

# Learning and Leading to Make a Difference

## 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. 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

<b>Higher Education Provider:</b>	The University of Portsmouth (in collaboration with Canterbury Christ Church University)
<b>Intervention Title:</b>	Learning and Leading to Make a Difference
<b>Intervention Type:</b>	Active Psychoeducation/ Pedagogy
<b>Target Group:</b>	Universal/ Non-targeted
<b>Date:</b>	October 2023

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

## Brief overview of the intervention

An intervention tested at the University of Portsmouth is being further developed at Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) as the basis for a distinctive curriculum-embedded whole-institution approach to increase social inclusion and improve student wellbeing.

Teaching emotion regulation and compassion, Learning and Leading to Make a Difference (LLMD) engages students as both agents and beneficiaries of an actively inclusive learning community, promoting belonging as the basis for both wellbeing and learning success. The approach shifts focus from an individualised deficit model of wellbeing and teaches a simple psychological literacy framework focusing on successful learning and on leadership. The intervention draws on Professor Paul Gilbert's 'Compassionate Mind' model, fostering a compassionate mindset towards oneself and others in a way in which recognises the emotional impact of learning challenges. A compassionate mindset cultivates associated learning mindsets: a 'growth' mindset to help students persevere in the face of difficulty and to embrace challenges and failures as opportunities to grow; a recognition of personal values and a wider sense of purpose as a source of motivation and direction; and the self-belief and courage to both seek out and offer others the positive relationships and connections which provide a sense of belonging.

## Intervention approach

The pilot intervention is a Level 4 (20-credit) online learning module at the University of Portsmouth, part of a suite of standalone optional interdisciplinary learning opportunities for extra credit. While the module is credited at Level 4, it is open to all students.

LLMD module credits are earned as students build a portfolio of evidence demonstrating key meta-learning and employability skills: embracing learning challenges and critically reflecting on their experiences; working effectively in teams and working communities; and leading others in addressing key challenges such as improving wellbeing/mental health; sustainability, and social justice.

Students are asked to participate as partners in building an effective learning community in the module cohort, while practising key teamwork and leadership skills. These include: emotion regulation skills such as mindfulness and self-compassion skills; values-led and strengths-based goal setting; setting boundaries using assertive communication; empathic listening and peer support; equity, diversity and inclusion competence; effective teamwork; inclusive community-building to support authentic belonging; bystander intervention; antiracism and allyship; restorative conflict resolution; sustainability activism; psychologically literate critical reflection; learning co-creation and partnership.

## Resources required

The intervention uses digital resources including an engaging introductory animated video.<sup>1</sup> An extended visual 'Learning Journey' metaphor is used to structure the introduction of

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<sup>1</sup> Please visit the TASO Student Mental Health Evidence Hub, Examples of Practice to see the ['Emotion Regulation for Learning & Life' animated video](#).

associated meta-learning concepts and skills through rich asynchronous online learning activities.

## Intervention evaluation

The pilot 'Learning & Leading to Make a Difference' module was structured as a piece of participatory action research, with a small cohort of students drawn from the University of Portsmouth and Canterbury Christ Church University. The students collaborated as partners in testing the effectiveness of the module, developing resources to inspire future students and co-constructing potential methods for embedding the approach directly within course curricula.

The evaluation plan for the pilot utilised a reflective framework developed alongside previous iterations of the intervention, in particular through survey research conducted with staff and students at the University of Portsmouth during the Covid-19 pandemic to develop a reflective tool for measuring the impact of wellbeing interventions. The research survey made use of a number of standardised measures including of wellbeing (WEMWBS), resilience (Ohio), psychological flexibility (Acceptance & Action-II), and self-compassion (Neff Short Scale) alongside a bespoke tool (based on Eldred's Catching Confidence approach)<sup>2</sup> prompting reflection about the user's level of confidence in making use of a variety of learning, leadership, wellbeing and inclusion skills.

The Catching Confidence approach was designed as an empowering reflective tool for students to capture their own feelings about their learning and growing competence, and this adapted version made a particularly appropriate tool to support the participatory research element of the module. Students used this and other reflective frameworks to reflect on their own wellbeing, resilience and self-compassion and changing levels of confidence in making use of teamwork and leadership skills as a result of their learning on the module. For their pass/fail assessment portfolio, students were asked to:

- Apply one of two general models of reflection taught on the course (Gibbs, 5R) to consider several examples of their own experiences of practising some of the teamwork and leadership skills learnt on the course.
- Work together to develop digital resources sharing their own experiences of facing learning challenges to be used to inspire future students engaging with the updated intervention (see student voicenote for an example).
- Use the bespoke reflection tool described above to reflect on the impact of the course on their confidence in applying key learning, teamwork and leadership skills.
- Participate in a final focus group to give feedback about the module based on these reflections and to contribute ideas for how the intervention could be shaped and developed in the future.

Students who completed the module provided rich reflective feedback within the focus group, as well as a range of engaging artefacts to inspire future students. For students

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<sup>2</sup> For all outcome measures references, please see under References, Outcome Measures.

studying at all levels, the findings indicated significant individual impact as well as a ripple effect in students' lives:

“In my five years of university life, this module stands out as the most impactful and rewarding. This module has transformed me as a student, friend, teammate and aspiring leader. Looking back, I wish I had access to these self-help tools and resources earlier in my academic journey.”

University of Portsmouth, Taught Masters' student

## Next steps

The module is the product of an iterative process of development, centring partnership with students. The psychological literacy framework was originally developed within the psychoeducation programme offered in Portsmouth University's Student Wellbeing Service. It was further developed and tested over several years through student co-construction within an extracurricular student leadership programme originally initiated within an Office for Students-funded Catalyst project and then an evaluated collaborative project in the Portsmouth Law School. Building from these projects, the central digital learning resources were developed to support transition and (re-)induction during the Covid-19 pandemic. Several hundred students engaged each year with this initial transition-focused version of the online learning resources in 2020/21 and 2021/22, providing feedback which helped to shape extended online learning materials for the Learning & Leading to Make a Difference module.

At the University of Portsmouth, the module will continue in its current format within the suite of optional enrichment modules available for additional credit. The format and resources are also being tested in a version embedded with the Pharmacy course.

As the intervention is developed and scaled up at Canterbury Christ Church University, robust evaluation will continue along with a strong participatory and partnership ethos. The intervention is augmenting existing equity and sustainability initiatives to consolidate a compassion-focused foundation for a distinctive strategic whole-institution approach to student wellbeing and inclusion. The goal is to embed a rich digital learning experience initially to support transition and induction, and then within all undergraduate and postgraduate courses as a framework for building peer-led, inclusive inter-cohort learning communities and a curriculum aspiring to deliver Canterbury Christ Church University's vision for shaping sustainable futures.

## References

### Outcome Measures

**5R reflective framework:** Bain, J.D., Ballantyne, R., Mills, C. & Lester, N.C. (2002). Reflecting on practice: Student teachers' perspectives, Post Pressed: Flaxton, Qld

**Gibbs reflective cycle:** Gibbs, G. (1988). Learning by doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Further Education Unit.

**Neff Short Scale:** Raes, F., Pommier, E., Neff, K.D., & Van Gucht, D. (2011). Construction and factorial validation of a short form of the Self-Compassion Scale. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*. 18, 250-255

**Ohio Resilience:** Smith, B.W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P. & Bernard, J. (2008). The Brief Resilience Scale: Assessing the Ability to Bounce Back. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 15, 194-200

**WEMWBS:** Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) © NHS Health Scotland, University of Warwick and University of Edinburgh, 2006, all rights reserved.

## Other References

Bond, F.W., Hayes, S.C., Baer, R.A., Carpenter, K.M., Guenole, N., Orcutt, H.K., Waltz, T. & Zettle, R.D. (2011) 'Preliminary psychometric properties of the Acceptance and Action Questionnaire-II: A revised measure of psychological inflexibility and experiential avoidance.' *Behavior Therapy*, Vol 42, Issue 4, December 2011: 676-688.

Eldred, J., Ward, J., Snowdon, K. & Dutton, Y. (2006) *Catching confidence: The nature of confidence - ways of developing and recording changes in the learning context*. Department for Education and Skills.