staff and students on the Faith at Queen Mary website.



Mindfulness at Queen Mary
qmul.ac.uk/mindfulness-staff-students

Your flexible working rights

Queen Mary's flexible working policy aims to ensure that a) any application you make is given serious consideration and b) if your application is refused, you will be given the reason and a right of appeal. Our Flexible Working guidance outlines the types of flexible working available to staff, as well as the application process.



Flexible Working
hr.qmul.ac.uk/procedures/leave/flex_work

Mental Health First Aid

There are trained Mental Health First Aiders (MHFAiders) here for those times when you need support in seeking help, or simply need to talk to someone. Our MHFAiders actively listen without judgment and signpost to appropriate services where necessary. This service is open to everyone. All conversations with our MHFAiders are kept confidential, unless the individual has concerns for your immediate safety, in which case they will discuss this with you.



Health and Safety Directorate
qmul.ac.uk/hsd

Training resources

As well as our CPD Training, all Queen Mary employees have access to LinkedIn Learning, which is home to a huge range of training opportunities.



LinkedIn Learning
linkedin.com/learning/?u=52187153

Clubs, groups and activities

These aren't just for our students — there's a healthy programme of activity aimed at staff and boosting wellbeing. From book clubs to wellbeing walks, there are a number of activities on offer, allowing you to meet new people, learn a new skill, and exercise your mind and body.



Activities and Programmes
qmul.ac.uk/staff-wellbeing/wellbeing-at-work/activities-and-programmes



Staff Affinity Networks
qmul.ac.uk/human-resources/equality/staff-networks/

External resources



Samaritans
samaritans.org

Talk to someone 24/7 – a phone, email and in-person service for those having a difficult time emotionally, including having suicidal thoughts or feelings.



Shout
giveusashout.org

Text support service open 24/7. Text **SHOUT** to **85258** to start talking.



Together All
togetherall.com

An anonymous online community, free to all Queen Mary students and staff, that you can access 24/7 for support.



NHS Talking Therapies
nhs.uk/mental-health/talking-therapies-medicine-treatments

For help with depression or anxiety, you can refer yourself to NHS Talking Therapies.



Tower Hamlets 24 Hour Mental Health Crisis Helpline
elft.nhs.uk/services/tower-hamlets-mental-health-crisis-line

Offers support and advice from mental health professionals for all that live, work and study in Tower Hamlets. You can call them on **0800 073 0003**.



Anxiety UK
anxietyuk.org.uk/get-help

Offer an extensive range of resources designed to help control anxiety.



Mind
mind.org.uk

Supports everyone who has a mental health condition and provides general wellbeing advice.



Trades Unions
hr.qmul.ac.uk/workqm/unions

Trades unions look after their members' interests at work by building a better working environment, whether it's changes to workplace conditions, or negotiating on matters such as pay and redundancy.



We want to hear from **you**

They say you need to be the change you want to see in the world, and thus was born the resource in front of you.

This is the first edition, researched, written and designed by your Communications colleagues as an activity of solidarity. We want to get it absolutely right, so if you spot anything we missed, please fill in the below (anonymous) form with your feedback.



**Wellbeing Handbook
feedback form**
(Microsoft Forms)





qmul.ac.uk