Mind matters: A model for mental health awareness and support from the Geological Society of London

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Why mental health matters

- In the UK, 1 in 4 adults will experience a mental health issue each year and up to 1 in 4 students will seek to access university mental health services during their course.

- Academics and postgraduate students are more likely to experience poor mental health than other working-age cohorts.

- Poor mental health is associated with lower productivity and worse learning outcomes, as well as a higher rate of accidents and safety violations.

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Mental health and geology

- Many aspects of work and research in the geosciences can harm mental health, including isolation from family and friends in remote field sites, working with communities that have experienced a natural disaster, and employment insecurity due to volatility in relevant markets.

- Workers in offshore and construction-based occupations are more likely to experience mental health conditions.

- But, many aspects can promote mental wellbeing, such as being in the natural environment and working to protect people and the planet.

- The right support can ensure that students and employees reach their full potential and are able to engage with their workplace and community.

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The Geological Society model

Mental health champion: director level, reports to trustees

Mental health first aiders: able to help individuals who approach, or seek out staff if concerned

Mental health and wellbeing group: volunteers who develop activities and programmes to support staff wellbeing. Reports actions and recommendations to health and safety committee

All staff: mental health awareness training, access to resources and employee assistance programme (EAP)

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Benefits and lessons

- Staff members report feeling valued on a personal level.
- Employee survey shows staff care about their own and their colleagues’ mental health, and wanted clear policies on mental health and how they can help colleagues.
- Survey identified areas that the mental health and wellbeing group and the senior leadership team can support, such as protected lunch hours and encouragement of work-life balance.
- Survey also revealed areas that Society can provide information and support, such as resilience, managing stress, conflict resolution, and communicating mental health concerns.
- Society was ready to provide support to workers affected by the COVID-19 lockdown and switch to remote working.

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