**HEA Healthy Campus**  **Case Study**

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| **HEALTHY CAMPUS CASE STUDY** | |
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| **Name of Institution/ Organisation** | Maynooth University (MU) |
| **Who led the initiative?** | The Maynooth University Healthy Campus Team in collaboration with the campus Mental Health Nurse and the Clubs & Societies Co-ordinators. |
| **Date and timeframe of the initiative** | Four Connect Cafés took places across Academic Year 2023 – 2024, two in Semester One and two in Semester Two. |
| **What was the reach of the initiative?** | An open invitation to the Connect Cafés was issued to all students via the Healthy Campus, Student Services and Clubs & Societies social media accounts, and the campus wide student eZine. |
| **Initiative title** | Healthy Campus x Clubs & Socs ‘Connect Café’ |
| **Aims / objectives** | The overarching aim was to improve mental health literacy and decrease stigma regarding mental health, in addition to increasing students’ sense of connection with self/others/the campus community.  Objectives:   * Normalise talking about mental health by having regular cafés on campus where students can come together, and the topic of mental health is spoken about openly. * Increase students coping skills through promotion of the Mental Health Ireland ‘5 Ways to Wellbeing’ tool at each café. * Increase awareness of the mental health supports on campus and beyond by having an Information Stand at each café with information, flyers, and handouts available for students to take. * Increase students sense of connection and belonging to campus by providing a space for them to relax for an hour where they can avail of free tea/coffee and healthy snacks (e.g. fruit, yogurt and granola), mingle with each other and chat with/ask questions to the Healthy Campus Team, Mental Health Nurse and Clubs & Societies Co-ordinators about what supports/services are available to them. |
| **The rationale for the action, including any identified health needs** | Research the Healthy Campus Team conducted with students around perceived barriers to accessing mental health supports identified that many students were not fully aware of the supports Maynooth University offers, and many felt a stigma around mental health and accessing supports still exists.  Maynooth is a commuter college so many students arrive early in the morning and need to remain on campus all day. As such, having a warm, dry space to come for an hour between lectures to get a free hot beverage and healthy snack was helpful.  Public health and epidemiologic research have established that social connection is a protective factor for health and wellbeing. |
| **Identify all frameworks, policies, or strategies this initiative aligns to**  **(internal, local or national)** | The National Healthy Campus Charter and Framework  Healthy Ireland Framework 2019-2025  The National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework  The Maynooth University Strategic Plan 2023-2028 |
| **Summary** | The Maynooth University Connect Café initiative is a collaborative series of events for students, organised and run by the Healthy Campus Team in partnership with the campus Mental Health Nurse and Clubs and Societies Department. The aim is to improve mental health literacy and decrease mental health stigma across the student population, in addition to increasing students’ sense of connection with self/others/the campus community. Four Connect Cafés were run during Academic Year 23/24. Each event was well attended and received positive feedback from students. |
| **Did you collaborate with internal and/or external stakeholders to deliver?** | Internal collaborators were the Student Services Department who provided handouts and leaflets with information on their services such as Counselling and Student Advisory. External collaborators were Mental Health Ireland (from whom the Connect Café concept originated) who provided advice, sample questions, bunting and informative handouts for the events. |
| **How was the initiative organised?** | In advance of Academic Year 2023/24 the Healthy Campus Team and the Healthy Campus ‘Mental Health & Wellbeing Working Group’ reviewed plans under the National Student Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Framework. In order to target key goals such as increasing mental health awareness and belonging it was agreed to run a Connect Café.  In the spirit of the Healthy Campus Framework, we aimed to take a whole-campus, partnership approach and consulted with many key stakeholders. Through this consultation we learned that the Clubs & Societies Department had a new dedicated space on campus where they planned to hold coffee mornings. We then approached the Clubs & Societies Co-ordinators to ask if we could partner together to use this space to run a dedicated ‘Connect Café’ coffee morning.  The 1st pilot Café was extremely well attended, so it was agreed that we would run it again in semester one and twice in semester two. |
| **What resources did you need?** | A dedicated event space was required. The room complete with tables and chairs was kindly provided by our partners, the Clubs and Societies Co-ordinators. It was then decorated with bunting, posters and leaflets related to both Healthy Campus and general mental health supports.  A range of tea/coffee and healthy snacks were required. Clubs and Societies kindly provided the water canisters, cups, stirrers, and milk, while the Healthy Campus Team financed the tea/coffee and snacks.  A minimum level of staffing was required. The Clubs & Societies Co-ordinators and Healthy Campus Executive Assistants manned the tea/coffee stand (greeting students and pouring the beverages), while the Healthy Campus Co-ordinator and Mental Health Nurse floated around to each table of students; engaging them in conversation around the general topic of mental health, the ‘5 ways to Wellbeing’ tool and the supports available on/off campus. |
| **Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?** | Monitoring of attendance – having the Connect Cafés consistently well attended (approx. 100-150 students attended each event) demonstrates that there is an appetite for this type of initiative among the Maynooth University student population.  Feedback – students at the cafés provided verbal feedback that talking through the questions inbuild into the ‘5 Ways to Wellbeing’ Tool was interesting and positively impacted their mood. Furthermore, the Mental Health Nurse had several students engage her 1:1 service as a result of becoming aware of it through attending a café. |
| **Any future plans, including the sustainability of the initiative?** | The plan is to run another series of Connect Cafés next Academic Year (24/25), and to recruit Student ‘Mental Health & Wellbeing Ambassadors’ who can assist in the promotion and running of these events. |
| **Key learning points** | The importance and value of a partnership approach to student wellbeing – the collaborative work between the Healthy Campus Team, the Health Centre (Mental Health Nurse) and the Clubs & Societies Department enabled a higher standard of service delivery and a broader reach across the student population. We did reach out to the Maynooth student Mental Health Society and invite them to become involved, but they did not have capacity this year. We are hopeful they will be able to get involved in AY 24/25 and feel this will add a further richness, reach and depth to the events.  The importance of the student voice – while we did illicit qualitative feedback from students who attended, this was not done in a structured, quantitative way. Our goal for next semester is, not only to have students involved in the running of the events, but to have a structured feedback mechanism for attendees (e.g. a QR code linked to a satisfaction survey that we invite all attendees to complete). |

**Healthy Campus Framework Categories (please tick all that apply)**

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| **Healthy Campus Process** | **Whole Campus Approach** | **Topic** | **Population Group** |
| Commit | Leadership, Strategy & Governance | Alcohol | Students |
| Coordinate | Campus Environment (Facilities & Services) | Substance Misuse | Staff |
| Consult | Campus Culture & Communications | Healthy Eating / Food | Wider community |
| Create | Personal & Professional Development | Mental Health & Wellbeing | Other |
| Celebrate & Continue |  | Sexual Health & Wellbeing |  |
|  |  | Tobacco Free Campus |  |
|  |  | Physical Activity / Active Transport |  |
|  |  | Wellbeing on the Curriculum (can also fall under ‘Personal & Professional Development) |  |
|  |  | Health & Sustainability |  |
|  |  | Other |  |

**Contact Details**

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| **Contact Name** | Orlagh Eustace |
| **Date** | 20/05/24 |
| **Email Address** | [orlagh.eustace@mu.ie](mailto:orlagh.eustace@mu.ie) |
| **Links** | [Maynooth University Healthy Campus (@healthycampusmu) • Instagram photos and videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/Cydnc4AIxXq/)  [Maynooth University Healthy Campus (@healthycampusmu) • Instagram photos and videos](https://www.instagram.com/p/C4IHKNSNzyl/?img_index=1) |