INDUSTRY CASE STUDY
HIGHER EDUCATION

Student mental health is a hot topic. But what about that of the staff tasked with keeping these young minds well and these prestigious institutions – that have been subject to much scrutiny in the wake of tuition fee increases and, more recently, COVID-19 lockdowns – running smoothly?

Over the past few years, several universities have engaged Luminate in supporting the mental health and wellbeing of their staff. This case study looks at three clients in the higher education sector; their unique goals and challenges in staff wellbeing and how our partnership has improved employee mental health, internal knowledge, and confidence around the subject within these esteemed faculties and broader work environments.

SOAS

SOAS, University of London, is a highly prestigious university based in Bloomsbury, England. It specialises in studies of the Near and Middle East, Asia, and Africa, with a student population of approximately 6,000 and just over 500 staff.

THE BRIEF:

SOAS first engaged Luminate in June 2022, to speak as one of multiple suppliers at a staff wellbeing day. Hosted on campus, the event was conceived to bolster employee wellbeing across all different functions – from professors to cleaners to administrators to caterers.

This left Luminate at the top of the list when the university's (then new) HR Director renewed their staff wellbeing programme at the beginning of this financial year, in April 2024. At which point, Luminate were re-engaged and tasked with delivering a quarterly series of wellbeing webinars/workshops to help continue this support piece and meet SOAS staff's evolving wellbeing needs.

THE SOLUTION:

ON-CAMPUS WELLBEING DAY

Luminate delivered four back-to-back seminars on a variety of subjects, chosen for their broad appeal and relevance across all different job functions. The topics included Burnout, Body Positivity and Intuitive Eating, Boosting Happiness, and Sleep. Each session aimed to help staff 'fill their cup' and keep well whilst managing the responsibilities and pressures of their various roles, incorporating practical tools and takeaways to ensure the sessions' impact extended beyond just that day.

WELLBEING WEBINAR SERIES

SOAS's programme of webinars continues to cover topics suitable for individuals, no matter their role – including sessions on Stress Management, Menopause in the Workplace, and Men's Mental Health. Deciding to host these via videoconference with a recording circulated afterward, similarly, helps accessibility across all the college's departments and functions – with different hours/working patterns being commonplace in universities.

BESPOKE WORKSHOP

Most recently, the university's library team requested a workshop specific to their department – a bespoke session on financial wellbeing that spanned several topics from Luminate's off-the-shelf sessions: including Budgeting and Planning, Credit and Borrowing, and Money and Mental Health.

SOAS University of London

Working closely with the SOAS People Team and resident Financial Educator, Lynsey Sykes Davis, Luminate devised a tailored, 2-hour session that was received so well that they've been commissioned with creating two more. This time, exploring pensions (looking specifically at the pension SOAS provides, as well as more general information), savings and investments, and future-proofing your retirement. Luminate is uniquely positioned as a small collective of experts to be able to create and deliver bespoke sessions, such as this, for their clients.

THE OUTCOME:

Now a firmly established partnership, SOAS's staff have embraced Luminate as a wellbeing resource; participating actively in webinars/workshops and freely requesting topics of future future sessions to best match their evolving departmental needs. This is demonstrated by the university's ongoing and upcoming work with Luminate, including a bespoke session on financial wellbeing through retirement this autumn and a session on Understanding Neurodiversity this winter.

Both client and attendee feedback has been really positive, with both parties communicating that sessions have been rich in information and accessible wellbeing tools, and that increased team cohesion has been a happy side effect of these webinars/workshops too!

91% of attendees voted the sessions as *Excellent* or *Very Good*

90% of attendees stated they will make *positive changes* based on something learned in sessions

"A brilliant workshop! To the point, relevant, informative, tools and information shared for life skills and money management, and a really good overall team building session too. Lynsey is an excellent trainer!" – **training attendee, July 2024**

"A fantastic session ran by Lynsey on Friday. I think everyone got something out of it and a huge range of useful information given, as well as a facilitated sharing amongst our group." – **Carole Dean, SOAS Library Team, August 2024**

ROYAL HOLLOWAY

Royal Holloway, University of London, (RHUL) is a leading UK university based in Surrey, England. Well known for their contributions to science, the arts, management, economics, and law, the university has 6 schools and 21 departments, with approximately 12,000 students and 1,600 members of staff.

THE BRIEF:

Of Royal Holloway's approximate 1,600 members of staff, 350 are line managers. In September 2022, the university invited Luminate to tender for the contract to provide their managers with mental health awareness training. The client was looking to develop their standard training offering for line managers – understanding the substantial impact managers can have on their direct reports' mental wellbeing[1] – by incorporating a course to help this group feel more confident in managing mental health at work.

THE SOLUTION:

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS TRAINING FOR LINE MANAGERS

In winning the contract, Luminate was tasked with delivering their Mental Health Awareness Training to three cohorts over three months with a conditional offer (dependent on the response to these sessions) to retain Luminate's services for the next 5-years. The course is focused on giving managers the tools to recognise an unwell colleague, start a conversation around mental health, and understand how to create environments that support positive mental health.

Due to the success of the initial sessions, the contract was extended and Luminate continued (and continues) to work with RHUL. The course is run once an academic term with the intention that *every* manager at RHUL receives mental health awareness training. It is also delivered in two parts, as an e-learning module (to be completed in the individual's own time) and as an in-person workshop, to help better fit the learning around demanding schedules that vary from department to department.

Understanding the course content is sensitive in the Higher Education environment, Luminate's facilitators worked hard to foster safe, encouraging, engaging spaces – in part, through the inclusion of fidget toys in face-to-face sessions. These small objects have had a big impact – proven to help with concentration and ease any anxieties attendees might have about the course content or contributing during sessions.

100% of attendees rated their knowledge *Good* to *Excellent* after completing the course

100% of attendees strongly agree that they would recommend the course to others

THE OUTCOME:

Feedback on the managers' training has been excellent, with the client observing delegates as particularly...

responsive to the in-person portion of sessions: "People [are] finding it helpful to build up their confidence and enjoying the discussion-based learning aspect." Recognising and responding to this, Luminate's upcoming Mental Health Awareness Training sessions will be adapted to be hosted exclusively in-person running into 2025.

The success of this partnership is demonstrated by the renewal – several times over – of Luminate's work with RHUL. Luminate's ongoing Mental Health Awareness Training programme has met the client brief in providing attendees with the tools, support, and space needed to feel more confident in managing mental health at work.

"Luminate have been providing Mental Health for Line Managers training over the course of the last year at Royal Holloway University – everything from the administrative organisation, course content, course delivery, course facilitators/trainers, and post-course follow-ups is first class. This is extremely important training for us and delegate feedback has been excellent and we are looking forward to Luminate continuing to deliver this course for us this coming year." **– Paul Bulos, Organisational Development Manager (Client)**

"The whole of the course was excellent, particularly the trainer Ryan. He had a very open, friendly & engaging manner with injections of humour. This kept the course light and made people want to participate. He was very open and approachable & willing to listen to everyone which meant people were prepared to share information." **– training attendee, June 2024**

THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

The University of Warwick is a Russell Group university based just outside of Coventry, England. The largest in this case study, it is organised into three faculties – Arts, Science-Engineering-Medicine, and Social Sciences – within which there are thirty-two departments. It has approximately 29,000 students and just under 8,000 members of staff.

THE BRIEF:

In March 2023, the University of Warwick approached Luminate to run a pilot series of Wellbeing For Leaders training – having found the course online and recognised it as potentially fitting their needs.

The client was looking to make a transition away from older styles of management, after conducting some internal research demonstrating that, post-pandemic, staff were expecting more from their managers in terms of wellbeing support. However, managers' feedback was that they felt ill-equipped to handle such wellbeing conversations.

Warwick's Leadership and Management Development Team wanted a solution that equipped leaders with the confidence to both champion and role-model wellbeing in the workplace; to push back when workloads were too high, to build their resilience, and to learn some practical tools to help support both them and their teams.

THE SOLUTION:

WELLBEING FOR LEADERS
FOR THE LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT TEAM

Luminate ran their pilot Wellbeing For Leaders training for a group of approximately 43 over June-July 2023...

...The training consisted of a series of five 90-minute sessions:

- Mental Health Awareness for Managers
- Managing Stress Within Your Teams
- Building Resilient Teams
- Building Happy Teams
- Leading With Emotional Awareness

Both Warwick and Luminate – and, of course, the training attendees – learned a lot from what was a successful pilot programme, as well as split-testing another series of sessions; with one group receiving the training in person and the other over video conference, to trial which format leaders got more value from. Luminate incorporated the learnings from these investigations into the workshops, which were delivered as part of the client's leadership development offering.

These adaptions included delivering sessions exclusively via videoconference, increasing the session length from 90 minutes to 3 hours to dive even deeper into each topic, and weaving neurodivergence, as it relates to wellbeing, into the session content.

POSITIVE RIPPLE EFFECTS

FURTHER TRAINING ACROSS MULTIPLE DEPARTMENTS

Word of mouth spread within the university about the Leadership and Management Development Team's well-received wellbeing training.

This led to multiple other departments/teams engaging Luminate to run workshops and/or training across 2024 and into 2025:

- The Philosophy Department ran a Work-Life Balance seminar + Mental Health First Aid Training
- The Residential Community Team ran Mental Health First Aid Training + will be running a Mental Health Awareness seminar and Bespoke Mental Health Advocates Training in February and March 2025 respectively
- The Widening Participation Team ran a Young People's Mental Health seminar
- The English and Comparative Literature Department ran Mental Health Awareness Training
- The Conduction and Resolution Team ran Mental Health First Aid Training
- The Estates Team will be running a Building Happy Teams seminar in January 2025

Their objectives, generally, were to equip colleagues with the skills to take charge of their wellbeing and drive positive mental health from the ground up (where all staff were being trained) or top-down (where leadership was being trained).

92% of attendees feel they gained tools to support a colleague experiencing mental illness

100% of attendees feel they have a better ability to spot the signs and symptoms of poor mental health

92% of attendees feel they have a better understanding of how to look after their mental health

100% of attendees now feel more comfortable having conversations about mental health

This data is based on feedback from 43 participants in the Wellbeing For Leaders pilot study.

THE OUTCOME:

Warwick's response to the Leaders programme has been resoundingly positive; from the high praise received about Luminate's facilitators (Ryan Ridgway and Jana Nightingale) to the attendee request to lengthen sessions because they felt so enthusiastic about the training and its subject matter!

Managers who participated in the Wellbeing For Leaders pilot scheme report an improvement in their soft skills – with 92% of attendees stating they have gained practical tools they can implement to support themselves and their teams, and 100% stating they have gained a wider awareness of mental health as a result of the training.

The success of the partnership is also demonstrated in the positive reputation and numerous internal recommendations that have seen a growing number of departments/teams work with Luminate – as the client continues to upskill their workforce and build out a culture of positive mental health that spans the breadth of the organisation.

"*Thank you Luminate for supporting Warwick with the Wellbeing for Leaders programme. As I walk around campus, I've been stopped on more than one occasion by staff who want to tell me how amazing the sessions with Ryan and Jana [Luminate's facilitators] have been – words I hear a lot are 'great', 'positive', 'enjoyable', 'lively' and 'engaging'.*

" I'm so pleased our managers are engaging with the theme of Wellbeing and the practical tools they can implement to support their teams. It's an area which will only become more important to us all and Luminate have made this an easy, yet powerful, way of engaging with the topic." **– Mike Hudman, Leadership and Management Development Director (Interim), December 2023**

"Resonated with so many issues / people / situations." **– training attendee, June - July 2023**

LUMINATE HAVE ALSO WORKED WITH:

Barking & Dagenham College

Programme:
- Wellbeing Champions Training
- Bespoke, 3 hour, managing our mental health training workshop

UCL

Programme:
- Stress Management webinar
- Menopause in the Workplace webinar

University of Sheffield

Programme:
- Mental Health Awareness training for all staff

Queen Mary University of London

Programme:
- Mental Health Awareness for all staff **and** managers

[1] https://www.ukg.co.uk/about-us/newsroom/workforce-institute-managers-impact-mental-health