



Wellbeing and Dignity at Work initiatives: supporting staff to identify and discuss wellbeing to promote healthy lifestyles and positive mental health

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Last year Archaeology South East (ASE), part of UCL Institute of Archaeology, further increased the number of members of staff trained as first aiders via the British Red Cross scheme, thereby significantly increasing the number of physical first aiders on any given site. The reassurance of always having a first aider in proximity led me to wonder if it was possible to emulate the scenario with mental health first aid.



Staff working alongside contractors. Credit: Archaeology South East

Since starting in commercial archaeology – and particularly through my roles in ClfA's Diggers' Forum, various ClfA working parties and the Enabled Archaeology group – I've come to believe that the heritage industry attracts highly empathetic individuals.

This is evidenced by the number of people I've met who have left the industry to pursue vocational, caring careers in areas such as nursing, midwifery, social care and social housing. However, I have considered whether having higher levels of empathy makes people more prone to everyday stressors, having encountered several colleagues who have experienced mental health issues.

When I approached my management with this concept, they not only supported me in identifying mental health



Field staff at work. Credit: Archaeology South East

first aid courses, they also went out of their way to find resources that could be shaped to fit our specific needs in the field and assisted me in becoming a Wellbeing Champion.

ASE is unique compared to many other commercial archaeology companies in that our connection with UCL allows us to access a host of resources built around supporting an academic community. However, staff welfare and mental health is not a one-size-fits-all solution, and the company has endeavoured to take the core principles from UCL's main strategy and create a useful set of resources and support network for both field and office staff. Nothing illustrates this as clearly as our Wellbeing and Dignity at Work initiatives.

ASE uses the five-year UCL Wellbeing Strategy, dedicated to creating and supporting a happy and healthy community. This strategy was developed to introduce a proactive approach to wellbeing by promoting and embedding positive physical, mental and social health and wellbeing behaviours and activities across the UCL/ASE community.

There are six Pillars of Wellbeing:

- 1 Positive environments
- 2 Policies and practice
- 3 Healthy lifestyles
- 4 Mental wellness
- 5 Removing mental ill-health stigma
- 6 Culture and behaviour change

Our network of Wellbeing Champions is spread across our Sussex, Essex and London offices, incorporating members of staff from all levels of responsibility. They help to implement and support Wellbeing@UCL through effective signposting, knowledge of support available, organising and promoting wellbeing activities, and encouraging healthy lifestyles and positive mental health. Champions foster a positive and supportive environment across the workplace community, also acting as contact points for Dignity at Work concerns. They facilitate and document local wellbeing activity, working collaboratively with other wellbeing champions.

ASE is committed to providing a safe, all-inclusive work environment, hence the development of our Dignity at Work initiative. We drew the base structure for Dignity at Work in collaboration with UCL's 'Where do you draw the line?' scheme, tailoring it to commercial archaeology and therefore creating a bespoke policy that is not yet in place anywhere else within the industry.

Staff workshops were created after an anonymous consultation exercise with all ASE staff, which was used to identify and model different scenarios for use in role-playing. They also drew on the results of pre-workshop questionnaires that modelled approaches to, and understanding of, harassment and bullying in the workplace. The workshops were held over a three-month period ensuring full staff participation, and involved presentations, round-table group working, role-playing

exercises and feedback sessions. Each workshop concluded with the formal identification of action points, and these have established an ongoing action plan for a standing working-group within the ASE team.

The Dignity at Work policy now forms a part of our Research and Method Statements (RAMS), meaning all clients and sub-contractors encountering our staff are required to read and adhere to the policy whilst working alongside our staff. Infographics created for use on site give staff contact details for the Wellbeing Champion of their choice.



The infographic on display in all staff locations, including all welfare units in the field. Credit: Archaeology South East

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Gemma joined ClfA as a student, obtaining a seat on the Diggers' Forum committee shortly after beginning work in commercial archaeology. She is currently a field archaeologist for Archaeology South East and teaches field methodology to research students for Brown University. She has a focus on mental wellbeing in the workplace, as well as promoting the rights of and improving general working conditions for archaeologists.

