Building Our Community's Understanding of Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Research Spaces

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Participatory Practices & Wellbeing

Harnessing Participatory Practices is crucial for understanding and co-producing solutions to tackle higher education student and staff mental health challenges effectively.

- Piper, R. & Emmanuel, T. 2019. Co-producing Mental Health Strategies with Students: A Guide for the Higher Education Sector, Leeds: Student Minds.
- Slates, S., Cook-Sather, A., Riva, E., et al., 2023. How can students-as-partners work address challenges to student, faculty, and staff mental health and well-being? *International Journal for Students As Partners*, 7(2), 221–240.
- Riva, E., Lister, K., Jeglinska, W. 2024. Student and staff mental well-being in European higher education. NESET report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Lister, K., Riva, E., Kukulska-Hulme, A., Fox, C. 2022. Participatory digital approaches to embedding student wellbeing in higher education, *Frontiers Education*, 7:924868
- Wavehill. 2022. Co-creating mental health initiatives with students. Final Report to the Office for Students

Participatory Practices & Wellbeing

Participatory methods help to address issues affecting often overlooked student demographics within the university community.

- Wilson S., L., Riva E., Lister K. 2024. Positive Pedagogies: Co-creation partnerships to support social and emotional learning in higher. *Social and Emotional Learning: Research, Practice, and Policy*, 3.
- Riva, E., Gracia, L., Limb, R. Co-creation: how to find the 'super' in supervision *Times in Higher Education*, August 2022.
- Riva, E., Gracia, L., Limb, R. Using Co-Creation to Facilitate PhD Supervisory Relationships, *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 2022, 46(7), 913-930.

Join at: **vevox.app**   ID: **136-348-971**

https://vevox.app/#/m/136348971

What is Wellbeing to You?

What is Wellbeing to you?

RESULTS SLIDE

Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces

Why, In Your Role, Are You Interested in Discussing Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces?

Post your answer in the Teams chat.

Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces

What are the Barriers and Enablers to Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces?

❑ 'Study/Work related': PhD Assessment, Supervision, etc.
❑ 'Skills Related': Study/Research skills, Self-management, Social skills, etc.
❑ 'Environmental': Spaces, People, University, Funding Body, Systems, Life, etc.

• Join Your Teams Group
• Discuss for 10 minutes
• Post on Padlet

https://warwick.padlet.org/eriva6/canvas-zr0aok0h7u24aksh

Lister, K., Seale, J., & Douce, C. (2021). Mental health in distance learning: a taxonomy of barriers and enablers to student mental wellbeing. *Open Learning: The Journal of Open, Distance and e-Learning, 38*(2), 102–116.

Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces

What do we know?

Schmidt, M., & Hansson, E. (2018).
Jackman, P. C., Jacobs, L., Hawkins, R. M., & Sisson, K. (2021)
Mercer, J., & Thomas, J. (2024).

Wellbeing in Doctoral and Post-Doctoral Spaces

Issues include:
- job precarity & casualisation;
- a pervasive culture of performativity (Jayman et al., 2022);
- poor work-life balance, presenteeism;
- excessive workload;
- gender and equality issues;
- limited mental health and wellbeing literacy (Brewster, 2022);

- …

Rampant development across Europe of a neoliberal university landscape associated with the marketisation of education. Common denominator across Europe, causing similar effects on the workforce (Berg et al., 2016).

A pervasive culture of performativity

A comprehensive, large cross-international study by the Wellcome Trust explored the extent of toxicity in research culture (Wellcome Trust, 2020):

- 78 % of researchers think that high levels of competition have created unkind and aggressive conditions;
- 61 % have witnessed bullying or harassment and 43 % have experienced it themselves;
- 37 % researchers feel comfortable speaking up, with many doubting that appropriate actions will be taken;
- 53% have sought, or have wanted to seek, professional help for depression or anxiety;
- government, funders and institutions that appear to focus on quantity of outputs, and narrow concepts of 'impact' - intense pressure to publish, with too little value being placed on how results are achieved and their human costs.

Poor research culture is leading to stress, anxiety, mental health problems, strain on personal relationships, and a sense of isolation and loneliness at work. Role of supervision.

Job Precarity & Casualisation

Casualised work has become a prevalent business model for universities, which are highly dependent upon a pool of low-paid, exploitable and expendable workers employed to teach and conduct research on precarious and unfavourable contracts.
Impacts of casualisation on wellbeing associated with rising cases of stress and anxiety (Loveday, 2018; Lee et al., 2022), and the onus being placed on the individual to take personal responsibility for this within the neoliberal academy.

Precarious and unfavourable contracts are widespread in the European academic arena (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017):
- In Denmark more than 50 % (in some cases up to 70 %) of academics are either PhDs, postdocs, non-tenured assistant professors or casual teaching fellows (in Denmark known as 'external lecturers') (Hirslund et al., 2018);
- In Germany, Estonia, Austria, Finland and Serbia, only around 30 % of academics are employed under an indefinite contract;
- In the UK by The University and College Union (UCU, 2019), around 70 % of the 49,000 researchers and 37,000 teaching staff are on fixed-term contracts (the majority of the latter being paid by the hour), and a further 71,000 teachers are employed as 'atypical academics', not counted in the main staff record (Mason and Megoran, 2021).

Job Precarity & Casualisation

- Junior positions often involve fixed-term or project-based contracts (Aarrevaara et al., 2015);
- Strong relationship between contractual stability, part-time/full-time employment and academic career stage - fixed-term contracts are often attached to part-time employment opportunities and junior positions (Ates and Brechelmacher, 2013).

Precarious contracts are a great cause of anxiety, and therefore affect employees' stress levels, health and wellbeing. Precarity affects both the private lives and the professional development of staff. Casualised employment also makes personnel particularly vulnerable to harassment, abuse of power, discrimination and exploitation.

In 2021, staff at German universities reported their experiences of living with temporary contracts in academia using the hashtag *#IchbinHanna* sharing their pain, trauma and deep frustration with a system that does not value them (Bahr et al., 2021).

Excessive Workload

- Excessive workload as academics are 'overloaded by considerable administrative and management activities' and excessive documentation of their work (Pace et al., 2021).
- Unrealistic workload models that poorly reflect the time associated with performing duties.

Excessive demands are coupled with the dominance and brutality of metrics, **generating excessive workloads that often result in 'overwork'** (Erickson et al., 2021), defined as 'working 50 or more hours per week' (Kelly et al., 2014; Cha, 2013), **which has a dramatic impact on mental health, wellbeing and work-life balance**.
Overwork may arise through one job within a single institution (Ylijoki, 2013), but because academic precarity often requires academics to hold multiple part-time jobs in different institutions or to work on multiple projects at the same time - 'work-work balance' (Griffin, 2022; Caretta, et al. 2018).
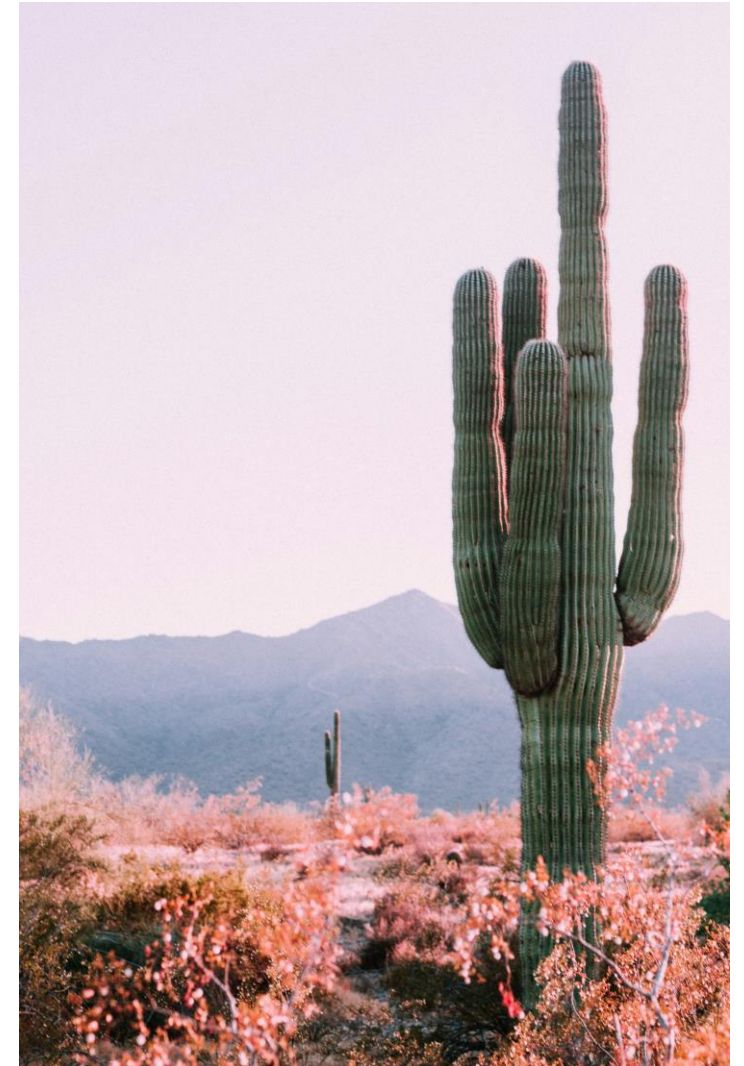
Whole-University Approach

A ***whole-university approach to mental wellbeing*** is needed, with university leaders taking ownership of and accountability for ensuring that mental wellbeing is considered throughout higher education cultures, systems and practices.

Whole-University Approach

- Universities should work to implement holistic, whole-institution approaches to wellbeing and mental health, which are planned and deployed **in partnership with staff and students**.

- Policies and strategies relating to wellbeing and mental health should be developed, both at institution level and more broadly (e.g. country-wide), that can inform an effective and **continuously monitored** practice.

- Change should be promoted in institutional culture, with **university leaders taking ownership of and accountability** for ensuring that mental wellbeing is considered throughout higher education systems and practices, and for delivering a strategic vision that supports **a culture of compassion, belonging and equality for staff and students**.

Whole-University Approach

- **Support services** (e.g. counselling) and practices (e.g. deferrals of study or leave of absence) should be **inclusive and culturally competent**.

- **Institutional processes, systems and administration should actively consider wellbeing**, in terms of both the inclusive design of processes (accommodating extenuating circumstances requests, and so on) and in terms of embedding accountability for wellbeing into processes via measures such as Equality Impact Assessments.

- **Wellbeing should be actively considered throughout staff recruitment**, working conditions and promotion practices, and should including accommodations, adequate training, the provision of relevant support, inclusive practices, and a commitment to eliminating bias and discrimination.

- Support for mental wellbeing should be proactive, **promoting mental health literacy among staff and students** towards a culture of well-being for all.

Thank you!

Get in touch: e.riva@warwick.ac.uk

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