Vol 13 | Issue 3 (2025) | pp. 87-111

JOURNAL OF
Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice

https://jpaap.ac.uk/

Student mental wellbeing at critical times: Normalising discussion and action

Dr Lovleen Kushwah, University of Glasgow

"…human beings are biologically cultural, and education is a major acculturating force."

-Immordino-Yang, Darling-Hammond and Krone (2019, p. 186)

Abstract

Student Academic Experience surveys evidenced that undergraduate students fare worse than the whole population in wellbeing measures. Several studies have found that students reported assessments as one of the top stressors. At the same time, research has shown that studying at Higher Education institutions (HEIs) contributes to students' personal growth and has lifelong benefits. This study explores how to support students at critical times during an academic year. In doing so, it proposes the use of wellbeing education through an unconventional, decentralised, and targeted intervention. The significance of this work lies in demonstrating how mental wellbeing support can be made accessible, inclusive and de-stigmatised by embedding it into everyday academic practices as a core pedagogic strategy; a gap which cannot be filled by traditional counselling or standalone mental health services. This provides a shift in how wellbeing is framed in HEIs as an integrated and preventative educational practice and not as reactive support. More specifically, this solution uses a targeted newsletter (t-NL) to enhance students' academic experience in a non-health-based course when students are more vulnerable to diminished mental wellbeing. The use of a newsletter is intertwined with formative assessments which promotes student and staff collaboration as well as student engagement using a play-based learning approach. In addition, it allows co-creation of resources by feeding forward diverse and multicultural students' voices for future issues of the newsletter attending to students' lived experiences, required support and possible intersectionality. The findings of this research are supportive of such an intervention and indicate students' interest in engaging with mental wellbeing content alongside academic activities. Overall, this approach contributes to a necessary paradigm shift from reactive to preventative support for student flourishing.

Keywords: embedding mental wellbeing in curriculum, humanistic approach, critical pedagogy, wellbeing-education

Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK are being encouraged to get the University Mental Health Charter (UMHC) award by the Department of Education (2021) to establish a secure and stress-free learning environment for students. Working along with the UMHC, there are several initiatives at national level which also support students' mental wellbeing. The Universities UK's Stepchange framework is one such initiative, which calls for action and asks HEIs to "adopt mental health as a strategic priority, to see it as foundational to all aspects of university life, for all students and all staff" (Universities UK, 2023, p. 4). Another government initiative includes funding worth £400,000, which was granted by the Office for Students (OfS) in 2024 to the Student Minds charity to support the implementation of UMHC (OfS, 2024).

The Scottish government is also working alongside Universities Scotland on a Student Mental Health Action Plan which will involve creating a Student Mental Health Agreement collaboratively with student bodies (Scottish Government, 2024). All these call for closer scrutiny of institutional policies.

While universities acknowledge assessment stress as a key concern, institutional responses are often reactive. Many institutional policies still place the burden on individual students to seek support without addressing structural limitations. In addition, implementation of policies to tackle this varies widely. Further, conversations about mental wellbeing are generally avoided between educators and students, and the responsibility is left to be shouldered by the support services. However, this disjointed view has been highlighted by UMHC's call for a whole university approach (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). Thus, it is important to identify gaps between rhetoric and practice which may require a deeper scrutiny of current institutional policies. This will not only highlight practices and learning environments that aggravate stress, such as certain assessment methods, limited flexibility around exams etc., but also help propose reforms for healthy and more inclusive academic environments to better align with UMHC and Universities UK Stepchange framework. So, a key question for HEIs, educators, mentors, pastoral carers and support service providers is then: how can they support students, and more so, collectively?

This paper proposes a complementary approach of a decentralized wellbeing education intervention that reframes wellbeing not in isolation but as an integral part of the academic experience delivered at the classroom level. It fills a gap that traditional counselling or standalone mental health services cannot address, i.e. normalising and embedding support within learning environments, making support more accessible, preventive, and culturally inclusive (Baik et al., 2019; Oades et al., 2011). Further, it enables a shift in how wellbeing is framed in HE. The intervention presented in this paper also holds significance for multiple stakeholders. For students, it offers a framework for an inclusive and context-specific support that can reflect the diverse and intersectional nature of students' lived experiences while respecting academic rhythms; engages students where they are; and lowers barriers to accessing mental wellbeing content (Lister & Allman, 2024). For educators and institutions, it provides a low-cost, scalable framework while enhancing wellbeing as a shared pedagogical responsibility (Priestley et al., 2022). Thus, this approach supports the shift from reactivity to challenge as they move into proactively promoting conditions for student wellbeing.

Similar to this paper, Houghton and Anderson (2017) provide examples of embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum in which academic content and the learning and teaching process are adjusted or innovatively incorporated to support students' mental wellbeing. Lister and Allman (2024) provide a framework in which they look at two-dimensional five-point definitions of mental wellbeing embeddedness. According to all these authors, educators who are in regular contact with students can play an important role in embedding mental wellbeing into the curriculum.

Beyond UMHC and Universities UK Stepchange, this focus on mental wellbeing is also important as it has implications and connection with several sustainable development goals (Votruba et.al, 2016), which are called to envisage and create an economically sustainable and socially just world, and students' mental wellbeing is crucial to support that vision (Nolet, 2015). It is about planting good Anthropocene seeds and creating scenarios with optimal conditions for innovation and creativity, self-actualisation, mindful and sustainable lifestyle, reduced inequality, social cohesion etc. From a social perspective, Jayawickreme and

Dahill-Brown (2016, p. 473) refer to an "educational system that has as its goal the expansion of eudaemonic wellbeing that can contribute to a more just society and world".

In this paper, wellbeing education refers to the educative process that promotes mental wellbeing and awareness among students through accessible, supportive, and non-clinical intervention. Vella-Brodrick et al., (2025, p. 2) state that its use "… is not solely about academic achievement but also about preparing students for a healthy, balanced, and meaningful life". The intervention- a targeted newsletter –adopts a holistic approach that integrates academic guidance with strategies to support students' mental wellbeing, aiming to normalise conversations about mental wellbeing and encourage engagement through light, interactive academic content.

Background

Research has shown that HE students' wellbeing measures have been in decline (see Figure 1), and they have been below the general population of young people in the age group of 20-24 years old, indicating that studying at a higher education institution can be a stressful time and can impact mental wellbeing (Neves & Brown, 2022; Office for National Statistics 2022; Neves & Hillman, 2017). Another survey conducted by Maguire et al. (2022), called 'The Thriving Learners', targeted Scottish college students and found that 64% of students have experienced low mental wellbeing.

While students are generally more anxious, they are also reported to feel more anxious and stressed around exams and submission of coursework during the academic year (Boulton et al., 2019; Mahadevan et al., 2010). Student Minds and Alterline (2023) reported that three most common causes of stress were performing well academically, keeping up with study and managing time. While some challenges and stress associated with them can be a productive experience, high and persistent stress can impact students' mental health and academic performance adversely (Neves & Hillman, 2019). Exam stress, including an increase in the number of assessments, is unavoidable, and it is often accompanied by anxiety and pressure to perform (Neves & Hillman, 2019). High levels of stress are associated with poor mental wellbeing (Denovan & Macaskill, 2017; Macaskill, 2013). Stress can take a toll on mental health to the point where it may impact students not only in the short run, for example, weak academic performance, retention challenges (Eisenberg et al., 2009), but also in the longer run. Neves and Hillman (2019) point out that some students may find their coursework and exams difficult and hold themselves responsible for their unmet expectations and hence feel more anxious.

Several other factors, such as part-time work, financial worries, lack of supportive personal relationships, relocation from home to host country etc. have also been found to be contributing to students' less positive experiences (Sheldon et al., 2021; Stiebahl & Lewis, 2023).

Student Wellbeing Measures for the 20-24 age group.

Figure 1 Student Wellbeing Measures for the 20-24 age group. Sources: Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES, HEPI) and Office of National Statistics (ONS). For general population ONS data is used, average of the quarterly personal wellbeing estimates is taken, which are seasonally adjusted. Please note: High levels of 'low' anxiety are good. Life satisfaction, feeing life is worthy, and happiness have been on decline and the number of students reporting low levels of anxiety, i.e., 0-1 on a scale of 10, have been decreasing.

Further, this age group is in a very interesting phase. At social-cultural-economic level, researchers continue to understand the impact of these factors on students' wellbeing, while at the neurobiological level, the pre-frontal cortex - the brain's rational region responsible for executive functions, such as task planning, risk assessment, multitasking, problem-solving, and cultivating lifelong interests - does not reach full development until the mid-20's (Arain, et al., 2013; Hensch, 2005; Tottenham, 2017).

This paper

When students do not know ways to manage mental wellbeing, associate it with stigma, and have limited help-seeking behaviour they can have poor mental health awareness and literacy (Kutcher et.al, 2016) which can lead to poor mental health (Gorczynski et al., 2017). Gorczynski et al. (2020) found a low level of mental health literacy amongst UK university students. In fact, there is evidence that poor mental health and lack of wellbeing is directly connected to greater experience of exam stress (Boulton et al., 2019; Mahadevan et al., 2010) and lower engagement with leisure and learning activities (Campbell et al., 2022). Thus, this research proposes to target mental health literacy and raising awareness. This can be achieved by active and direct introduction of wellbeing education in classrooms. Research has shown that, in addition to education and awareness (Vidourek & Burbage, 2019; Wada et al., 2019) open conversations and positive environment (Elbulok-Charcape et al., 2020) are also important in reducing stigma about mental wellbeing. Use of wellbeing education courses is not a new concept, and research has shown that it can produce

improvement in students' mental wellbeing significantly (Young et al., 2020; Yusufov et al., 2019; Hobbs et al., 2024). These courses can be designed to fit for the purpose, such as normalising talking about mental wellbeing (Goodman, 2017), stress etc.

Other interventions may target mental health stigma amongst undergraduate students using events, workshops (Bingham & O'Brien, 2018; Stanley et al., 2018; Hankir et al., 2017; Zalar et al., 2007; Hamann et al., 2016) and through curricula (Carroll, 2018). Some other studies have been done on online interventions (Oti et al., 2022) and web-based support systems (Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2017) and their effectiveness and the results are mixed and require more evidence in support. In a review, Worsley et al. (2020) discuss various interventions that can improve college and university students' mental health and wellbeing, such as mindfulness-based, cognitive behavioural, and technology-delivered interventions.

This paper is different from other interventions in the sense it involves all stakeholders as well as targets only critical periods during studies and embeds mental wellbeing into the curricula more directly into a non-health-based course. It also calls to move away from reactive approach and towards the adage of 'prevention is better than cure' and revisits the role of educators in promoting mental wellbeing by enhancing interpersonal interactions and social relationships (Priestley et.al, 2022). The UMHC and Universities UK's Stepchange policy frameworks shape how universities are expected to act, and how mental wellbeing be prioritised in curriculum design and institutional culture. This paper contributes to this line of work by moving beyond tokenistic approaches and towards a sustainable, embedded model of support. It also offers a scalable, low-resource method to integrate mental wellbeing awareness into everyday academic life. Rather than a standalone tool, the intervention represents a broader commitment to compassionate and preventive pedagogical practice.

The case for more conversations about mental wellbeing

Wellbeing education is often used as a tool to reduce stigma around mental health issues. Thus, there is a case for its use to start, normalise and propagate conversations about mental wellbeing. Talking about mental wellbeing is not normalised in immediate environments, and some students facing obstacles do not seek help (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). This situation can be aggravated depending on students' ethnicity, gender, cultural background, etc. (Elbulok-Charcape et al., 2020; Hirai et al., 2015; Sagar-Ouriaghli et al. 2020). In a narrative analysis by Sheldon et al.(2021), stigma attached to mental health revelations, either because of viewing it overtly as a taboo, or not accepting oneself as sick and weak, were identified as risk factors.

More recently, student requests for support have increased (Campbell et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2015) and so have its costs. The Times (2025) reported that UK universities are spending millions per year on student mental health services and more recently, over the last five years, this amount has increased significantly. However, even with this level of investment, there are several challenges, for example, these services are economically unsustainable (Papadatou-Pastou et al., 2017); usually have a long waiting list (Broglia et al., 2018); and not enough to reach all (Kazdin & Rabbitt, 2013). Beyond these costs, poor mental health can reduce productivity, increase welfare costs, and put pressure on healthcare services. It is estimated that in 2019 the annual cost in the UK is £117.9 billion due to lost productivity alone (McDaid et al., 2022). While wellbeing education is provided by student support services in the format of online

resources etc., what is missing is a more focussed and targeted approach in an academic environment, which is the primary source of stress and focus of this study.

Theoretical frameworks

The overarching intention of this intervention is grounded in a humanistic educational approach, which prioritises students' holistic development, recognising both their academic and emotional needs, especially during high-stress periods. This is further informed by a developmentalist perspective, acknowledging that students' challenges and support needs evolve over time and across different stages of study. In its practical application, the intervention draws on principles of critical pedagogy, by encouraging academics to tailor newsletter content based on observed student challenges, thereby fostering a more responsive, student-centred learning environment.

From a humanistic perspective, this research calls for education where the focus is not only on enhancing students' intellect, building their knowledge and exposing them to experiences that are academic in nature but also to help them view and build themselves as 'a whole person' (Jayawickreme & Dahill-Brown, 2016) — cognitively, emotionally, socially, and in practical areas of learning — and hence , emphasizing personal growth, autonomy, and emotional wellbeing. As per this perspective, which was championed by Rogers and Freiberg (1994) and Maslow (1943) the learner is at the centre of the educational experience. From a person[student]-centred perspective, Rogers (1961) talks about human beings having self-actualising tendencies, and these are realised when right environment is provided, which is possible through satisfaction of three core-conditions, namely, unconditional positive regard (respect), empathy, and congruence (authenticity). Rogers et al. (2013) build on a Rogerian person-centered perspective, offering support for educational practices that prioritize authenticity, empathy, and unconditional positive regard in the classroom. These principles, deeply rooted in Roger's earlier works frame learning as an inherently personal and self-actualizing process. The research demonstrates that when students feel genuinely understood, respected, psychologically safe and emotionally supported, they show greater motivation, creativity, and engagement. This is especially relevant in the context of exam stress, where academic pressures can trigger significant anxiety.

Such a pedagogy emphasises that learning environments must be nurturing, self-directed, and experientially rich. In the person-centered perspective, the teacher's role shifts from that of authority figure to that of a facilitator of learning, as a guide who co-creates the conditions under which students feel safe to explore, take risks, and grow (Rogers et al., 2013). This perspective counters rigid, standardized systems by advocating for education that is relational, democratic, and rooted in the inner lives of students. As Rogers argued, "the only learning which significantly influences behavior is self-discovered, self-appropriated learning" (Rogers, 1957, p. 241), underscoring the transformative power of autonomy and emotional safety in the educational process. This perspective is also underpinned by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, which asserts that basic psychological safety must be met before individuals can pursue higher levels of learning, such as problem solving, creativity, esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1943; 1968).

Contemporary research supports these views, demonstrating that person-centered learning environments enhance not only academic achievement but also emotional intelligence and social connectedness (Benmoussa, et al., 2024; Bowers & Lemberger-Truelove, 2016; Purswell, 2019; Tangney, 2014). Bowers and Lemberger-Truelove (2016) support embedding a person-centered perspective where relational integrity and emotional context are essential for educational outcomes. Similarly, Purswell (2019) found that applying Rogers' three core conditions in counsellor and teacher education facilitated not only academic

gains but also the internalization of lifelong learning competencies. A systematic review by Bereded et al. (2025) emphasises that person-centered experiential designs are effective for socio-emotional competence development. One important thing Waddington (2021) notes is that creating an environment that supports students doesn't mean one has to compromise academic rigor. Far from it, such an environment will enable students to be more resilient, take more risks, and engage in more academically rigorous learning.

The intervention in this paper also incorporates a developmentalist perspective, rooted in the work of Piaget and Inhelder (1973) who posit that education is a lifelong process of cognitive, emotional, and social development. The importance of 'neuropsychological functions' and the late development of the pre-frontal cortex (Miller, 2007) is re-emphasised as it also coincides with the period of higher education. Students during these years have varying needs related to development of their cognition, psychosocial and emotional areas at different levels and years of study. Hence, it calls for tailoring support according to their developmental stage and involving academic staff, who are perhaps better placed in gauging these needs and could provide targeted interventions especially around assessment.

While humanistic education and to some extent a developmentalist perspective motivate the intervention, critical pedagogy is also invoked to shape the intervention by addressing the systems and structures that influence individual experiences. Freire (2020) argues that education either reinforces the status quo or challenges it and thus, he advocates for a pedagogy in which teachers and students engage in dialogue to understand and transform their realities. Thus, a critical pedagogy invites educators to challenge the stress-inducing practices and academic culture around mental wellbeing. It encourages educators to question and challenge the power dynamics and structures within educational systems that may perpetuate inequality and oppression, contribute to inequity, marginalization, and student alienation. The intervention, then, is not merely a coping tool but a subtle form of resistance. It reframes the curriculum as a space for care, reflection, and support, thereby challenging the transactional model of education. Contemporary research emphasizes that supporting students' socio-emotional needs significantly enhances overall wellbeing (Nadeem et al., 2024) and supports emotional regulation (Gandía-Carbonell et al., 2025). Vandeyar and Swart (2016) extend Freire's work by proposing an 'epistemology of compassion', integrating emotional knowledge with intellectual development. The intervention presented in this paper reflects this hybrid approach which fosters intellectual engagement while embedding mental wellbeing. Freire's notion of the teacher as a transformative intellectual is again relevant here. The educator who introduces the intervention takes on a role that goes beyond content delivery.

The intervention

The intervention was designed for 137 students in a one-year post-graduate taught economics course, which had a large international student cohort. The motivation for the intervention stemmed from two key sources. First, the author's own experience through several conversations over the year with students revealed recurring concerns around stress, academic pressure, and the challenges of a new cultural and educational environment (Sawir et al., 2007). Second, research on challenges of acculturation and adjustments for international students (Minutillo et al., 2020) underscores the need for more preventative support structures. Whitton and Langan (2018) in a study found that for students to learn, they need a low stress environment during assessments. These contexts, when combined together, informed the design of the intervention. The intervention is a targeted newsletter (t-NL) which was created on Microsoft Sway platform and shared with all students using Moodle class forum two weeks before the assessment.

The experience of reading the newsletter could be compared to reading an issue of a magazine. Its structure entwined evidence-informed learning strategies with psychological wellbeing practices. It was focused on normal day-to-day mental wellbeing challenges, such as anxiety and stress, rather than on any specific pathology, which would be handled by a qualified and trained professional. Further, its tone was under the assumption that all students need mental wellbeing, including those with a diagnosed mental illness. The assessment-specific material or the academic content engaged students individually as well as collaboratively through formative assessments. This included collaborative creation of a quiz question bank, crossword, word search, and self-help tips which were specific to the format and content of the exam. Researchers have highlighted the usefulness of play-based learning in adulthood (Colarusso & Nemiroff, 2013) and in the workplace (Baldry & Hallier, 2010; Lamm & Meeks, 2009). In several others, it has been shown that positive emotions support problem solving skills, develop resilience (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002), facilitate relaxation (Bisson & Luckner, 1996) and foster a safe environment (Koster, 2013). Although, it is important to note that some learners may find games and play frivolous (Whitton, 2007). So, this must be designed and embedded carefully.

The layout of the newsletter was as follows.

Section 1 introduced the dual aim of the newsletter - academic support and mental wellbeing. It acknowledged potential stressors, such as displacement, language barriers, and ongoing global crises, which aligns with the principles of trauma-informed education (Carello & Butler, 2015). Such contexts were crucial for building trust and empathy.

Sections 2–3 combined motivational framing (using a motivational quote) with practical academic tips. The recommendations in the third section, such as studying a little every day, echoed psychology literature on spaced repetition (Cepeda et al., 2006). Students were also encouraged to use collaboration and forums, which aligns with Vygotsky's social constructivist approach (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Sections 4–5 used puzzles and word games to reinforce course content through active recall and problem-solving, and to improve long-term retention (Karpicke & Blunt, 2011).

Sections 6–9 centered around self-care, grounding, and university-provided resources and support. These emphasized the need to pace oneself and be emotionally self-aware. Suggestions included, grounding techniques, such as 'The butterfly hug' (Artigas & Jarero, 2014), breathing exercise phone applications (Chittaro & Sioni, 2014) such as 'Breathing Zone' and journaling using Cognitive Behavior Therapy model (Beck, 2020; Hofmann et al., 2012).

Here are a few screenshots of the circulated newsletter.

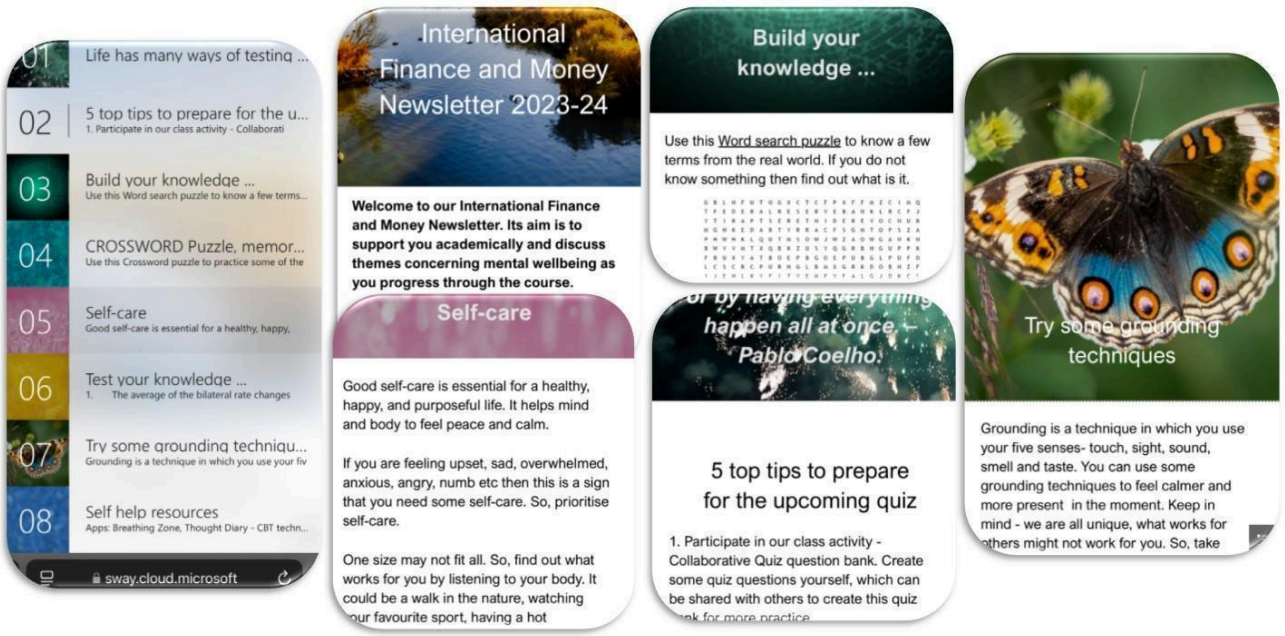

Figure 2 Screenshots of the targeted Newsletter (t-NL).

The newsletter is disruptive and unconventional in nature and aligns with Kazdin and Rabbitt's (2013) call for innovative interventions that reduce barriers to wellbeing. It is disruptive because it fundamentally changes how mental wellbeing support is delivered in higher education. Usually, the support is embedded in psychological strategies and provided by services which are independent from academic provisions. This intervention brings mental wellbeing embedded within a course itself. It is unconventional as it suggests easily implementable intervention that normalizes mental wellbeing within the academic experience, rather than treating it as a separate stigmatized issue. By rethinking the delivery and reach to students during critical times, the newsletter provides preventive support in a way that is both accessible and scalable.

Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the usefulness of a course-specific t-NL before an assessment. In doing so, students' coping strategies, their engagement with, acceptance and success of a targeted intervention, and inclusion of stakeholders in determining areas to support in an academic as well as mental wellbeing context are looked at. Further, it aims to provide a way to normalise talking about mental wellbeing challenges. Further, it explores whether there is a demand for such an intervention and what students would want to know concerning mental wellbeing. Thus, it also assesses the demand and usefulness of having a course specific t-NL before an assessment and its academic and mental wellbeing content. The novelty of this intervention and research is that by using academic content as an incentive, it can make an understanding of managing wellbeing more subtle and accessible to students.

Data and survey

This research has received approval from the College of Social Science Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow (No.400170120). Data was collected by using an online survey after the assessment and the survey contained both closed- and open-ended questions (see Table 1). Data was analysed using both qualitative

and quantitative methods. For quantitative analysis students' responses to the closed-ended questions are considered and their responses across all questions are assessed. Qualitative analysis makes use of thematic analysis by creating codes and themes in line with Braun and Clarke (2006). For robustness, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal and took notes of her thoughts and biases throughout the research process. Further, she documented information on every single step. Over the period of one year, the researcher looked at the qualitative data and coded thrice separately, at this point the identified codes and themes were consistent.

Table 1

Table 1 Survey questions and type of answers.

Number	Questions	*Types of answers*
1	What is your gender?	Male; female; non-binary; and prefer not to say.
2	What is your nationality?	Open ended.
3	Were you worried or anxious about the assessment?	(Yes, very much; Just a little bit; and No, not at all.)
4	How likely were you to reach out for help or to talk to somebody about your anxiety?	Very likely; Somewhat likely; Neither likely nor unlikely; Somewhat unlikely; and Very unlikely.
5	Did you read the newsletter?	Yes, in depth; Yes, quickly; and No.
6	How helpful was the Newsletter to manage your quiz anxiety?	5- Most helpful; 1-least helpful.
7	How helpful was the Newsletter to prepare for the assessment?	5- Most helpful; 1-least helpful.
8	How helpful was it to see the academic and mental wellbeing content together in the Newsletter?	Very helpful; Somewhat helpful; Neither helpful nor unhelpful; Somewhat unhelpful; and Very un-helpful.
9	If you want more newsletters then how should this be organised?	Only one newsletter per semester for every course; Have two or more newsletters per semester for every course; Only have course specific and targeted newsletters; Have a newsletter before every exam; and Only one newsletter for the whole PGT cohort per semester.
9.1	Would you like to have more course and topic specific newsletters?	Yes; Yes, but with different topics; and No.
9.2	If you answered 'yes' to the above question, then why did you choose the option to the previous question?	Open ended
9.3	If you answered 'yes' to the above question, then what topics would you like to see in the next newsletter?	Open ended

Results

Overall, 72 students (response rate 53%) responded and consented to participate in the survey. More than half of the respondents were females (67%) and almost all were international students (99%) whose native language was not English. Since there was no variability in terms of the international status of the respondents, the focus is on overall experience and gender demographic variables only.

Challenges & stress

In order to get a sense of students' level of anxiety and worry, the question, 'How worried were you about the assessment?' is examined. The picture that one gets from Figure 4 is that of a worried and anxious cohort. Around 85% of students indicated a very high level of anxiety (n=60), and only 15% of students indicated feeling it 'just a bit' (n=11). There is no notable gender specific difference, except that 54% of female students (n=25) opted for the 'very worried' category which is higher compared to 36% of male students (n=8).

Count of worried students based on their gender

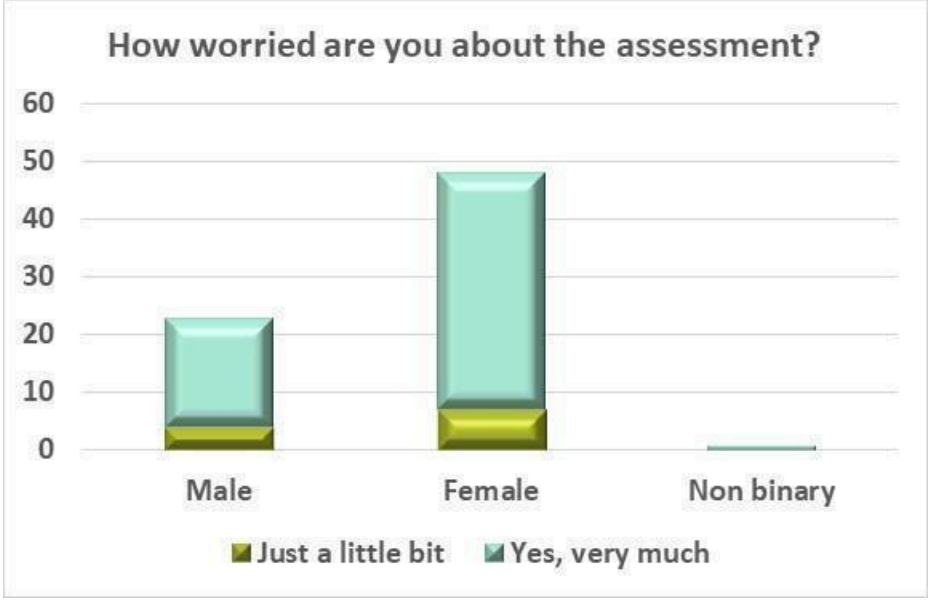

Figure 3 Count of worried students based on their gender.

Coping strategy

Students were asked 'How likely they were to reach out for help?'. In general, 59% of students were 'very likely' (n=14) and 'somewhat likely' (n=28) to reach out for help (panel (a)). Of which, 41% were female students (n=29) and 17% were male students (n=12). A greater proportion of female students, who were likely to reach out for help compared to male students in our sample, can explain this result. Interestingly on a visual inspection, even though the number of responses for each category was higher for female students (in Figure 5, panel (b)), individual distribution of responses across genders, i.e. for male and female students, is very similar.

Coping with anxiety by reaching out to others

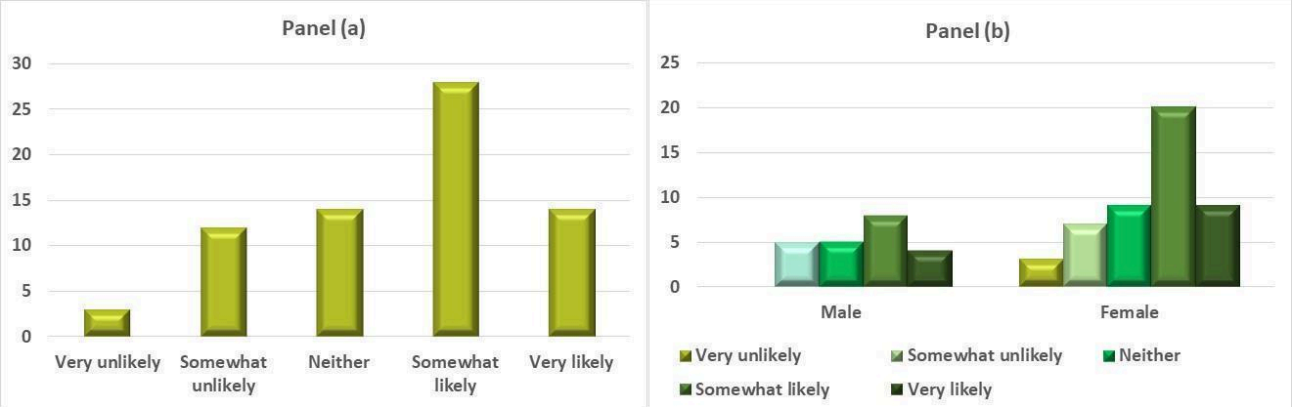

Figure 4 Coping with anxiety by reaching out to others. Panel (a) is expressed in number of students. Panel(b) distribution of responses across genders.

Engagement & success of the intervention

Students' views are important to assess the usefulness of the intervention which was targeted and focused on assessment and the time-period before it. According to the survey, the newsletter was read by 99% of the respondents and 51% of them (n=36) indicated that they read it in depth while 48% of them (n=34) of them read it quickly (see Figure 6 in panel (a)).

Since the newsletter was available on the Microsoft Sway platform, it was possible to analyse the data analytics, which is anonymised and aggregated information, of the whole class on readers' engagement. The newsletter was viewed 393 times, which was almost three times the size of the class (n=137). Out of the total, 28% views were deep reads (n=111), 30% views were quick (n=117), and 42% views were just glancing over the material (n=167). Students' engagement with the newsletter is high as the material was accessed multiple times and this is despite participation with the newsletter being voluntary.

Students found the newsletter helpful in managing their anxiety as well as in preparing them for the assessment (panel (b)). A visual comparison reveals similarities between the two distributions of students' experience with the academic and mental wellbeing content. However, it also shows a slightly more positive experience in terms of mental wellbeing content. Students found 'top tips' related to assessment preparation most helpful, which was followed by 'self-care strategies and 'self-help' resources.

Readership of the newsletter

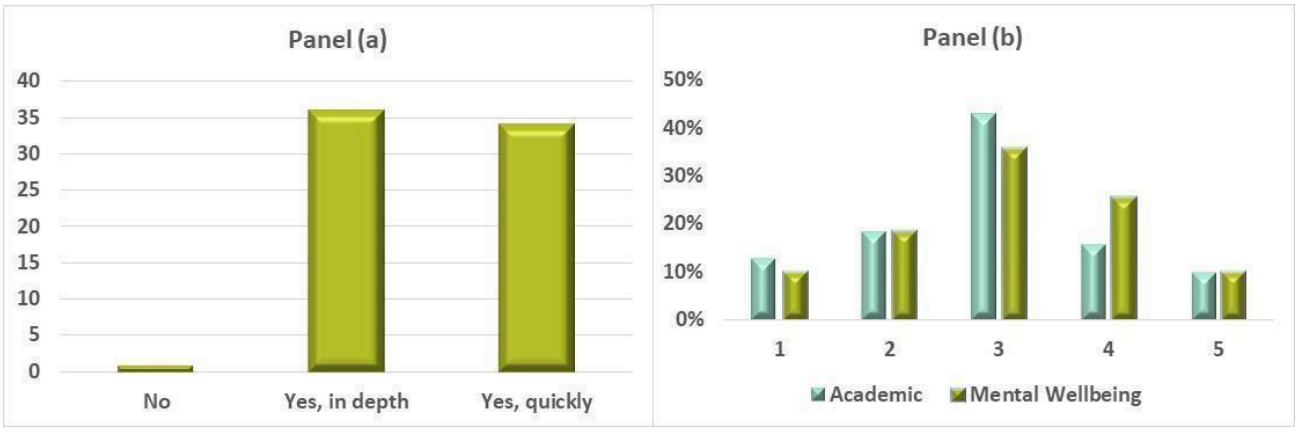

Figure 5 Readership of the newsletter. Panel (a) Count of responses. Panel (b) Rating usefulness of academic and mental wellbeing content in the newsletter to support the assessment (1= Low and 5=High).

User acceptance of the newsletter's design

When students were asked whether having a combination of both academic and mental wellbeing content together was helpful, 73% of students responded positively (n=51). It is worth noting that 82% of male students (n=17) found this as a ('very' and 'somewhat') helpful strategy, against 70% of female students (n=33).

Helpfulness of seeing the academic and mental wellbeing content together in the newsletter

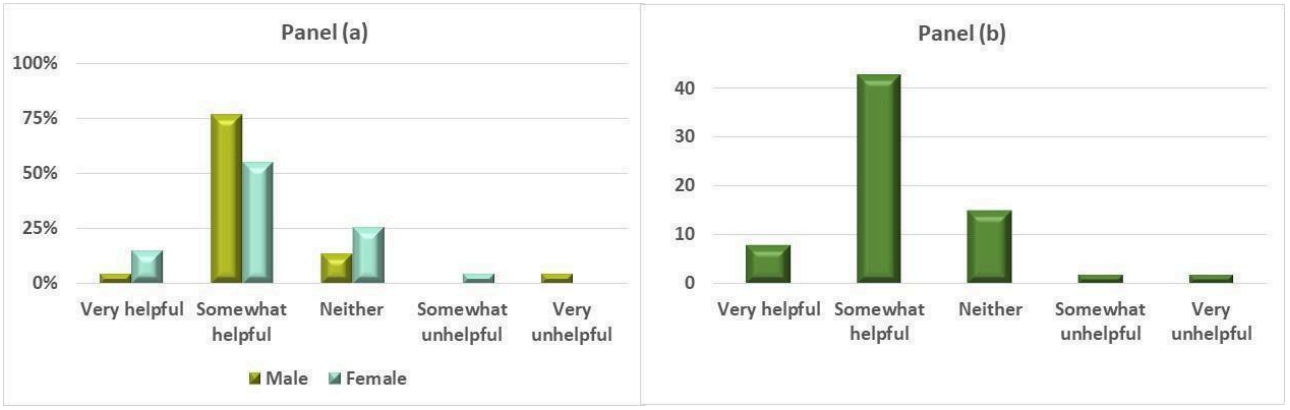

Figure 6 Helpfulness of seeing the academic and mental wellbeing content together in the newsletter. Panel (a) Percentage of responses across genders. Panel (b) Count of responses.

Next, students were asked about the organisation of the newsletter in terms of its frequency and time-target. Figure 8 indicates a strong preference for a course specific newsletter with the focus on academic and mental wellbeing content before every assessment (see panels (a) and (c) combined.). The most popular choice is to have a newsletter before every exam which was opted by 82% of students (n=54). As the second leading preference, 59% of students (n=36) wanted to see two or more newsletters per semester. Following closely, around 53% of students (n=34) wanted course specific newsletters. Students were also asked about a more common type of newsletter which is generally used in practice and sent to the whole cohort per semester. Only 15% of students (n=9) showed preference for it (panel (d)). Students'

responses were not inconclusive when asked about having only one newsletter per semester for every course, with an equal number of students on both sides of preference options (panel (e)).

Frequency and timing of the Newsletter

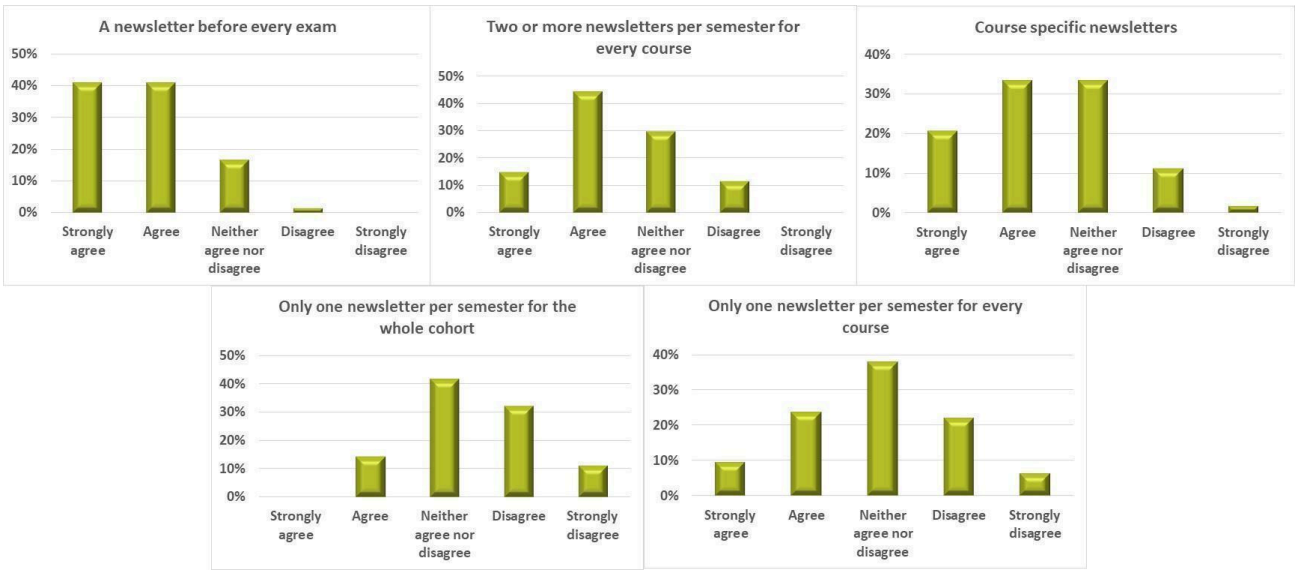

Figure 7 Frequency and timing of the Newsletter. Percentage of students who want to have: Panel (a) a newsletter before every exam; Panel(b) two or more newsletters per semester for every course'; Panel (c) course specific newsletters'; Panel (d) only one newsletter per semester for the whole cohort; and Panel (e) only one newsletter per semester for every course.

Inclusion of stakeholders

When asked about seeing more newsletters and topics of interest, almost all students (n=67) responded positively. It is important to understand why students demanded course specific targeted newsletters with a focus on academic as well as mental wellbeing content, and what topics they would like to see in the next newsletter. By incorporating students' views, one can build an environment of co-creation, where students contribute to areas where they need more support themselves. This could be a helpful tool in the case of a diverse and multicultural learning environment.

To analyse the reasons that students (n=50) wanted to see more newsletters, a thematic analysis was conducted and found four main themes: Helpfulness (n=11), Course relevance (n=16), Enhance performance (n=10), mental wellbeing (n=4) and others (n=9). Most of the students in the first category did not make elaborate comments, except stated that the newsletter was 'helpful'. One student provided more details and noted:

> The [previous] newsletters and MCQ question bank really made me understand where I was lacking before the exam and focus on those parts. Since, the future quizzes and exams will be more challenging, having a direction will surely help me.

In terms of the course's relevance, again, there was very little explanation, and students stated "…because it is important for me to understand different topics more" and "…this method [crossword and word search] is fun and good for me to memorize [technical/ course specific terms] words."

In terms of enhancing the exam performance one student mentioned:

> … Practice questions and direction on topics to revise are helpful … more practice questions may be helpful in order to fully grasp the style of questions that were going to come [in the exam], math related etc.…

Regarding the topics for the newsletter, around 44 students commented and most of the requests were focused on topics of mental wellbeing (n=32), such as "techniques to relax, time management, how to structure notes, and exam stress"; "loneliness"; "[managing] exam stress"; and "how to deal with anxiety". There was also interest in academic content (n=15) but not as much as in mental wellbeing. Most of the comments were around ways to improve performance through practice, such as "More tests to check if I understand this knowledge completely"; "more quizzes, review questions, solved mathematical equations"; and "Test knowledge, have more exercises, with answers and analysis".

Discussion, recommendations and conclusion

This paper proposes and discusses an intervention - a targeted newsletter - to enhance students' experience and help them manage adverse emotions around assessment. While discussion about embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum has been going on for a while, there is room for more research and discussion about how mental wellbeing of students can be improved and safeguarded at critical times during academic year (Degges-White & Borzumato-Gainey, 2013). From a social perspective, educators, mentors and those in similar positions play an important role in providing such an environment, guidance and support. From an ethical point of view, they have a duty of care towards their students, including in the classrooms (Williams et al., 2015). Thus, this calls for decentralised and targeted interventions beyond counselling services.

The UMHC and UUK Stepchange frameworks advocate embedding mental wellbeing in curriculum design and institutional culture. Both support moving beyond crisis response toward preventive measures. The intervention in this paper aligns with these aims by addressing structural stressors and promoting a shift towards visible, embedded support within academic contexts. Rather than a standalone tool, it represents a broader commitment to humanistic, developmental and critical pedagogical practice.

From a humanistic lens, this research emphasises the development of 'the whole student' and highlights the value of having a psychologically safe and secure environment for enabling learning, especially for students to be creative, reflective and confident (Advance HE, 2025; Gobin et al., 2012). By acknowledging psychological challenges that often accompany assessments, such a newsletter affirms students' experiences and communicates that their well-being matters as much as their grades. Complementing this is the developmentalist approach, which views education as a life-long process focused on personal growth, adaptability, and reflective learning. The newsletter's design includes tools (e.g., reflective prompts, quizzes, and affirmations) that support the development of metacognitive skills (e.g., tips on revision planning) and emotional intelligence (e.g., recognising anxiety), preparing students not just for assessments but for lifelong resilience. It also serves as a scaffold that students can rely on during high-stress periods. Over time, as students internalise these strategies, they become more autonomous and resilient learners. In this sense, the intervention is for both immediate and developmental use. Further, by openly discussing mental wellbeing, the intervention challenges the notion that mental wellbeing struggles are personal failings. Instead, they position wellbeing as a shared concern, encouraging dialogue and support among students and faculty. This approach aligns with Freire's (1998) vision of education as a practice of freedom, where

learners are empowered to critically engage in shaping a more just and compassionate educational environment.

The finding of this paper on the high number of students who were worried about the assessment, ties in well with what has been found in the literature. It also finds that there is a gender specific difference in students' experience, similar to Eisenberg et al. (2007). Interestingly, male students found the newsletter more helpful. This could be because use of a newsletter makes mental wellbeing content more accessible, especially if there is stigma about it amongst male students. Further, the study indicates a positive culture, where many students indicated willingness to reach out for help. This behaviour can be attributed to changing environment in general in recent times due to increasing mental health awareness and higher number of female students in our sample, who are not only more likely to report experiencing anxiety and stress (Bayram & Bilgel, 2008) but also more likely to reach out (Burns et al., 2023).

The intervention proved to be effective as it directly embedded mental wellbeing in the curriculum without taking the space or time away from usual classroom activities. Some might argue that educators cannot dedicate time to prepare for such interventions, especially if this increases workload. Other challenges include insufficient skills of staff to support mental wellbeing of students (Danby & Hamilton, 2016; Kidger et al., 2013). However, this can be overcome by establishing and nurturing connections between staff, for instance between professional staff, educators, wellbeing service providers, student experience teams etc., and across different dimensions such as communications, training, values, senior managerial support etc. (Cooper et al., 2016). Interagency collaboration can be useful, and it might lead to greater and better service provision. Further, such tools are one-off investments in terms of time and effort; and they can be maintained easily once established.

It would be good practice to involve students right from the start, through a co-creation process, for more insights. The newsletter was created keeping in mind topics that were motivated by literature. However, one needs to be aware that the students' lived experiences and cultural context might vary (Eshun & Gurung, 2009; Vaillant, 2012; Fernando, 2019). Further, disciplinary needs and the corresponding academic-developmental stage of students might also be important. In this sense, the newsletter partially involved students by asking them about what they would like to see in future newsletters and hence in a way incorporated their needs for future newsletters.

This research gauges students' receptivity to and experience of mental wellbeing content which was delivered directly in a classroom setting in the short run. For the future, an investigation of its impact on other attainment variables, such as student outcomes and long-term effects, could also be explored. Further, there may be the issue of generalisability of results as they might vary depending on institutional services setup and programme level learning support. However, the targeted approach of the newsletter can be tailored to fit students' needs accordingly.

Based on the findings of this paper and the experience of the researcher, the following are suggested recommendations.

1. There is a demand for a targeted course specific newsletter. It could be used regularly for wellbeing-education, normalising mental wellbeing and signposting resources.

2. Future designs: The findings of the paper contrast with the common practices of using a generic newsletter. So, re-think dissemination of information and availability of resources and support. Communication with students must consider aspects such as use of targeted (more localised)

vs. generic (broad) approach, communication frequency and timeline of newsletter delivery, discipline specific content etc., to cater to students' immediate needs.

3. Content: Self-care strategies should be generic in nature, since one size does not fit all, and its use otherwise may prove to be a setback or even discourage students from using them all together. Experiential activities, such as grounding techniques, might require live or face-to-face interaction.
4. Collaboration between stakeholders: Education doesn't have to be disjointed from students' personal development, especially given that academic exposure provides a safe arena for personal growth.
5. Staff training for normalising mental wellbeing: Academic and professional staff do not have to be trained counsellors, but they must develop skills to feel comfortable talking about mental wellbeing. Staff training on listening skills during induction or courses such as Scottish Mental health first aiders (Kitchener & Jorm, 2008) could be used for such a purpose.

On a final note, this research highlights that education should entail students' personal development. It provides a practical solution to address students' mental health challenges around assessments actively. There are no barriers to its application in other types of courses. Even though focused on assessment, its application can also be extended to other types of settings, at other critical times and to other contributing factors and intersectionality.

Biography

Dr Lovleen Kushwah is a Senior lecturer in Economics at the University of Glasgow. She is also a trained integrative Psychotherapist and has engaged with various third-sector organizations working with mental health in Glasgow. Email: Lovleen.Kushwah@glasgow.ac.uk.

References

Advance HE (2025). *Education for Mental Health Toolkit - Psychologically safe learning environment.* https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/education-mental-health-toolkit

Arain, M., Haque, M., Johal, L., Mathur, P., Nel, W., Rais, A., Sandhu, R., & Sharma, S. (2013). Maturation of the adolescent brain. *Neuropsychiatric disease and treatment*, *9*, 449-461. https://doi.org/10.2147/ndt.s39776

Artigas, L. & Jarero, I. (2014). The butterfly hug. *Implementing EMDR early mental health interventions for man-made and natural disasters*, 127-130. https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826122452.0001

Baik, C., Larcombe, W., & Brooker, A. (2019). How universities can enhance student mental wellbeing: The student perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development, 38*(4), 674-687. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1576596

Baldry, C., & Hallier, J. (2010). Welcome to the house of fun: Work space and social identity. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 31*(1), 150-172. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X09351215

Bayram, N., & Bilgel, N. (2008). The prevalence and socio-demographic correlations of depression, anxiety and stress among a group of university students. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, *43*, 667-672. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-008-0345-x

Beck, J. S. (2020). *Cognitive Behavior Therapy, Third Edition: Basics and Beyond*. Guilford Press. https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.12006

Benmoussa, F., Atill, M. & KORICHE, H., 2024. *Exploring the Influence of a Humanistic Approach in Higher Education on Motivation and Performance of Learner's Case of Master One Didactics and Applied Languages and Literature and Civilization Students* (Doctoral dissertation, UNIVERSITY OF AIN TEMOUCHENT). https://dspace.univ-temouchent.edu.dz/handle/123456789/5100

Bereded, D. G., Abebe, A. S., & Negasi, R. D. (2025). Emotional intelligence and academic achievement among first-year undergraduate university students: The mediating role of academic engagement. *Frontiers in Education, 10*, 1567418. Frontiers Media SA. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1567418

Bisson, C., & Luckner, J. (1996). Fun in learning: The pedagogical role of fun in adventure education. *Journal of Experiential Education, 19*(2), 108–112. https://doi.org/10.1177/105382599601900208

Bingham, H., & O'Brien, A. J. (2018). Educational intervention to decrease stigmatizing attitudes of undergraduate nurses towards people with mental illness. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing, 27*(1), 311–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12322

Boulton, C. A., Hughes, E., Kent, C., Smith, J. R., & Williams, H. T. P. (2019). Student engagement and wellbeing over time at a higher education institution. *PLOS ONE, 14*(11), e0225770. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0225770

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Broglia, E., Millings, A., & Barkham, M. (2018). Challenges to addressing student mental health in embedded counselling services: A survey of UK higher and further education institutions. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 46*, 441–455. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2017.1370695

Burns, D., Dagnall, N., & Denovan, A. (2023). Predictors of help-seeking behaviour in UK university students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 47*(6), 727–739. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2023.2226598

Campbell, F., Blank, L., Cantrell, A., Baxter, S., Blackmore, C., Dixon, J., & Goyder, E. (2022). Factors that influence mental health of university and college students in the UK: A systematic review. *BMC Public Health, 22*(1), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-022-13943-x

Carello, J., & Butler, L. D. (2015). Practicing what we teach: Trauma-informed educational practice. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work, 35*(3), 262–278. https://doi.org/10.1080/08841233.2015.1030059

Carroll, S. M. (2018). Destigmatizing mental illness: An innovative evidence-based undergraduate curriculum. *Journal of Psychosocial Nursing and Mental Health Services, 56*(5), 50–55. https://doi.org/10.3928/02793695-20180108-04

Cepeda, N. J., Pashler, H., Vul, E., Wixted, J. T., & Rohrer, D. (2006). Distributed practice in verbal recall tasks: A review and quantitative synthesis. *Psychological Bulletin, 132*(3), 354–380. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.132.3.354

Chittaro, L., & Sioni, R. (2014). Evaluating mobile apps for breathing training: The effectiveness of visualization. *Computers in Human Behavior, 40*, 56–63. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.07.049

Colarusso, C. A., & Nemiroff, R. A. (2013). *Adult development: A new dimension in psychodynamic theory and practice.* Springer Science & Business Media. https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.33.3.230

Cooper, M., Evans, Y., & Pybis, J. (2016). Interagency collaboration in children and young people's mental health: A systematic review of outcomes, facilitating factors and inhibiting factors. *Child: Care, Health and Development, 42*, 325–342. https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12322

Degges-White, S., & Borzumato-Gainey, C. (Eds.). (2013). *College student mental health counseling: A developmental approach*. Springer Publishing Company. https://doi.org/10.1891/9780826199720

Danby, G., & Hamilton, P. (2016). Addressing the 'elephant in the room': The role of the primary school practitioner in supporting children's mental well-being. *Pastoral Care in Education, 34*(2), 90–103. https://doi.org/10.1080/02643944.2016.1167110

Denovan, A., & Macaskill, A. (2017). Stress and subjective well-being among first year UK undergraduate students. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *18*, 505–525. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-016-9736-y

Department of Education. (2021). *How we're supporting students with their mental health.* The Education Hub. https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2021/12/how-were-supporting-students-with-their-mental-health/

Eisenberg, D., Golberstein, E., & Hunt, J. B. (2009). Mental health and academic success in college. *The BE Journal of Economic Analysis & Policy, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.2202/1935-1682.2191

Eisenberg, D., Gollust, S. E., Golberstein, E., & Hefner, J. L. (2007). Prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and suicidality among university students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 77*(4), 534–542. https://doi.org/10.1037/0002-9432.77.4.534

Elbulok-Charcape, M. M., Mandelbaum, F., Miles, R., Bergdoll, R., Turbeville, D., & Rabin, L. A. (2020). Reducing stigma surrounding mental health: Diverse undergraduate students speak out. *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy, 35*(4), 327–344. https://doi.org/10.1080/87568225.2020.1737853

Eshun, S., & Gurung, R. A. (2009). Introduction to culture and psychopathology. In S. Eshun & R. A. R. Gurung (Eds.), *Culture and mental health: Sociocultural influences, theory, and practice* (pp. 1–17). Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444305807.ch1

Fernando, S. (2019). Developing mental health services in the global south. *International Journal of Mental Health, 48*, 338–345. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207411.2019.1706237

Fredrickson, B. L., & Joiner, T. (2002). Positive emotions trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. *Psychological Science, 13*(2), 172–175. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00431

Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield. https://doi.org/10.5771/9781461640653

Freire, P. (2020). Pedagogy of the oppressed. In *Toward a sociology of education* (pp. 374-386). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429269400-8

Gandía-Carbonell, N., Molla-Esparza, C., Lorente, S., Viguer, P., & Losilla, J. M. (2025). Strategies to assess and promote the socio-emotional competencies of university students in the socio-educational and healthcare fields: A scoping review. *PLOS ONE, 20*(5), e0324531. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0324531

Gobin, B. A., Teeroovengadum, V., Becceea, N. B., & Teeroovengadum, V. (2012). Investigating into the relationship between the present level of tertiary students' needs relative to Maslow's hierarchy: A case study at the University of Mauritius. *International Journal of Learning, 18*(11), 203–219. https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v18i11/47813

Goodman, L. (2017). Mental health on university campuses and the needs of students they seek to serve. *Building Healthy Academic Communities Journal, 1*(2), 31-44. https://doi.org/10.18061/bhac.v1i2.6056

Gorczynski, P., Sims-Schouten, W., & Wilson, C. (2020). Evaluating mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviours in UK university students: A country wide study. *Journal of Public Mental Health, 19*(4), 311–319. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPMH-10-2019-0086

Gorczynski, P., Sims-Schouten, W., Hill, D., & Wilson, J. C. (2017). Examining mental health literacy, help-seeking behaviours, and mental health outcomes in UK university students. *The Journal of Mental Health Training, Education and Practice, 12*(2), 111–120. https://doi.org/10.1108/JMHTEP-05-2016-0027

Hamann, J., Mendel, R., Reichhart, T., Rummel-Kluge, C., & Kissling, W. (2016). A "mental-health-at-the-workplace" educational workshop reduces managers' stigma toward depression. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 204*(1), 61–63. https://doi.org/10.1097/NMD.0000000000000423

Hankir, A., Khalil, S., Wadood, Q., Madarbukus, D., Yunus, H.A., Bibi, S., R Carrick, F. & Zaman, R., 2017. The Federation of Student Islamic Societies programme to challenge mental health Stigma in Muslim communities in England: The FOSIS Birmingham study. *Psychiatria Danubina*, *29*(suppl. 3), pp.512-520. https://hrcak.srce.hr/clanak/383241

Hensch, T. K. (2005). Critical period plasticity in local cortical circuits. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience, 6*(11), 877–888. https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn1787

Hirai, M., Vernon, L. L., Popan, J. R., & Clum, G. A. (2015). Acculturation and enculturation, stigma toward psychological disorders, and treatment preferences in a Mexican American sample: The role of education in reducing stigma. *Journal of Latina/o Psychology, 3*(2), 88–101. https://doi.org/10.1037/lat0000035

Houghton, A. M., & Anderson, J. (2017). Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum: maximising success in higher education. Higher Education Academy, *68*(1), 1-44. https://www.academia.edu/download/115363923/embedding_wellbeing_in_he_1568037359.pdf

Hobbs, C., Jelbert, S., Santos, L. R., & Hood, B. (2024). Long-term analysis of a psychoeducational course on university students' mental well-being. *Higher Education,* 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-024-01202-4

Hofmann, S. G., Asnaani, A., Vonk, I. J., Sawyer, A. T., & Fang, A. (2012). The efficacy of cognitive behavioral therapy: A review of meta-analyses. *Cognitive Therapy and Research, 36*, 427–440. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-012-9476-1

Hughes, G. & Spanner, L. (2019). *The University Mental Health Charter.* Leeds: Student Minds.

https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/191208_umhc_artwork.pdf

Hunt, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behavior among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health, 46*(1), 3–10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2009.08.008

Immordino-Yang, M. H., Darling-Hammond, L., & Krone, C. R. (2019). Nurturing Nature: How Brain Development Is Inherently Social and Emotional, and What This Means for Education. Educational Psychologist, 54(3), 185–204. https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2019.1633924

Jayawickreme, E., & Dahill-Brown, S. E. (2016). Developing well-being and capabilities as a goal of higher education: A thought-piece on educating the whole student. In J. Vittersø (Ed.), *Handbook of eudaimonic well-being* (pp. 409–419). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42445-3_31

Karpicke, J. D., & Blunt, J. R. (2011). Retrieval practice produces more learning than elaborative studying with concept mapping. *Science, 331*(6018), 772–775. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1199327

Kazdin, A. E., & Rabbitt, S. M. (2013). Novel models for delivering mental health services and reducing the burdens of mental illness. *Clinical Psychological Science, 1*(2), 170–191. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167702612463566

Kidger, J., Gunnell, D., Biddle, L., Campbell, R., & Donovan, J. (2013). Part and parcel of teaching? Secondary school staff's views on supporting student emotional health and well-being. *British Educational Research Journal, 36*(6), 919–935. https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920903249308

Kitchener, B. A., & Jorm, A. F. (2008). Mental Health First Aid: An international programme for early intervention. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry, 2*(1), 55–61. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-7893.2007.00056.x

Koster, R. (2013). *Theory of fun for game design*. Paraglyph Press. O'Reilly Media, Inc. Link

Kutcher, S., Wei, Y., & Coniglio, C. (2016). Mental health literacy: Past, present, and future. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry, 61*(3), 154–158. https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743715616609

Lamm, E., & Meeks, M. D. (2009). Workplace fun: The moderating effects of generational differences. *Employee Relations, 31*(6), 613–631. https://doi.org/10.1108/01425450910991767

Bowers, H., & Lemberger, M. E. (2016). A person-centered humanistic approach to performing evidence-based school counseling research. *Person-Centered & Experiential Psychotherapies*, *15*(1), 55-66. https://doi.org/10.1080/14779757.2016.1139502

Lister, K., & Allman, Z. (2024). Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum: A collaborative definition and suite of examples in practice. *Frontiers in Education, 8,* 1157614. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2023.1157614

Macaskill, A. (2013). The mental health of university students in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 41*(4), 426–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2012.743110

McDaid, D., Park, A. L., Davidson, G., John, A., Knifton, L., McDaid, S., Mortan, A., Thrope, L., & Wilson, N. (2022). *The economic case for investing in the prevention of mental health conditions in the UK.* Mental Health Foundation. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-06/MHF-Investing-in-Prevention-Full-Report.pdf

Maguire, C., Cameron, J., Cherman, V., & Solomon, S. (2022). *Thriving learners: Initial findings from Scottish colleges.* Mental Health Foundation. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-11/MHF_Thriving_Learners_Report.pdf

Mahadevan, S., Hawton, K., & Casey, D. (2010). Deliberate self-harm in Oxford University students, 1993–2005: A descriptive and case-control study. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology, 45*(2), 211–219. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-009-0057-x

Maslow, A. H. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Maslow, A. (1968). Some educational implications of the humanistic psychologies. *Harvard Educational Review, 38*(4), 685–696. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.38.4.j07288786v86w660

Miller, B. L. (2007). The human frontal lobe: An introduction. In B. L. Miller & J. L. Cummings (Eds.), *The human frontal lobes: Functions and disorders* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/s0887-6177(99)00027-x

Minutillo, S., Cleary, M., Hills, A. P., & Visentin, D. (2020). Mental health considerations for international students. *Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 41*(6), 494–499. https://doi.org/10.1080/01612840.2020.1716123

Nadeem, Z., Khan, M. L., & Atta, N. (2024). Investigating socio-emotional competence, sleep quality, and work-life balance among medical students. *Journal of Asian Development Studies, 13*(2), 1576–1594. https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.2.124

Neves, J., & Hillman, N. (2017). *Student academic experience survey 2017*. Higher Education Policy Institute & Higher Education Academy. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/2017-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-Final-Report.pdf

Neves, J., & Hillman, N. (2019). *Student academic experience survey 2019*. Higher Education Policy Institute & Higher Education Academy. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2019.pdf

Neves, J., & Brown, A. (2022). *Student academic experience survey 2022*. Higher Education Policy Institute & Higher Education Academy. https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey.pdf

Nolet, V. (2015). *Educating for sustainability: Principles and practices for teacher*s. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315867052

Oades, L. G., Robinson, P., Green, S., & Spence, G. B. (2011). Towards a positive university. *The Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*(6), 432–439. https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2011.634828

Office for National Statistics. (2022). *Quarterly personal well-being estimates-seasonally adjusted*. https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/datasets/quarterlypersonalwellbeingestimatesseasonallyadjusted

Office for Students. (2024). *Funding boost to support Student Minds' University Mental Health Charter.* https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/funding-boost-to-support-student-minds-university-mental-health-charter/

Oti, O., Pretorius, C., & Pitt, I. (2022). Experience of students in using online mental health interventions: A qualitative study. In Papadopoulos, G. A., Achilleos, A., Pissaloux, E., & Velázquez, R. (Eds.), *ICT for Health, Accessibility and Wellbeing*. (pp. 124–144). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-29548-5_9

Papadatou-Pastou, M., Goozee, R., Payne, E., Barrable, A., & Tzotzoli, P. (2017). A review of web-based support systems for students in higher education. *International Journal of Mental Health Systems, 11*, 59. https://doi.org/10.1186/s13033-017-0165-z

Piaget, J. & Inhelder, B. (1973). *The psychology of the child*. Basic Books. LINK

Priestley, M., Hall, A., Wilbraham, S. J., Mistry, V., Hughes, G., & Spanner, L. (2022). Student perceptions and proposals for promoting wellbeing through social relationships at university. *Journal of Further and Higher Education, 46*(9), 1243–1256. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2022.2061844

Purswell, K. E. (2019). Humanistic learning theory in counselor education. *The Professional Counselor, 9*(4), 358–368. https://doi.org/10.15241/kep.9.4.358

Rogers, C. R. (1957). The necessary and sufficient conditions of therapeutic personality change. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 21*(2), 95–103. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045357

Rogers, C. R., & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). Freedom to learn (3rd ed.). Merrill/Macmillan College Publishing. LINK

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin Company. LINK

Rogers, C. R. (1957). *Personal Thoughts on Teaching and Learning.* Merrill-Palmer Quarterly (1954-1958), 3(4), 241–243. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23080641

Rogers, C., Lyon, H., & Tausch, R. (2013). *On becoming an effective teacher: Person-centered teaching, psychology, philosophy, and dialogues with Carl R. Rogers and Harold Lyon*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203725672

Sagar-Ouriaghli, I., Godfrey, E., Graham, S., & Brown, J. S. L. (2020). Improving mental health help-seeking behaviours for male students: A framework for developing a complex intervention. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(14), 4965. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17144965

Sawir, E., Marginson, S., Deumert, A., Nyland, C., & Ramia, G. (2007). Loneliness and international students: An Australian study. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 12*(2), 148–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315307299699

Scottish Government, (2024). *Student mental health action plan*. Scottish Government. https://www.gov.scot/publications/student-mental-health-action-plan/pages/5/

Sheldon, E., Simmonds-Buckley, M., Bone, C., Mascarenhas, T., Chan, N., Wincott, M., Gleeson, H., Sow, K., Hind, D., & Barkham, M. (2021). Prevalence and risk factors for mental health problems in university undergraduate students: A systematic review with meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 287*, 282–292. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2021.03.054

Stanley, I., Hom, M. A., & Joiner, T. E. (2018). Modifying mental health help-seeking stigma among undergraduates with untreated psychiatric disorders: A pilot randomized trial of a novel cognitive bias modification intervention. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 103*, 33–42. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2018.01.008

Student Minds & Alterline. (2023). *Student Minds research briefing – February 2023.* Student Minds. https://www.studentminds.org.uk/uploads/3/7/8/4/3784584/student_minds_insight_briefing_feb23.pdf

Stiebahl, S., & Lewis, J. (2023). *Student mental health in England: Statistics, policy, and guidance*. House of Commons Library. https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8593/CBP-8593.pdf

Tangney, S. (2014). Student-centred learning: A humanist perspective. *Teaching in Higher Education, 19*(3), 266–275. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2013.860099

The Times (2025). The universities raising mental health budgets by up to 600%. *The Times.*https://www.thetimes.com/uk/article/the-universities-that-have-doubled-spending-on-student-mental-health-k8jh9px99#:~:text=Research%20by%20Times%20Radio%20and,mental%20health%20support%20has%20increased.

Tottenham N. (2017). The Brain's Emotional Development. *Cerebrum: The Dana forum on brain science, 2017,* cer-08-17.https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30210657/

Universities, U. K. (2023). *Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities.* Universities UK: London, UK. https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/what-we-do/policy-and-research/publications/features/stepchange-mentally-healthy-universities

Vaillant, G. E. (2012). Positive mental health: Is there a cross-cultural definition? *World Psychiatry, 11*, 93–99. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wpsyc.2012.05.006

Vandeyar, S., & Swart, R. (2016). Educational change: a case for a'pedagogy of compassion'. *Education as Change*, 20(3), 141-159. https://doi.org/10.17159/1947-9417/2016/1362

Vella-Brodrick, D. A., Gill, A., & Duarte, G. (2025). Efficacy of wellbeing education involving long-term interventions or long-term assessment of eudaimonic and hedonic wellbeing and psychological distress: A systematic review. *International Journal of Applied Positive Psychology, 10*, 31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s41042-025-00225-1

Vidourek, R. A., & Burbage, M. (2019). Positive mental health and mental health stigma: A qualitative study assessing student attitudes. *Mental Health & Prevention, 13*, 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mhp.2018.11.006

Votruba, N., Thornicroft, G., & FundaMentalSDG Steering Group. (2016). Sustainable development goals and mental health: Learnings from the contribution of the FundaMentalSDG global initiative. *Global Mental Health, 3*, e26. https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2016.20

Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjf9vz4

Wada, M., Suto, M. J., Lee, M., Sanders, D., Sun, C., Le, T. N., Goldman-Hasbun, J., & Chauhan, S. (2019). University students' perspectives on mental illness stigma. *Mental Health & Prevention, 14*, 200159. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mph.2019.200159

Waddington, K. (2021). *Towards the compassionate university: From golden thread to global impact*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429324338

Whitton, N. (2007). An investigation into the potential of collaborative computer game-based learning in higher education (Doctoral dissertation). Edinburgh Napier University. Open Grey repository. https://core.ac.uk/reader/40046320

Whitton, N., & Langan, M. (2018). Fun and games in higher education: An analysis of UK student perspectives. *Teaching in Higher Education, 24(*8), 1000-1013. https://doi.org/10.1080/13562517.2018.1541885

Williams, M., Coare, P., Marvell, R. A., Pollard, E., Houghton, A. M., & Anderson, J. (2015). *Understanding provision for students with mental health problems and intensive support needs: Report to HEFCE by the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Researching Equity, Access and Participation (REAP).* Institute for employment studies. Higher Education Funding Council for England. https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20180319114953/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/mh/

Worsley, J., Pennington, A., & Corcoran, R. (2020). *What interventions improve college and university students' mental health and wellbeing? A review of review-level evidence.* University of Liverpool. https://livrepository.liverpool.ac.uk/3089948/1/Student-mental-health-full-review%202020.pdf

Young, T., MacInnes, S., Jarden, A., & Colla, R. (2020). The impact of a wellbeing program embedded in university classes: The importance of valuing happiness, baseline wellbeing and practice frequency. *Studies in Higher Education, 47*(4), 751-770. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1793932

Yusufov, M., Nicoloro-SantaBarbara, J., Grey, N. E., Moyer, A., & Lobel, M. (2019). Meta-analytic evaluation of stress reduction interventions for undergraduate and graduate students. *International Journal of Stress Management, 26*(2), 132–145. https://doi.org/10.1037/str0000099

Zalar, B., Strbad, M., & Svab, V. (2007). Psychiatric education: Does it affect stigma? *Academic Psychiatry, 31*(3), 245. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ap.31.3.245