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Embedding Wellbeing in the Curriculum – a little tale

Dr Elena Riva

Associate Professor (Reader), Head of Department,
Institute for Advanced Teaching and Learning (IATL), University of Warwick

What is Mental Wellbeing?

Mental wellbeing is the **positive aspect** of mental health. It is more than the absence of disease.

People with mental wellbeing **feel good and function well**. Some people call this positive mental health, others call it flourishing.

Mental wellbeing is influenced both by **external circumstances** and by **how we respond to them**.

People who function well respond to challenging external circumstances in a way that is resilient and enables rapid recovery.

External circumstances change all the time, so **mental wellbeing fluctuates from time to time**.

Mental wellbeing has a powerful influence on **physical wellbeing**, on **learning**, on **productivity** and on the quality of **interpersonal relationships**.



Academics 'lack support' to help with student mental health

Mental health

FINANCIAL TIMES

UK universities act to tackle student mental health crisis

**The
Guardian**

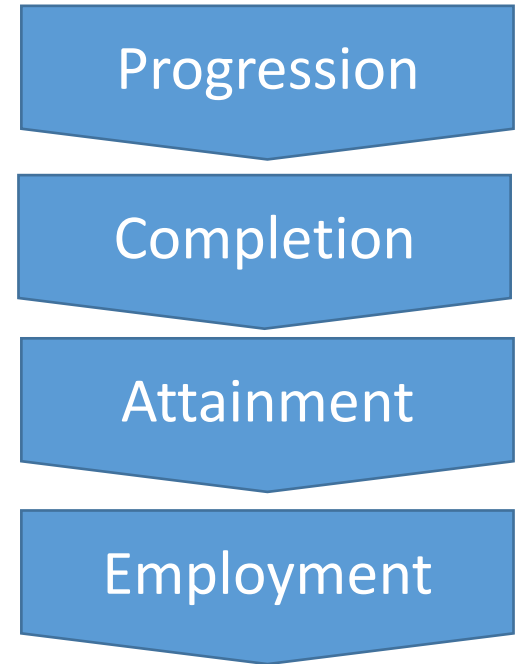
Suicide is at record level among students at UK universities, study finds

Mental health in HE

Research has shown that students with mental health difficulties are:

- Less likely to complete a course or module (Richardson, 2015)
- Less likely to attain higher grades (Eisenberg et al, 2009)
- More likely to drop out of university (Baker, 2017)
- More likely to experience long term consequences in terms of future employment, earning potential and overall health (Eisenberg et al, 2007)

We also know that while learning has been shown to help mental wellbeing, university study and culture has been shown to trigger mental health issues (Tinklin et al, 2005; Markoulakis and Kirsh, 2013; Ribeiro et al, 2018)



Mental health in HE



[Office for Students](#) says:

“In 2016-17, 86.8 per cent of students with mental health conditions continued their studies after their first year, compared to 90.2 per cent of all undergraduates.”

“In 2017-18, graduates who had reported a mental health condition were also less likely to be awarded a 1st or 2:1.”

“Among students who graduated in 2016-17, 69.2 per cent of those with declared mental health conditions progressed into skilled work or further study compared with 73.1 per cent of all undergraduates.”

“The proportion of UK-domiciled full-time students studying in England reporting a mental health condition has increased from 1.4 per cent in 2012-13 to 3.5 per cent in 2017-18”

What can we do about this?

- Support students with mental health needs in a timely way
- Be proactive in promoting wellbeing and anticipating mental health triggers or issues
- Empower students to build skills and strategies to overcome adversity, build resilience, manage their mental wellbeing and celebrate their achievements
- Accept that HE needs to change, and work to understand how by learning about diverse student experiences and journeys
- Adapt our tuition, curricula and learning environments, so they are inclusive and engender wellbeing

Support

Pre-empt

Empower

Learn

Adapt

Whole University Approach – Participatory Practices

What can we do about this?

There is little acknowledgement of the interlinked relationship between staff and student wellbeing within higher education with institutional interventions and approaches to explicitly or implicitly prioritise student wellbeing.

Staff and student wellbeing are not separate issues but need to be considered as mutually dependent parts of the same ecosystem.

Whole University Approach – Participatory Practices

Support

Pre-empt

Empower

Learn

Adapt

Towards embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum

At University, the learning experience is crucial for creating a healthy campus community.

Why?



Student wellbeing is integral to learning



Poor student wellbeing can impact academic achievement with consequences for continuation and attainment.



Student wellbeing experience is impacted by T&L environments

Progression

Completion

Attainment

Employment

By 'curriculum' we include 'all the learning which is planned or guided' (Kerr, 1968) including attitudes, values and skills as well as content. This includes Careers, the Library, the VLE, Student Support, etc.

Towards embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum

Research indicates that teaching practices contribute to experiences of wellbeing.¹

The experiences involved in learning (classroom culture, physical learning spaces, course design, curriculum, assessment, mode of delivery, etc.) can have either a positive or a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

The learning experience can impact:

- the level of **stress** that students feel,
- the degree to which they feel **connected** to others,
- the extent to which they feel meaningfully **engaged** in their university experience.

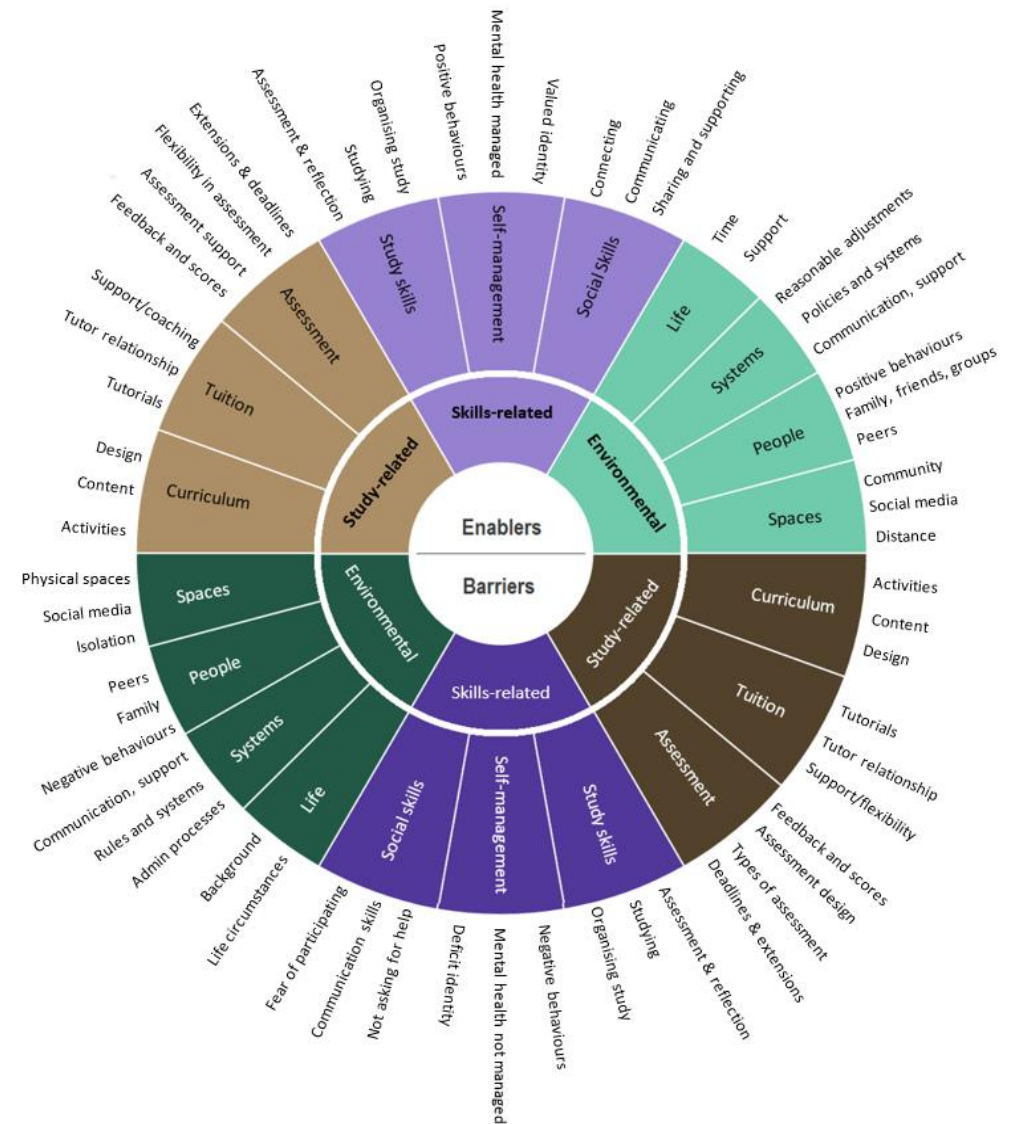


The challenges linked to students' wellbeing need to be addressed also by ensuring that classroom and learning environments support health and wellbeing, within the classroom's walls, as part of the curriculum.

Towards embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum

Barriers and Enablers to wellbeing

- Study related: Assessment, Curriculum and Tuition
- Skills Related: Study skills, Self-management, Social skills
- Environmental: Spaces, People, Systems, Life



Warwick Wellbeing Online Library

- Wellbeing Library is a practical response that aims to address the issues presented.
- Create an online space for Warwick community to discover helpful teaching approaches, offering support to students and staff who aim to sustain/create wellbeing mindful T&L environments.
- Celebrate existing Warwick excellence in this pedagogic field through capturing case studies and experiences - **co-created, community-rooted** response.
- Let's explore it: https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academy/funding/2016-17fundedprojects/wellbeingpedagogieslibrary/

Lister, K., **Riva, E.**, Kukulka-Hulme, A., Fox, C. Participatory digital approaches to embedding student wellbeing in higher education , *Frontiers Education*, **2022**, 7:924868. DOI: 10.3389/educ.2022.924868.

Riva, E. Well-being pedagogies: activities and practices to improve the student experience online, *Times in Higher Education*, February **2021**.

This article on Wellbeing Pedagogies was one of the most read resources on THE in 2021. To celebrate this, Elena featured on a Times in Higher Education podcast about her contribution <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/campus/podcast-behind-two-our-mostread-resources-diversity-statements-and-student-wellbeing>.

Towards embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum

Impact of the learning experience on student mental health and wellbeing, but this is not the only way of conceptualising wellbeing as part of the curriculum.

Relevance of embedding mental health and wellbeing in the curriculum as a topic of study for increasing student mental health and wellbeing literacy (Houghton and Anderson, 2017).

Wellbeing Literacy

- ♣ In-classroom IATL Module '[Understanding WB – Theory and Practice](#)' – Students who participated in the module reported increased personal Wellbeing alongside increased Wellbeing Literacy
- ♠ Health literacy not only impacts on knowledge, but it is also a main predictor of health (World Health Organization, 2013) - increasing wellbeing education among Higher Education students has an impact on their own wellbeing.
- ♥ Students themselves suggested that this type of initiative, given its positive impact, should be a mandatory part of the academic journey of every student.
- ♦ Similar results in other Universities:
[Bristol University happiness course students found to be more upbeat – The Guardian, March 2021](#)

Riva, E.,* Stewart-Brown, S., Rahman, Y., Gerson, J., Ashworth, S. *Can an academic, interdisciplinary intervention help to solve wellbeing issues among higher education students?* in *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching: Practice and Pedagogies*, Ethics Press, Cambridge, *Forthcoming*.



Understanding Wellbeing

Online Module

For more information and enquiries please email us at:
understandingwb@warwick.ac.uk
or email Dr Elena Riva, module leader and co-creator, at:
e.riva@warwick.ac.uk



What is it?

- Understanding Wellbeing is our new **non-CATTED, Open Access, HEAR Accredited** module.
- The module will guide students to discover and better understand the crucial concept of wellbeing.
- The module is for all Warwick students and can be taken and completed in your own time.

Why did we create this module?

- University can be a stressful time and therefore looking after wellbeing is crucial. We created this module to allow students to learn about the theory and practice behind wellbeing in an engaging and accessible way.
- The module content is presented through podcasts which students can access in their own time. The reflective activities mean that students can engage with the content in a meaningful way which we hope will make a positive contribution to their wellbeing.

What will students gain?

- An **interdisciplinary understanding of wellbeing**: ranging from scientific, economic, psychological, and philosophical perspectives.
- An opportunity to engage with **activities and strategies** that can improve our wellbeing, from exercise and art to mindfulness and many others.
- An understanding of what factors might be affecting our wellbeing, from social media, emotions, to dealing with failure.
- Completing the different sections of the module (Bronze, Silver and Gold levels) will provide students HEAR Accreditations.



Wellbeing Literacy

- ♥ Co-created module.
- ◆ More than 5000 Warwick students have taken the module with 1000 students gaining HEAR accreditation
- ♣ Collaboration with the University of Copenhagen to support them in creating and launching the module in the Danish context in the academic year 2022/2023.
- ♠ Module adopted by the Glasgow School of Arts, Arden University and Salford University.

Riva, E., Jeglinska, W. Co-creating an interdisciplinary well-being module for all students, *Times in Higher Education*, January 2022.

Slates, S., Cook-Sather, A., Riva, E., et al. How can students-as-partners work address challenges to student, faculty, and staff mental health and well-being? *International Journal for Students As Partners*, 2023, 7(2), 221–240. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.15173/ij sap.v7i2.5597>



Towards embedding mental wellbeing in *your* curriculum

1. What barriers to *mental wellbeing* do students experience in curricula?
2. What barriers to *achieving their study goals* do students with mental health issues experience in curricula?
3. What interventions do students and staff perceive would lower these barriers?
4. How do staff and students perceive these interventions can be evaluated?
5. Which actions could you take?



Thank you for listening!

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

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