



**Mental Health<sup>+</sup>**

# **MH+ Charter for inclusive mental health practices in VET**

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# MH+ Charter for inclusive mental health practices in VET

This Charter has been created to help VET organisations (and other educational organisations) foster a tolerant, inclusive and accepting environment in which student and staff mental health is recognised and supported. Below are a series of approaches, policies and procedures that a mental health positive VET organisation can adhere to, to demonstrate that it is committed to support the mental health and wellbeing of all of its staff and students. Overall, a mental health positive VET organisation is a place where:

- Proactive education and training are offered to all students and staff to help them fully understand mental health and different support pathways.
- Information about mental health and where to receive support is easily accessible to all.
- All stakeholders (teachers, parents, all members of staff etc.) respect one another and are able to have open conversations.
- Everyone is taught to recognise and resist stereotypes, not to tolerate mistreatment (discrimination, stereotyping, teasing, bullying, harassment), including those based on mental health and to protect students, parents, teachers and other staff from all forms of discrimination.
- Create a culture of support so that students' voices are heard, their talents, interests and career aspirations are respected, their training and development needs are adequately supported and their work and feelings are valued.

## General Policies

Mental health positive VET organisations:

- Have a dedicated mental health policy that outlines how it will support student and staff mental health, how it will support staff learning and training, and all internal procedures around communication and discussing mental health with individuals (including confidentiality when personal discussions around mental health arise). This policy should also include an implementation plan of this Charter, describing specific measures to be taken for each section.
- Have a school ethos of equality and respect and ensure that all activities are inclusive of all students, and does not discriminate, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity or origin, religion or belief, disability or health status, including mental health. This should be followed by all students and staff members.
- Provide a space marked by respect, acceptance and confidentiality for students to speak openly about their mental health challenges.
- Identify and train staff members who function as leads around mental health work or issues (**IO3 Mental Health Champion**). These could be teachers, teaching assistants, school counselors etc.
- Have readily available written materials and information about mental health and wellbeing, the variety of mental health issues, mental health advocacy groups and support mechanisms.
- Have signage/imagery (such as posters, banners, email signatures etc.) promoting talking and being open about your mental health.



- Present opportunities for all students to take part in decision-making about policies that affect them (this can be done through student councils etc.).
- Support student campaigns and run activities each year that promote mental health – e.g. at mental health awareness week or a wellness week.
- Run lunchtime or after school activities and encourage students to participate and find activities that they enjoy as this helps promote wellbeing and helps students develop important social connections.

## Staff training and personal development

- All staff are aware of the policies and internal structures in place regarding mental health and are updated about any changes.
- All members of staff (including teachers, administrative staff, cafeteria staff, bus drivers etc.) are provided training on young people’s mental health, the variety of mental health problems there are and signs of emotional distress or suffering. This training should be comprehensive and updated regularly.
- There are Identified staff members who function as leads around mental health work or issues (**IO3 Mental Health Champion**).
- Staff are also supported with their mental health and sessions are provided on key issues such as dealing with stress and burnout.

## Teaching and Training approaches

Mental health positive VET organisations use teaching and learning approaches which instill greater awareness and understanding about mental health. Whether alone or integrated into other aspects of course delivery, these approaches are the most direct way to impact students:

- Actively address and educate students about mental health. This is done through assemblies, presentations by guest speakers from mental health advocacy groups, and informal activities within lessons.
- Use lesson plans that educate young people about emotional distress and suffering, mental health and their signs, and tackle mental health stereotyping.
- Use video, books, social media or other forms of media that present information and ideas around mental health and promote discussion.
- Create space for students to form and articulate their own understanding and to share their experiences of mental health.
- Use lesson plans that help students see, appreciate, support and understand one another as individuals.
- Offer sessions to all students on key issues such as dealing with exam stress, dealing with body image, self-image, social relations, managing anxieties, developing resilience, resolving conflict, communication etc.
- Discussions should be held with disruptive students to see if there are any signs of emotional distress / mental health issues and to see if support mechanisms can be found, before taking disciplinary actions such as detentions and exclusions.



## Communication

Interpersonal communication reinforces the VET organisation's commitment to mental health inclusion.

In a mental health positive VET organisation, teachers:

- Recognise that everyone's mental health is important, that we can all influence each other's mental health both positively and negatively, and that everyone should communicate and interact with empathy, respect and in ways that are supportive of other people's mental health.
- Promote discussions around mental health which revolve around individual experiences, rather than diagnosis, and stresses the importance of social support.
- Stress the idea that seeking support is a form of courage rather than a weakness.
- Use language that is inclusive of all communities and which does not reinforce stereotypes.
- Let students know that their strengths are recognized.
- Celebrate both academic and non-academic achievements of students.

Developing a whole school approach towards mental health is vital in supporting the mental health of students. This includes communicating with parents/carers:

- Provide written information to parents/carers on the importance of talking about mental health with their children, the policies and training for teachers that the school has in place as well as resources around where to get help.
- Discuss and hold presentations on mental health with parents/carers to help them understand the complexity of mental health and the importance of being open about discussing it at home, and signs of emotional distress and how to support their child.
- Support families of students who have mental health problems. Help parents/guardians understand what their child may be going through and signpost towards useful information. Make sure that the student has a say in the discussions about them.
- Support the student to express their own perspective and needs.
- With families, share ways to talk about mental health that are affirming and inclusive.

## Access to information

- Information about mental health and where to get support is readily available to students in publicly visible locations in the form of flyers, posters, brochures etc. This will include the introduction of relevant materials in the library and access to electronic and printed materials etc.
- Information and advice about general mental wellbeing is also presented – e.g. dealing with exam stress, communication, making friends, self-confidence, expressing yourself, dealing with family issues etc.
- The mental health policy is accessible and updated to all students and families on the organisation's online areas.



- There is clear signage (for example through posters, banners, teachers email signatures and social media posts etc.) throughout the organisation that mental health is a core value and that students can speak to teachers.
- Ensure access to a specific person at every VET organisation who would consult students, teachers and the non-teaching staff on issues related to mental health (**IO3 Mental Health Champion**).
- Cooperate with students, teachers and parents in the implementation of projects and initiatives – e.g. wellness weeks.

## Counteracting Bullying

Within education, bullying can impact a young person's mental health and there is a duty to prevent bullying and support victims.

- Educate students about the forms that bullying can take (emotional, physical, ignoring), the effects it has and how students can contribute to a bullying-free environment.
- Policies have been put in place on how staff should deal with instances of bullying.
- Introduce effective mechanisms for protecting the victims of bullying and violence, giving priority to ensuring their safety. These mechanisms should involve effective and prohibitive sanctions for the perpetrators, which aim at correcting their behavior.
- Discussions are held with bullies around their emotional wellbeing and mental health to see if any support can be provided to them.
- Organise a centralised system for the collection of statistical data on the occurrence of bullying and how it has been handled.
- Challenge student comments based on stereotypes.
- Sanction hate speech in public in the name of reinforcing the principles of equal treatment and acceptance of all individuals and offer an alternative to it, by modelling compassionate speech.
- Ensure hallways and cafeterias have trusted individuals present to increase a sense of safety.
- Enable all students to have access to support services for victims of violence, including psychological support.



## MH+ partners

Mental Health + project is formed by:

### Aspire-igen (UK)

The Aspire-igen group is the largest careers and training organisation in the Yorkshire region (an area with a population of over 5 million). The group is a not-for-profit social enterprise with 22 years' experience of supporting young people and adults into employment.



Website: <https://aspire-igen.com/>

### CESIE (Italy)

CESIE is a non-profit, apolitical, and non-governmental organisation based in Palermo (Italy) and established in 2001. CESIE promotes cultural, social, educational and economic development at local, national, European and international levels.



c e s i e  
the world is only one creature

Website: <https://cesie.org/>

### Learnmera Oy (Finland)

Learnmera Oy is a private adult education provider and translation company, focused mainly on corporate clients in the greater Helsinki area providing private executive business language lessons.



Website: <https://learnmera.com/>

### Business Foundation for Education (Bulgaria)

Business Foundation for Education (BFE) is a Bulgarian non-government organisation, established in 2005 to act in public interest. The Foundation has been implementing a variety of innovative national and EU initiatives impacting on citizens' employability and competitiveness directed to various target groups.



Business Foundation for Education

Website: <https://www.fbo.bg/en/>



### **Hugarafll (Iceland)**

Hugarafll (Mindpower) is an independent association of people dealing with mental illness. The organisation is built on ideas on empowerment, recovery, equality and cooperation between users and professionals.

Website: [www.hugarafll.is](http://www.hugarafll.is)



### **INTRAS Foundation (Spain)**

INTRAS is a non-profit organisation founded in 1994 dedicated to high quality research and intervention in the field of mental health. The organisation consists of 12 centres in 9 different provinces in Spain, with 189 interdisciplinary professionals (psychiatrists, psychologists, educators, art-therapists and professionals from social and economic fields) carrying out research, training, clinical practice as well as cultural and sport activities

Website: [www.intras.es](http://www.intras.es)

