

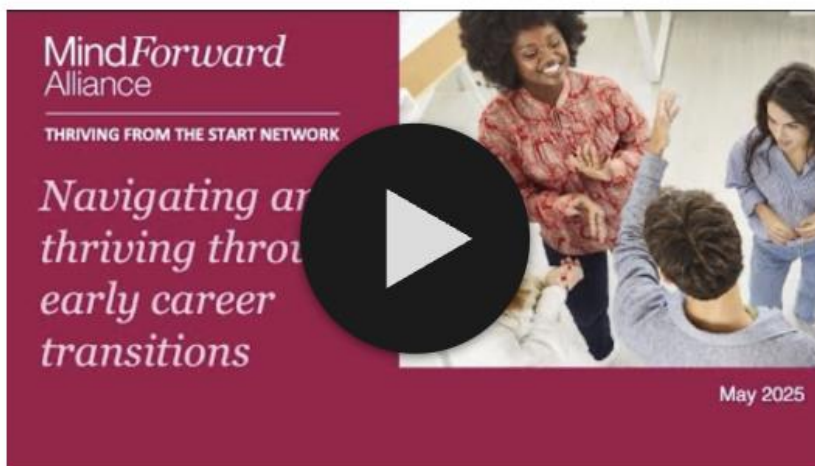
THRIVING THROUGH CHANGE

Prioritising wellbeing in early career transitions

The first few years of young professional's career are full of change - exciting but also can be overwhelming. Balancing the pressures of a new job, getting to grips with manager expectations and full-time work, and, for some, balancing additional assignments and exams brings stress, uncertainty and feelings of competition. This can negatively impact on mental wellbeing.

MindForward Alliance's Thriving From The Start Network, a mental wellbeing network for young professionals, hosted a virtual panel event focusing in on how young people can maintain positive mental wellbeing through significant change. In this conversation, young professionals and workplace mental health expert shared their experiences, expectations and advice. The key points are highlighted in this document.

You can watch the full event via the link below:



SPEAKERS



Nicole Fernandes
Senior Associate - Audit
PwC



Hannah Kempson-Mead
HR Occupational Psychology
Graduate
Lloyds Banking Group



Jaan Madan
Senior Training Consultant
MindForward Alliance

Prioritising wellbeing in early career transitions

Key insights

HANNAH'S EXPERIENCE: NAVIGATING CHANGE AND STAYING GROUNDED

Career transition - Hannah entered the Lloyds Banking Group HR graduate scheme after a career change. She had started her career by qualifying in a mental health role. She then shifted into a corporate setting and beginning a new very different specialism - occupational psychology - meant starting over in many ways. Even though she was able to draw on previous experience, she went from feeling like an expert in an area to feeling like she was starting again.

Adapting to constant transitions in the new role - The structure of the graduate scheme required her to rotate into new teams every eight months. While this was an excellent way to build broad knowledge quickly, it meant regularly learning new systems, adapting to new managers, and rebuilding relationships - all while trying to deliver a consistently good performance. It was a relatively intense cycle of change, with multiple learning curves, in a short period of time.

Juggling priorities and big questions - As the end of the scheme approached, Hannah found herself in one of the most complex stages yet. She was not only managing her current role, but also applying for permanent positions for when the graduate scheme ended. She was also asking herself the big question: "what do I actually want to do?". Deciding on the next step felt both exciting and weighty. But, with so many potential paths, pressure to make the "right" choice felt overwhelming at times. There was also the fear of rejection.

Spotting the signs of struggle - Through experience, Hannah said that she had learned to recognise early signs that her wellbeing was slipping. In particular, she noticed changes in her thinking - becoming more self-critical, withdrawing from social activities and feeling low in energy. These were her cues that she needed to refocus on taking some steps to prioritise her wellbeing. If she didn't, both her wellbeing, job performance and ability to make the right decision for herself could suffer.

Developing personalised tools - Hannah shared strategies that helps her to maintain positive wellbeing. This included reframing negative thoughts, e.g. that things were worse than they seemed or that everyone was doing better than her. Journaling helped her to explore what was really bothering her. Crucially, she also ensured that she was prioritising and appreciating activities outside of work life. E.g. regularly volunteering at an animal shelter provided a meaningful and energising way to recharge.

NICOLE'S EXPERIENCE: MOVING FROM OVERWHELM TO FINDING SUPPORT

Early stability - Nicole started her career on an audit graduate scheme, which combined real work with ongoing professional exams and training. For her, this felt like a natural continuation of university. The structure, deadlines, and rhythm of study and exams were familiar, and this helped to ease the transition into working life.

Managing the shift to more unstructured work – when the exams ended, Nicole found herself in a very different environment. With no more scheduled training, the structure she had relied on disappeared. She entered busy season in audit - long hours, competing demands and expectations from different managers. In this more unstructured context, where she was working on new content, she found prioritising hard and felt overwhelmed.

Reaching a tipping point – the stress took a physical toll and led to her migraines flaring up. This was a trigger for Nicole to notice that something needed to change. As a first step, she opened up to her peers and talked to them about how she was feeling. She discovered that many of them were going through the same thing. That moment of solidarity helped her to feel better, and their support gave her the confidence to speak with her line manager to find a way forward.

The Power of Honest Conversations – her line manager was supportive and booked in regular one-on-one conversations. These were practical and supportive, and helped her reassess her priorities, understand expectations more clearly and develop skills to manage her time better. As a result, Nicole's confidence grew, her mental wellbeing improved and she was able to work more effectively.

Lessons learned

MAINTAINING YOUR OWN POSITIVE WELLBEING THROUGH CHANGE

Take the time to recognise “early warning signs” of poor wellbeing - Both Hannah and Nicole developed the ability to spot changes in their thinking, energy, emotions and health as early signs that were not coping well. This self-awareness of changing behaviour or thinking is critical as a trigger to start taking action.

Challenge negative thought patterns - Hannah spoke powerfully about identifying “thinking traps” – with common examples being the tendency to compare yourself negatively to others, who seem to be coping better with the same situation. Or catastrophising small mistakes. Reframing these thoughts helped her stay grounded and maintain perspective.

Embrace Peer Support - Nicole's experience showed the importance of connecting, and speaking with, peers. It can reduce isolation, be a source of advice and give the confidence to seek further help. Jaan reinforced the value of peer networks - whether internal or external - as a way to share strategies and normalise challenges faced by young professionals. If you are looking for a peer network, consider [joining the Thriving From The Start Network](#).

Practice self-care continuously, not just in crisis - Jaan emphasised the importance of embedding and prioritising practices, which support your own positive wellbeing, into your everyday life. Examples include exercise, journaling, social connection, listening to your favourite podcast and having some downtime when things are good. This is important, firstly, as it protects your wellbeing and can protect against struggling in the first place. And, secondly, these practices become natural to fall back on when stress increases.

Find personal strategies that work for you - Jaan underlined that wellbeing is individual. What works for one person may not work for another. Professionals should think of their mental wellbeing in the same strategic, proactive way they approach other aspects of their career development – be proactive, experiment, reflect, and evolve over time. This could include a “toolbox” which includes anything from exercise, breathing exercises, therapy, spending time in nature and time with friends.

Recognise that some of your previous coping mechanisms may not work in the new environment - Jaan explained that many high-performing young people rely on coping strategies that worked in school or university – like putting their head down and working harder. While this may be effective in academic settings, this approach often doesn't work in the more complex, fast-paced workplace. It lacks intentional planning, regular breaks for optimal cognitive performance and long-term goal setting.

Further, when receiving developmental feedback, we may fall into unhelpful patterns formed earlier in life. Some become defensive, others take it personally and withdraw, and some overcommit to please. Reflecting on how we respond to feedback allows us to stay composed, gain more from the feedback, and uncover real opportunities for growth. It may also make us more likely to actively seek out feedback which will only support our career development.

Make sure you don't tie your whole personal worth to your job - Hannah and Nicole highlighted the importance of maintaining a balanced identity. Jaan echoed this, encouraging professionals to define themselves beyond just their job titles, and make time to find fulfilment across other areas of life. This is important as puts difficult times at work, which we will all experience, in perspective.

The role of the workplace

SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH AND RESILIENCE

Mental wellbeing in the workplace isn't just an individual concern – it's a shared responsibility with the business. Young professionals should not be left to manage their mental wellbeing alone, especially at what can be transitional challenging time. Organisations should be intentional in designing environments that support young professionals so they are more likely to thrive in these roles and in the future. This includes creating a psychologically safe environment, creating a mentally healthy work environment, and offering and signposting to support.

For an evidence-based roadmap on how to build a mentally healthy workplace, businesses can download the MindForward Alliance [Thriving at Work Framework](#). If a business would like to speak to MindForward Alliance about membership, or workplace mental wellbeing consultancy, training or event support related to workplace mental wellbeing, please contact training@mindforwardalliance.com

A final word

Understanding the need, and how to, prioritise and protect your mental wellbeing in the context of the workplace will be an important part of a young professional's development. If you are equipped with tools for self-awareness and mental wellbeing from the very start of your career – and supported by workplace culture built on empathy and sustainability – you are more likely to thrive.

This foundation not only protects your mental wellbeing, but also will empower you to perform at your best and build a fulfilling career. And remember to actively seek support when needed. Help-seeking behaviour is a strength, and will help you to thrive, even in challenging environments.

About the Thriving from the Start Network

The Thriving from The Start (TFTS) Network is a mental health network run by, and for young professionals. It aims to raise awareness of common early-career challenges - like perfectionism, burnout, financial stress, and imposter syndrome - through open conversations and access to support and resources.

If you are a young professional, and you would like to be kept informed about future TFTS Network events and resources, please go [here](#).

About MindForward Alliance

MindForward Alliance was founded by business leaders and mental health experts to support organisations to build mentally healthy workplaces where both people and business thrive. As a non-profit, we provide impartial expertise, insight and guidance to help businesses build more resilient, high-performing teams and sustainable, inclusive cultures. [Find out more here](#).