Wellbeing in the curriculum and the potential at University of Edinburgh

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This briefing paper has been co-authored by colleagues from across the University of Edinburgh whose work relates to student support, clinical psychology, global health, wellbeing and compassion, and who have contributed to and taken part in a variety of working groups, projects and surveys over the past 24 months relating to wellbeing, belonging and community across our University. The paper draws insights from existing good practices in the University of Edinburgh, the authors' research, evidence from the global education sector, and sector-wide reports, approaches and frameworks relating to embedding wellbeing across curricula.

Wellbeing and relation to mental health and mental illness

The World Health Organization (WHO) promotes holistic psychological wellbeing to improve the lifespan mental health of individuals and society, promote mental wellbeing and prevent mental illness (Galderisi et al, 2015). Wellbeing enables people to realise their abilities, and cope with the stressors of life which in turn allows them to work productively and make contributions to their community (Galderisi et al, 2015; WHO, 2003; WHO 2013). Wellbeing is not just the absence of illness, and wellbeing goes beyond an individual's own thriving and includes societal wellbeing.

The vision of the University of Edinburgh's 2030 Strategy is to make the world better, through student and staff engagement, research, education and communities of practice.

Desirable graduate attributes and skills include:
- curiosity for learning that makes a positive difference
- passion to engage locally and globally
- courage to expand and fulfil their potential
- creative problem solvers and researchers
- critical and reflective thinkers
- effective and influential contributors
- skilled communicators.

These graduate attributes and skills complement the WHO's conceptualisation of wellbeing (2003;2013) with its emphasis on realising abilities, coping with adversity, and contributing to community. Student wellbeing is more than the

absence of symptoms. Keyes (2007; 2011) suggests complete mental health can be termed as flourishing. Students who are flourishing have adaptive cognitive functioning, fulfilling relationships, engaged in meaningful and productive activities, and are resilient in the face of adversity (Rashid et al 2017; Keyes 2011; 2007; Ouweneel et al. 2011; Russo-Netzer and Ben-Shahar 2011).

The WHO has also recognised that mental health problems are common, one in four people will have a mental health issue over the course of their lives (WHO. The World Health Report 2001 Mental Health: New Understanding, New Hope. 2001). Those who are most vulnerable will be exposed to the drivers, and risks that can exacerbate mental illness, and be least able to access services to help cope with or treat illness. Supporting flourishing and wellbeing and recognising and responding to mental health problems are two sides of a coin, and together they provide an environment, and a way of life, and a space that is safe, creative and holistic.

Mental illness is a significant and escalating barrier to students thriving at university (Rashid et al, 2017; Kettmann et al, 2007; Sharkin & Coulter 2005; Schwartz 2006; Erdur-Baker et al, 2006; Blanco et al. 2008). While the current focus on student mental illness could be attributed to the increased awareness of illness or more accurate psychological testing, studies show an increase in prevalence, chronicity, and severity of mental illness in higher education (Rashid et al, 201; Pedrelli et al. 2015; Much & Swanson 2010; Conway et al. 2006). Students are in transition, and communities in transition carry vulnerabilities (Richardson et al, 2012; Fisher & Hood, 1987).

Starting university life has been identified as an at-risk time for students, with the development or exacerbation of mental illness and greater overall distress (Stanley et al, 2009; Palmer et al, 2009; Leet et al, 2009; Tinto, 2003; Ishitani, 2003; Gall et al, 2000; Fisher, 1987). In response to this vulnerability and its associated risks, the academic sector has recognised the central place it has in providing places to flourish and providing the support networks and systems to care for those who are struggling with mental health and wellbeing issues.

A transformative approach

This paper offers a transformative approach and sets out to examine how and why embedding wellbeing in the curriculum is transformative, responding to both the call for an enabling environment to flourish and addressing mental health challenges which negatively impact wellbeing.

A transformative approach supports a non-binary definition of mental health and mental illness. The mental health continuum model (Westerhof & Keyes, 2010; Fritz et al, 1992) depicts a range, with mental health and mental illness at the endpoints. Situational, dispositional and behavioural characteristics can contribute to where a person may be along this continuum. Mental illness does not mean the absence of mental health; it merely implies that the person is currently at the negative end of the continuum. The Research Domain Criteria

(RDoC) is a research framework for investigating mental illness, developed by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) incorporating genetics, neuroscience, and behavioural science. Moving away from categorical diagnosis, its emphasis is on exploring basic dimensions of functioning that span the full range of human behaviour from normal to abnormal. Traditionally, mental illnesses have been conceptualised as disorders that are diagnosed on the basis of the number and type of symptoms, and the presence of distress or impairment (Lupien et al, 2017; Cuthbert, 2014). RDoC considers a range of behaviour from normal to abnormal rather than relying on diagnostic guide categories (NIMH, 2020). This emphasis on range and spectrum is important in the conceptualisation of wellbeing; it avoids the false dichotomy of wellbeing or mental illness.

A transformative approach recognises that the reduction of mental illness and distress, while important components of student wellbeing, do not provide a sufficient picture. The reduction of the negative does not help us see a vision for what the positive can look like. Investments in mental wellbeing that include flourishing and thriving go beyond just coping and surviving. Exploring strengths-based approaches provide the promise of a more complete approach to supporting mental health and wellbeing (Rashid et al, 2017).

A transformative approach requires addressing the question of 'if and how' academic success can go beyond a remedial approach that seeks to maintain student retention and higher marks. Rashid et all (2017) suggest that in support of remedial targets, universities have offered services that focus on remediating deficits. Student counselling services offer support to manage symptoms of stress reduction and disability services focus on providing accommodations (Rashid et al, 2017; Lee at al, 2009). Personal tutoring provides academic advising on specific ways to improve academic abilities, revision, academic writing and time management; as a result, universities have evaluated effectiveness by measuring the extent to which students utilise remedial services (Rashid et al, 2017; Lee at al, 2009; Ishitani, 2003). As a result, the higher education sector has been more focused on correcting weaknesses rather than fostering student flourishing (Rashid et al, 2017; Lopez & Louis, 2009; Lounsbury et al, 2009).

A transformative approach creates an opportunity to broaden definitions of flourishing and its absence; it enables a more nuanced consideration of the absence of flourishing, in a condition described as languishing (Keyes et al. 2011). This is not mental illness per se, but students who are languishing experience few positive emotions, a lack of meaningful purpose and are disengaged personally, socially and academically (Keyes et al. 2011). It should be noted that although the conceptual model of languishing is useful, it's important to avoid the connotation of laziness in its wording. The benefit of languishing is that it normalises struggles and challenges students might face and removes the clinical stigma. However, it should be noted that languishing is at risk of implying where a student *should* be in their functioning and development. Great care should be used not to set universal personal development standards.

While this approach does not seek to diminish the importance of identifying and suffering, psychological disorders can be seen as a syndrome of symptoms that affect wellbeing. This conceptualisation of languishing is useful in that it takes away the clinical implication of student difficulties. Academics and support staff may feel ill-equipped to work with mental illness. The emphasis on increasing mental health may spark resistance from university staff because they are not "mental health" experts. A transformative approach: allows a shift away from thinking of wellbeing as the responsibility of specific roles within the university towards a thread that underpins our collective ways of working.

Sector-wide approaches and frameworks

Several sector-wide frameworks and reports have been launched to promote mentally healthy universities. The Okanagan Charter, an international charter for health-promoting universities and colleges, published a call to action for higher-education institutions: embed health into all aspects of campus culture, across the administration, operations and academic mandates (Okanagan Charter, 2015). The charity, Student Minds, (https://www.studentminds.org.uk) published their 'Mental Health Charter' in 2019, which advocates for a framework of principles to enable universities to adopt a 'whole university approach'. The Student Minds Charter shares its framework with universities UK's 'Stepchange: Mentally Healthy Universities' report (Stepchange: mentally healthy universities (universitiesuk.ac.uk)). The aligned four themes are 'Learn, Support, Live, Work (Hughes & Spanner 2019). Within this, 'Learn' highlights the importance of curriculum design, content, delivery, and assessment methods – noting that 'assessments [should] stretch and test learning without imposing unnecessary stress' (de Pury & Dicks 2020). The Student Minds Charter echoes the need for assessment to test learning effectively without being detrimental to mental wellbeing, writing that: "…the nature of the challenge and how it is encountered makes a crucial difference…" What matters is 'What is hard? And 'Why is it hard?'" In other words, is the challenge difficult because it is appropriately academically stretching or because it is unclear, the students are unprepared and/or they lack the necessary resources (Hughes & Spanner 2019).

The academic sector has also explored how to embed mental wellbeing within the curriculum itself. The HEA Embedding Wellbeing in Higher Education (2017) report states that 'to avoid a tokenistic, or bolt-on, approach it is important to integrate and embed mental health and wellbeing resources into the curriculum that are relevant to the discipline' (Houghton & Anderson, 2017). The Advance HE report focuses on the opportunity that embedding wellbeing in the curriculum gives to maximise the potential for students to succeed in higher education. Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum identifies teaching and learning activities as part of a "whole university" approach through inclusive curriculum design (Morgan & Houghton, 2011; Burgess et al, 2009). Many of the messages in guidance from Universities UK (UUK) and the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) complement the recent review – 'Understanding provision for

students with mental health problems and intensive support needs' (HEFCE 2015).

Another approach, known as 'curriculum infusion', enables disciplines to integrate discussion of wellbeing and emotional health into their teaching in ways which are relevant to the taught content. The HEA report provides ideas as to how the arts, sciences, and social sciences can infuse discussion and understanding of mental health and wellbeing into their disciplines, for example covering how madness is depicted in literature (http://www.madnessandliterature.org/index.php) or how mathematicians might use Office for National Statistics datasets on mental health for applied analysis.

The HEA report draws on 'the New Economics Foundation's Five 'Ways to Wellbeing' ('Five Ways to Wellbeing, New Economics Foundation 2008) as a framework for considering curriculum content and/or on the teaching and learning process. 'Keep learning', has clear connections with higher education, however, we use the other four ('connect', 'be active', 'take notice' and 'give') to reinforce the idea that learning best supports wellbeing when it is embedded and students are engaged' (Houghton & Anderson 2017), which highlights the need for wellbeing to be considered as an integral part to the student and staff experience rather than a necessary but potentially artificial bolt on. This approach is one which the University of Edinburgh already promotes (Manage your wellbeing | The University of Edinburgh).

The work of the QAA Enhancement Themes, 'Transition Skills and Strategies' (Cheng et al, 2015) also highlights the need for transitional skills development and supporting students and staff awareness of how these can be developed. The report highlights the following skills: 'self-efficacy, critical self-reflection, independent learning, managing expectations, social skills, dealing with stress, critical thinking, and academic and information literacy.' Being able to develop these skills at key points of transition throughout a student's career and providing clear opportunities within the curriculum to understand how these skills can be developed and applied, is important in order to enable students to manage the expectations, pressures and relationships of higher education in a way that does not harm their wellbeing. Considering the disruption – and possible learning-loss - faced by so many learners due to the 2020-21 Covid-19 pandemic, reinforces the importance of scaffolding these transitions in a meaningful way that is inclusive and acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and educational contexts our students have experienced.

Sector-wide reservations about wellbeing in the curriculum

The focus on wellbeing in the Higher Education sector is not universally welcomed. Concerns expressed include that such a focus can:

- act as a distraction from academic scholarship and promotes a "diminished subject"' (Houghton & Anderson 2017)
- negatively impact on staff who are not adequately experienced or equipped to embed aspects of wellbeing into their course content
- be seen as 'yet another initiative' (Houghton & Anderson, 2017)
- become a burden if alongside integration, the consequent accountability and reporting is conferred (Evans, J. 2019).

Creative responses

Responding to these concerns points to the need for a **whole university approach** to wellbeing. The Student Minds Mental Health Charter highlights that, 'any genuine whole-university approach should consider staff and student wellbeing as inextricably linked and supportive of the other' (Hughes & Spanner 2019), UUK's StepChange report says that 'good mental health is central to staff engagement, productivity and creativity. The whole university approach brings together staff and student mental health and wellbeing' (de Pury & Dicks 2020). The framework speaks to a 'whole university approach' by the UUK StepChange report and Student Minds Mental Health Charter - Learn, Support, Live, Work – provides reference points for considering how wellbeing can be threaded through the university experience. Universities are, in effect, an ecosystem in which wellbeing of one group can affect another. Any genuine whole–university approach should consider staff and student wellbeing as inextricably linked and supportive of the other (Student Minds, 2019).

This "whole university approach" also allows us to reflect on how a curriculum and the systems which support it need to be enabled by 'significant cultural and structural change' including a 'shared vision, […] visible leadership, […] capacity building, […] and infrastructure to capture and embed improvements and avoid duplication or inefficient use of time and resource' (de Pury & Dicks 2020). The need for structural support for the benefit of the whole university community's wellbeing comes across in responses to our internal survey, where workload, systems challenges, and difficulty navigating information sources are cited as having a detrimental impact on student and staff wellbeing. The whole university approach shifts the focus to 'academic wellbeing' not 'student wellbeing'; accounting for the students and those teaching, supervising and supporting them.

Examples of existing and ongoing research, collaborations and practices

Internal examples

Colleagues at the University of Edinburgh provided examples of wellbeing development activities already undertaken in our own institution, via discussion fora and from contributions to a simple online survey in Spring 2021[i]. These include:

- credit bearing, assessed courses, including the development and understanding of professional skills, self-awareness, self-care, relationship building, emotional intelligence, social constructs, power, social change, personal efficacy, risk-taking, identity and agency, diversity, reflexivity, and personal sustainability[ii];
- reflective Edinburgh Awards;
- considering how assessments are planned to reduce overwhelm;
- avoiding or signalling the use of triggering material in course content[iii];
- understanding how cultural assumptions that inform subjective judgements of work may have a detrimental impact on students' wellbeing[iv];
- consideration of wellbeing and community building as part of course design and approval[v];
- course content to support students' transition into and through their studies and to help them develop academic and personal skills to best equip students to learn and to understand what is expected of them[vi];
- study skills support to which may surface issues which might have a bearing on wellbeing (e.g. balancing caring responsibilities with study commitments);
- examples of curriculum infusion in a discipline relevant context (e.g. students from engineers exploring 'design for wellbeing in the built environment', students from architecture understanding how building design impacts the wellbeing of its occupants)[vii];
- examples of experiential learning using therapeutic practice and strategies within students' own lives[viii];
- and non-credit bearing class activities to build community and build awareness of support available, including more social activities[ix].

As part of this review, the need to further research thriving was identified as part of creating action-orientated approaches. A research cluster has been established as part of the Edinburgh Centre for Data, Culture and Society. The cluster will focus on **Data-Driven Thriving in the Academic Community** aims to provide leadership and empower capacity for thriving in academic communities. This research cluster aims to foster interdisciplinary research collaboration and networking among academic, support and professional services to promote positive education and wellbeing in the academic community. Staff from Clinical Psychology, Student Wellbeing, the Global Compassion Initiative, the Chaplaincy Service and the Institute for Academic Development will develop projects that are committed to openness in research, inclusivity and representative of the entire academic community.

Through the survey, numerous schools highlighted the need for a whole institution approach, which takes into account three things: the structures our students and staff need to navigate as part of their experience of the University of Edinburgh, how these structures and systems should be designed in such a way that they promote rather than demote positive wellbeing (including ease of finding and processing information) and the need for an organisational culture that supports and protects staff and student wellbeing, which speaks to the 'Whole University Approach' advocated in the Mental Health Charter.

Looking beyond Edinburgh

University strategies for wellbeing tend to incorporate within-curriculum, extra-curricular and support systems or a combination of the three. Those universities that emphasise this combination approach have demonstrated success at increasing wellbeing. Examples of these include:

The Engelhard Project for Connecting Life and Learning. This was established at Georgetown University to make explicit the connections between students' academic studies and their broader life experiences, especially in the areas of wellbeing, flourishing, and mental health. Implementing the innovative curriculum infusion approach, the project took hold at Georgetown and supports the integration of wellbeing issues in courses across the University (McWilliams & Riley, 2012). The curriculum infusion approach involves finding opportunities within the regular academic content of the course where topics of mental health, wellness, and student wellbeing can be highlighted, linked to course content, and also considered from a personal perspective. The curriculum infusion approach selected readings or assignments that open up the connections between the academic content of a specific course with topics around wellbeing. In-lecture opportunities to learn more about the topic and to make personal connections to lived experience through class discussion and a guest presentation from a campus resource professional; and a reflective writing assignment based on the infusion topic. (Examples here). The connection between course material and the wellbeing issue creates an opportunity for faculty to deepen student engagement in a variety of ways. For example, if a course involves teaching statistical models, the faculty may decide to tailor a data set involved in an analysis to address a specific wellbeing issue. Or if it is a literature course, the faculty may decide to link concepts or characters from reading assignments to real-life wellbeing issues.

Empowering academic staff to design learning environments that promote wellbeing and support the "whole" student is a key feature of University of Washington Resilience Lab. The Lab aims to promote a culture of wellbeing, they've created a "Well-being for Life and Learning Guidebook". They emphasise the value that students want to know they are cared for. Every year, students and staff anonymously share experiences of academic failures and career 'face plants' in spaces set up across campus called "Failure/Gratitude Walls. It serves as a cathartic sharing our shortcomings, humorous, profound, or tragic. They even host a "Fail Forward" event that brings the personal stories of prominent academic staff administrators, and notable community members to the forefront. These are stories from leaders who are willing to share the

setbacks they've faced throughout their careers and how those experiences have helped them to grow, personally and professionally. These types of activities are designed to foster greater compassion and empathy across the campus.

Ensuring that the right services are available at the right time for the students who need the services. Universities have recognised that there are challenges when universities rely on extra-curricular/student support activities to bolster wellbeing. The inverse care law can mean that those who need the services most are least likely to access them (Eisenberg, Golberstein & Hunt, 2009). The demand for mental health services at the University of Texas (Austin) Counselling and Mental Health Center (CMHC) increased by 62% from the academic year 2009-2017. While the total number of students increased by less than 1% (CMHC Fact Sheet, 2017; The University of Texas at Austin, 2017). Led by the University of Texas CMHC, a vision was developed for wellbeing among the academic staff and a [toolkit](#) created for whole student well-being. This toolkit identifies principles of wellbeing such as social connectedness and a growth mindset. Most importantly, however, are the simple suggestions for academic staff on how to make very small changes to support wellbeing. As an example, staff are encouraged to create welcoming rituals at the start of lecture. This along with several suggestions are designed to foster social connectedness as an aspect of wellbeing.

Rashid et al (2017) at the University of Pennsylvania has implemented a programme called "Flourish" which is a strengths-based collaborative project bringing together different students services. It builds student resilience to enable students to grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Students are taught concrete skills which can be translated into action, habit, and purpose (Rashid et al, 2017). As part of the [University of Pennsylvania Resilience Programme](#) it is based on the idea that these aspects of resilience will promote flourishing of emotional, intellectual and social growth. Online assessments which include a comprehensive feedback report as well as online and campus-wide resources to support their resilience are used. With staff from four student services departments and student leaders, students in the programme can participate in a range of interventions that support flourishing. This is an example of a specific intervention programme.

Three common barriers to embedding wellbeing in the curriculum

1. Stigma, stress and the culture of academia

Some students arrive at university 'wounded…injured, psychically', says Michael J. Sandel in a Radio 4 interview (Start the Week, 7 Sept 2020) about his recent book *The Tyranny of Merit* (Sandel 2020). "We have required adolescents to convert their teenage years into a battleground of meritocratic pressure, striving and anxiety". They have become accustomed 'to striving and hoop-jumping' and 'find it difficult to step back and take advantage of their undergraduate years as an opportunity for exploration, enquiring, thinking, rather than networking' and acquiring the next gold accolade. The Harvard Professor of Government Theory describes a culture of 'winners and losers', imbued with a 'rhetoric of rising', in

which people are encouraged to believe that they get to where they are through their own individual effort, talent and hard work, in which higher education is the recommended way to rise, and where universities operate as a 'vast sorting machine'. 'The implication is', says Sandel, 'that those who do not rise will have no one to blame but themselves.' Those at the top are understood to deserve their place, and so too are those at the bottom. This contributes to resentment and social polarisation and blinds us to our indebtedness to the communities that help us on our way, and to the elements of 'luck' as to the places and times in which we are born, over which we have no control and therefore can appropriately exercise humility.

Fear of failure
Sandel is describing US culture. The sociologist Richard Sennett (2012) says similar things from the UK, as he looks for remedies to the uncooperative, competitive, angst-making individualism that pervades Western culture. In win-lose systems, we judge those at the top as succeeding, and others as failing. Fear of failure dominates in many students' minds. A growing proportion of students 'just seem terrified of failure and experience the whole process of learning and assessment as an unforgiving ordeal that offers no room for creativity or mistakes', says William Davies, lecturer at Goldsmiths. He is author of [The Happiness Industry](), a book about the commercialisation of wellbeing. 'One of the most worrying phenomena that many of us have witnessed in recent years', he says, 'is the rise of chronic anxiety, that afflicts some students so deeply that they feel unable to come to the campus at all,' (interview https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/sep/27/anxiety-mental-breakdowns-depression-uk-students, accessed 24 June 2021).

Scarcity mindset
The drive to be first, and the dread of low-ranking is felt by individuals and institutions alike. It is driven by a scarcity mindset, in which everything becomes a competition within a zero-sum game. If we do not win, we are losers. The scarcity mindset of 'there is not enough' and 'we are not enough' brings with it shame and fear of ridicule or loss of face; comparison, constantly worrying about how we are doing in relation to others whom we see as competitors and therefore as threats; risk-aversion, afraid to try new things; and an anxious need to 'fit in' because we do not feel that we belong (Brown, 2013). A sense of belonging is a casualty of the scarcity mentality and is a concern for the UoE and other C21 universities. Prioritising success is arguably itself a form of moral, personal and social failure, as it leads us to factor out needs of others, of our environment, of ourselves, and to eclipse risk, spontaneity, exploration and much of what is important in human experience (Clack, 2020).

2. Overworked and under-resourced

Stressed staff

Some staff may feel that wellbeing is outside their scope of practice or an unnecessary demand on their workload activity. This is a significant barrier to implementing wellbeing in the community if the academic feels this is "not their job". Anne Brown, founding director of the University of Washington's Resilience Lab acknowledges such challenges. Staff may feel that wellbeing is outside their scope of practice or an unnecessary demand on their workload activity. When faculty feel that implementing wellbeing is "not their job" then the Resilience lab speaks about the importance to "then go with the go-ers". Staff resistance may be a barrier but understanding the rationale from staff is also part of the solution. The important task is not to convince the sceptical but to empower those who are willing to try, and there are many staff supportive of integrating wellbeing. Students speak of how academic staff members are often seen as the "missing link" when it comes to their own wellbeing (Stuart & Lee, 2013). El Ansari and Stock (2010) speak of how "health and wellbeing are essential elements for effective learning".

Pressures on institutions filter down to their members

University rankings for teaching, research and student satisfaction dominate the sector culturally, inducing a fear of being bottom of the pile, or not in the top elite. How universities respond to their fear of failure as institutions both mirrors and affects the wellbeing of their members. Fear drives punitive measures to induce staff to give students satisfying experiences, but frightened, overworked, unhappy staff make for unhappy students. The Office for Students has published a report [Projected Completion and Employment from Entrant Data](May 2021), which introduces another measure to score universities and their courses on drop-out rates and graduate outcomes in one metric. This will further produce fear for survival amongst academic departments, and the transfer of anxiety to students.

Overall, the push to make universities profitable, be that via research, teaching outcomes, customer satisfaction or employability, shifts our sense of what universities are for, and erodes the understanding that learning and exploration are of value because they grow us as human beings, for the individual, common and global good. If students are cultivated in institutions driven to come out on top and win economically, growth at university is shaped by narrowly circumscribed channels of achievement. We hear at the University of Edinburgh from students and staff who do not feel that they have time for rest, celebration, wider exploration or leisure, or that if they do take, for example, a walk, it must be measurable (perhaps in the number of steps) and productive (as useful thinking time).

3. Student "satisfaction"

The UK wide National Student Survey (NSS) has been criticised by the Department of Education noting that it 'exerts a downward pressure on standards in higher education by inciting "dumbing down and spoon-feeding students." The Office for Students (OfS) has proposed to remove the phrase 'satisfaction with engagement' as satisfaction is seen not as a measure of quality, but a measure of the distance between expectation and delivery. This proposal highlights the precarious nature the relationship between the student and their institution (Rich, 2021). The NSS was modified to include a question about whether students *'feel part of a community of staff and students.* This represents a growing expectation that students are asked about their engagement within the academic community. In addition, research shows that satisfaction is linked to factors such as the quality of university provision and overall student wellbeing (Bowles, Sharkey & Day, 2020). This research identified that student personal development is a crucial element in overall satisfaction, leading the authors to admonish "We conclude that efforts to maximise student satisfaction should focus on enabling academic staff to excel as inspirational tutors, tutors who foster competence and confidence in their student's academic journey" (Bowles, Sharkey & Day, 2020).

Teaching quality is important in predicting course satisfaction, however little attention has been dedicated to students' internal, psychological factors that may be influential in their course satisfaction (Douglas et al, 2006). Only one domain of the NSS **personal development** contains items that relate to the student's per se; however, this factor may be key to students' satisfaction. An analysis of ten years of NSS data shows that the personal development domain is significantly important to student satisfaction more so than academic support, learning resources and assessment and feedback (Bowles, Sharkey & Day, 2020; Burgess et al., 2018). The obvious barrier identified is whether the current University of Edinburgh provision systemically provides these opportunities for personal development?

Overcoming the barriers

Transformation: learning across communities. For bringing about culture-change we can incorporate learnings from Futures Studies and from culture-coaching, cultivating insights from Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI), and also MIT's U-Lab (as used by Dr Glen Cousquer at the Vet School in recent award-winning initiatives) and the International Futures Forum (e.g. O'Hara and Leicester 2019).

Transformation: adapting training and the science of compassionate thriving. For moving from zero-sum to win-win psycho-social dynamics there is a wealth of material from compassion scientists, including clinical psychologist Paul Gilbert, Professor at the University of Derby and founder of the Compassionate Mind Foundation. Gilbert identifies three different emotion-regulation systems at work in us:

1. threat and self-protection system
2. incentive and resource-seeking system
3. soothing and contentment system

He argues that much in modern society overstimulates both the threat and incentive systems: we feel we need to do more, and we feel that we want more, and we may feel a need to achieve at the cost of others or win such that others lose. This is a description of the culture described by Sandel and Sennett. In the realm of education, these diseases are very apparent in the rise of perfectionism, imposter syndrome, severe fear of failure, and most tragically, the link between a fear of being at the bottom of the pile and suicidality. Compassion training fosters patterns of behaviour that change the neural pathways within us, and the relational patterns out with us, to calm our frightened and driven selves. It is a tenet of compassion-teaching that compassion is a win-win dynamic: the givers and receivers of compassion all benefit, and nobody loses, unlike the zero-sum dynamics played out in the competitive arenas in which we work and study. While there have been recent critiques of mindfulness (and by implication compassion-type) training as acting like sedatives that are in service to consumerist systems (e.g. Purser 2019), in fact, compassion and mindfulness are insight-practices, waking us up to internal and external dynamics and giving us tools to make a change.

Transformation: changing cultures changing curricula. Cultivate a culture where there is compassion and a shared goal mentality. These are cultures which foster healthy and caring competitiveness, in which we seek to be our best selves and can happily co-exist with others who are also becoming their best selves. Such an endeavour is true to the task of education, and the meaning of 'educare', to draw out that which is within; to grow us as human beings. In a context desirous of growing us as human beings, we can belong together in our full sense of who we are, because the flourishing of each benefits the whole. Such belonging is different from the performative networking that we do as isolated individuals in a scarcity culture: doing our best to perform to whom we think we ought to be and to out-perform all other competitors who are threats to our status and rankings.

Transformation: embedding compassion in action. Powerful practices demonstrate impact, practices such as conversations about well-being, 'how is everyone doing?'), and emphasis on humanness in everything we do, strategies in place for consistent engagement with students through peer support, ongoing coaching and activities which support friendship building, systems to recognise the contributions that students make in their daily and weekly activities as amplified by the Teaching Awards.

Research has clearly demonstrated that belonging and social integration are important, not just for student wellbeing, but also for academic achievement and persistence to graduation (p57 Student Minds MH Charter)

As evidenced by other university examples, designing a toolkit can be an important step. Not a manual of academic practice, but a menu of options that allow for adaptability and creativity. In response to the serious need to address wellbeing in the academic community, it is tempting to overly administer or force individuals to adopt a style of practice that is not congruent with their own personal style. The risk of encouraging an inauthentic approach is that it will be perceived as such. For members of an academic community to allow a level of vulnerability, there needs to be an element of authenticity.

Supporting student well-being from afar | THE Campus Learn, Share, Connect (timeshighereducation.com)

Acknowledgements

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[i] Wellbeing in the Curriculum (sharepoint.com) SharePoint news article promoting Wellbeing in the Curriculum survey, shared by Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing

[ii] Including examples from the Vet School, Moray House School of Education and Sport, Biological Sciences, and Business School

[iii] Example provided by History, Classics and Archaeology

[iv] Example provided by Edinburgh College of Art

[v] Example provided by History, Classics and Archaeology

[vi] Including non-credit bearing skills development courses provided by the IAD

[vii] Example provided by School of Engineering and Edinburgh College of Art

[viii] Example provided by School of Health in Social Sciences

[ix] Examples provided by Moray House School of Education and Sport