

Placing wellbeing at the heart of the curriculum



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Advance HE Virtual Symposium
Student Retention and Success: Examining the role of mental wellbeing in the curriculum and university
15th September 2020

@BewickBM

Join the discussion: @leadsteaching

The 'crisis' of student mental health and wellbeing



Images: <https://www.lclpa.org/help-for-lawyers/help-for-a-law-student/>; <https://www.tmcc.edu/counseling/services-provided/personal-crisis-counseling/>; <https://www.irishmirror.ie/news/irish-news/education/rental-crisis-college-students-forced-5861473>

“There is increasing ... interest in ... the psychological well-being of students ...the lives of students are different in many ways to that experienced by students 20 or 30 years ago. **Students’ lives are becoming increasingly pressurised** due to changes [that] have placed students under increasing ... pressure ... As more people enter higher education, degrees are becoming more common .. the pressure to get a good degree is greater than ever before. However, while higher education is expanding, there is concern that **the structures ... to support students are not developing at an equivalent pace ...**”

Cooke, Bewick et al. (2006: 505-506)

How can we do things differently?





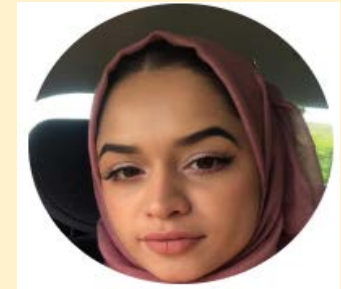
Design



Law



Biological Sciences



Plus Programme



Medicine



Mechanical engineering



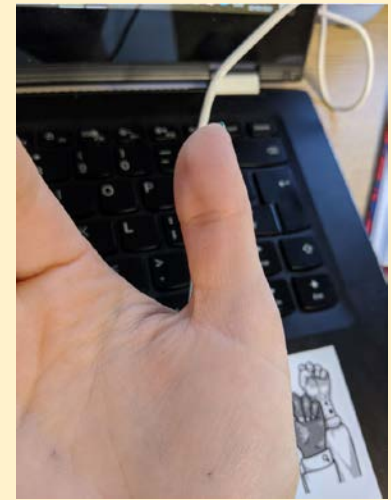
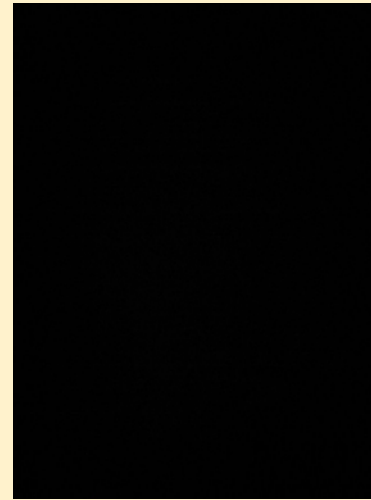
Music



Business
(July launch)

Student currently at $n \approx 400$ surveys, $n \approx 24$ interviews
Staff currently at $n \approx 30$ surveys, $n \approx 3$ interviews

What makes university more **challenging** and **difficult** than it need be?





In two weeks we have two **deadlines** and an exam on the same day ... **too much at once** ... I am going under with the pressure of it all

Deadlines and exams often fall in the same week or day. I feel like **module leaders don't talk to each other** or realise we have other work to do apart from their module

... a lot of deadlines have been very **close together** ...



...we have been allocated a longer time ... to submit exams ... that's why **my wellbeing has improved.**

...doing essays, instead of exams, has been **much better.** Exams test our memory, not ability.

I struggle with severe anxiety which exams increase immensely, having assessments instead has **helped me ...**

... they communicated changes in assessment quickly and **reduced the number of assessments** we had...



...module resources on Minerva
being very **disorganised** ...
conflicting information between
the module handbooks and what
lecturers say ..

Lack of direction in
assignments, **vague**
learning outcomes.

... lack of clarity on
sessions and if they are
occurring or not...

... last minute changes to
... assignment with
unclear guidance
created more stress ...



... **blanket emails...**

...to easy to feel like **just another face** in the lecture theatre very little planned communication with ... personal tutor ... tutors for ... tutorials changing every week. ... **little interaction between students and staff** ... make the transition ... harder than it would be with more frequent support.

Lecturers **not responding to emails.**

Personal tutor that **doesn't meet up** with us. I haven't seen them in over a year because they always **cancel the appointments.**

I hardly hear anything from my department or personal tutor. I know everyone is busy **but it would be nice to be checked up on...**

... **SES staff not available...**



... personal tutor check ins. Even though it's just an email, having your personal tutor email you directly really makes you feel like the **University cares about you personally...**

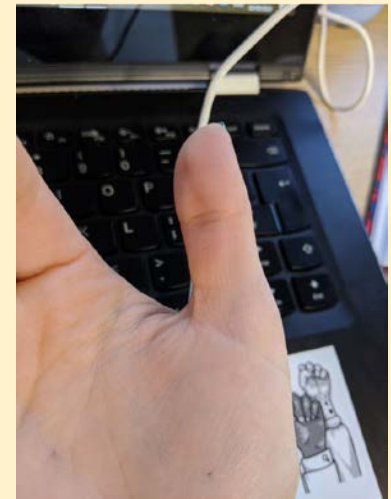
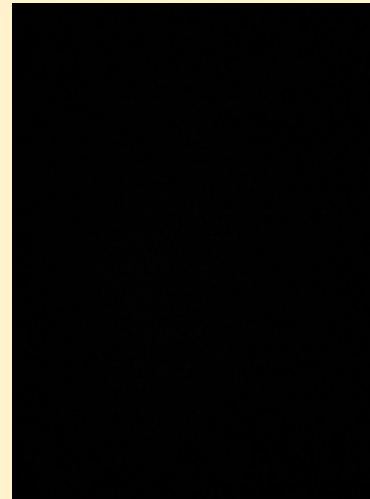
... they are **better at replying** to emails than normal, and understand everyone is going through hard time so are **more understanding ...**

...individual tutors have **taken an interest** in our wellbeing...

...contact with my tutors and advice from them has been fantastic ...

... it's the personal touch ...
contacting people individually and asking how they are ...

When have you felt a **sense of belonging**?



on campus in general, in the libraries and study areas where everyone is in the same boat

during some tutorials ... when I get a chance to express my thoughts freely without being judged

Our lectures remember our names and who we are, and greet us in the corridor. They are genuinely interested in what we are getting up to and what our future plans are.

in my lectures when I'm surrounded by lots of my course friends

seeing lots of familiar faces around campus

hanging out with societies that reflect my true interests

during feedback sessions because then I feel like my hard work has paid off

when meeting like minded friends in lab classes and lecture

being part of sports teams

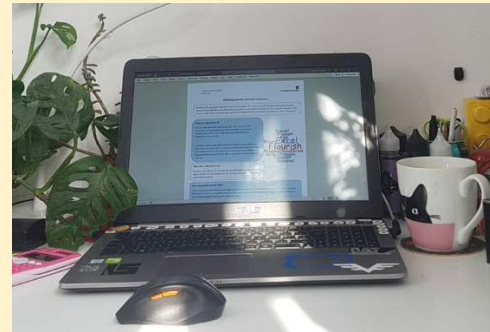
when lectures know my name and treat me like an equal

the University Union building gives me a great sense of belonging





- Feeling seen and respected by staff
- Knowing there were friends to sit with in lectures/work with in labs
- During meaningful interactions in group work, seminars, tutorials, and placements.
- Physical spaces around campus (e.g. library, student union, café)
- Extracurricular activities and/or with housemates





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Image: <https://www.needpix.com/photo/download/645123/thank-you-note-thank-thank-you-note-message-thank-you-card-appreciation-text-thank-you>; <https://www.pexels.com/photo/ask-blackboard-chalk-board-chalkboard-356079/>