

Groups and Workshops in Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM)

Examples of Practice, The Student Mental Health Evidence Hub

The Student Mental Health Project is an Office for Students (OfS) funded project that aims to help higher education providers develop their student mental health interventions. The project has developed a Student Mental Health Evidence Hub, a free resource consisting of an evidence-based toolkit, evaluation guidance, examples of practice and the results of our sector engagement and student panel work. The project was led by The Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes in Higher Education (TASO) as part of a consortium with What Works Wellbeing, SMARteN, Student Minds and AMOSSHE, the Student Services Organisation.

This document contains an example of practice to support student mental health in higher education (HE). This is one of a number of examples which have been collated as a result of calls to the sector issued by TASO. Please note that the information contained in these examples is not endorsed by TASO, and TASO has not been involved at any stage of intervention development, delivery or evaluation. We are grateful to the participating higher education providers for sharing information to facilitate the development of these examples.

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Overview

Higher Education Provider:	University of Oxford
Intervention Title:	Groups and Workshops in Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM)
Intervention Type:	Active Psychoeducation and Recreational
Target Group:	All students, universal
Date:	October 2023

With thanks to Luqmaan Waqar from King's College London for developing this example of practice.

Brief overview of the intervention

The University of Oxford's Counselling Service has collaborated with The Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM) to offer psychoeducational workshops in non-clinical spaces to improve student mental health and wellbeing and increase student engagement with gardens, libraries, and museums within the University. Workshop topics vary greatly, with a range that includes perfectionism, insomnia and belonging. They are open to all current students of the university and students can attend single workshops or a series of workshops.

Intervention approach

The intervention was originally proposed around 2019, but after a few pilots of a mindfulness-based workshop at one of the museums, the initiative was disrupted by Covid-19. Post-pandemic, the intervention has been broadened to include more students, more locations and an additional variety of psychoeducational topics.

Examples of activities include 'Forest Bathing', a mindfulness-based exercise taking place in the Botanical Gardens. Workshops have been designed to help overcome common student mental health and wellbeing difficulties such as panic, sleep and insomnia issues, imposter syndrome, perfectionism, and social anxiety. Additionally, there are integration based workshops including the 'How to Find Your People' geared towards newer students such as undergraduates who might find socialising challenging in a new environment. All workshops are facilitated by professionals who are qualified counsellors working at the University Counselling Service (UCS).

All undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in the University of Oxford can participate in the intervention. Between January 2022 and January 2023, over 180 students have taken part. The information regarding the workshops is circulated through several communication channels, including the University's welfare contacts in the different colleges across Oxford, who then pass this on to the students. The students may then contact the counselling service to sign up to the workshops. The students are sent a reminder of the workshops a few days before the event to confirm their attendance, which has helped improve attendance.

The intervention has been running alongside the [Student Wellbeing and Experiential Learning Spaces \(SWELS\) project](#), which builds on a growing body of research concerning the wellbeing benefits of engaging with culture (including museum, collections, art galleries, libraries and the outdoors) and applying this specifically to experiential learning environments in higher education.

Resources Required

The University Counselling Service (UCS) is a part of the Student Welfare and Support Services. The Gardens, Libraries, and Museums (GLAM) within the University of Oxford represents six departments, and coordinates related budgets, policy and strategy in support

of the University's academic, research and teaching activities, and its heritage and legal responsibilities. The partnership between UCS and GLAM facilitates student-facing events that relate to mental health and is involved with research and development to enhance access to spaces and wellbeing experiences.

Intervention evaluation

Feedback is collected after the workshops with open questions on whether the students found the content helpful, whether they would recommend it to a friend, and whether they had any feedback about the space and about the workshop. The [Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation outcome measure \(CORE-10\)](#) is also included in the feedback form, which is a clinical tool with items covering anxiety, depression, trauma, physical problems, functioning and risk to self. Plans to analyse feedback are in place but the evaluation has not been published yet.

Feedback from students suggest that attending psychoeducational workshops or groups in non-clinical settings can normalise talking about mental health needs in everyday spaces. Furthermore, while taking part in groups and workshops in non-clinical spaces can encourage access to psychoeducational interventions for students who otherwise may not have approached the University Counselling Service, it has also reportedly increased these students' engagement with gardens, libraries, and museums which the students may not have visited otherwise.

Further evaluation is expected to better understand current student interest and use of psychoeducational groups and workshops as it relates to overall wellbeing, as opposed to being limited to clinical associations with therapy and counselling. Furthermore, understanding the impact of psychoeducation in non-clinical spaces on students' relationship to their own wellbeing outside of therapy/counselling, would help Oxford's Counselling Service offer a more holistic form of wellbeing support.

The aim of the initiative is to encourage students to develop an ongoing relationship with cultural and recreational spaces, such as gardens, libraries, and museums. Further research is planned to understand how a developed relationship with these spaces may impact overall student wellbeing and quality of life. Additional investigation is needed on how increased engagement with GLAM spaces and better understanding of psychoeducational information gained in non-clinical spaces may influence overall fulfilment in the university experience as well as academic performance.

Next steps

The GLAM and University Counselling Service partnership has been notably successful and will be working to develop student mental health interventions in their gardens, libraries and museums and to explore the benefits of being in non-clinical spaces and in working with their collections. The partnership plan to continue the current range of groups and workshops to students within GLAM spaces, and to expand on the subject material offered informed by

student need, covering a further variety of topics that normalise conversations around mental health and overall wellbeing.

University of Oxford is part of the SMARteN-funded [Student Wellbeing and Experiential Learning Spaces \(SWELS\) project](#) and is looking to develop further research in this area with University College London and King's College London.

Links

GLAM project

<https://www.glam.ox.ac.uk/about>

Oxford University Counselling Service

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/welfare/counselling?wssl=1>

Student Wellbeing and Experiential Learning Spaces (SWELS) project

<https://culturehealthresearch.wordpress.com/student-wellbeing-and-experiential-learning-spaces-swels/>