WiSE
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Roadmap for the toolkit on student well-being

Title
Roadmap for the toolkit on student well-being
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WISE Project Partners

*Animafac

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UNIVERSITY

ESU EUROPEAN
STUDENTS'
UNION

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UNIVERSITY
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Student life is an essential dimension in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) strategy, and it's recognised as complementary to academic learning. Currently, it appears that many students suffer from problems of malaise, as shown by numerous studies and research. Some groups of students are particularly vulnerable to issues of well-being, due to the discrimination they already face (e.g. refugees, people with disabilities). Since the beginning of 2020, the health crisis has had a strong impact on student well-being (almost no student life, need to adapt to new learning methods, integration difficulties, significant deterioration in mental health, etc.). In this context the WISE project promotes and encourages well-being in student life within the European Higher Education field. This project aims to identify what is important for the well-being of students and how universities and student organisations can act within student life policies in favour of student well-being.

Purpose and main goals of WISE project

WISE is the acronym for **Well-Being Innovations for Students in Europe**, a project co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union.

Launched in 2022, this Project involves 7 European partners[1] (HEIs and consortium organisations that act of this topic) and aims to:

- Develop expertise to understand better what's at stake for student well-being within student life: quantitative and qualitative research and reports.

- Develop resources and training to help HEIs and student organisations to take in account and act for well-being in student life: *vademecum*, toolkits, training.

- Develop proposals and communications to promote student well-being and student life as essential components in Europe.

The current toolkit is dedicated to HEIs that wish to implement student well-being initiatives and is designed to increase their focus on student well-being, develop policies and implement good practices on this subject. As a training tool, it will be complemented by a platform, a resource centre available at wise.animafac.net

This toolkit is organised in 3 sections/ modules:

1. **understanding:** where we introduce WISE project, its main goals and outputs, the definition of well-being in the WISE project, and we will also share

1. Consortium organisations are: Animafac (France), ESU – European Students Union (Belgium), and EUF – European University Foundation (Luxembourg). HEIs that integrate WiSE project are Aristotle University of Thessaloniki in Greece, Charles University of Prague in Czech Republic, Polytechnic Institute of Coimbra in Portugal, and Transilvania University of Brasov in Romania.

studies and research on the well-being of students, in all of its dimensions;

2. **diagnosing:** a tool for self-evaluation by HEIs on what they already do regarding well-being what they are missing and propose what else to do and they have to improve;

3. **acting/innovating:** with recommendations, guidelines, fact sheets about specific topics, to help HEIs to implement policies and initiatives regarding well-being.

The training toolkit is tailored for the following target groups:

Specifically:

• HEIs governing bodies, for an integrated and sustainable strategy on responding to well-being challenges.

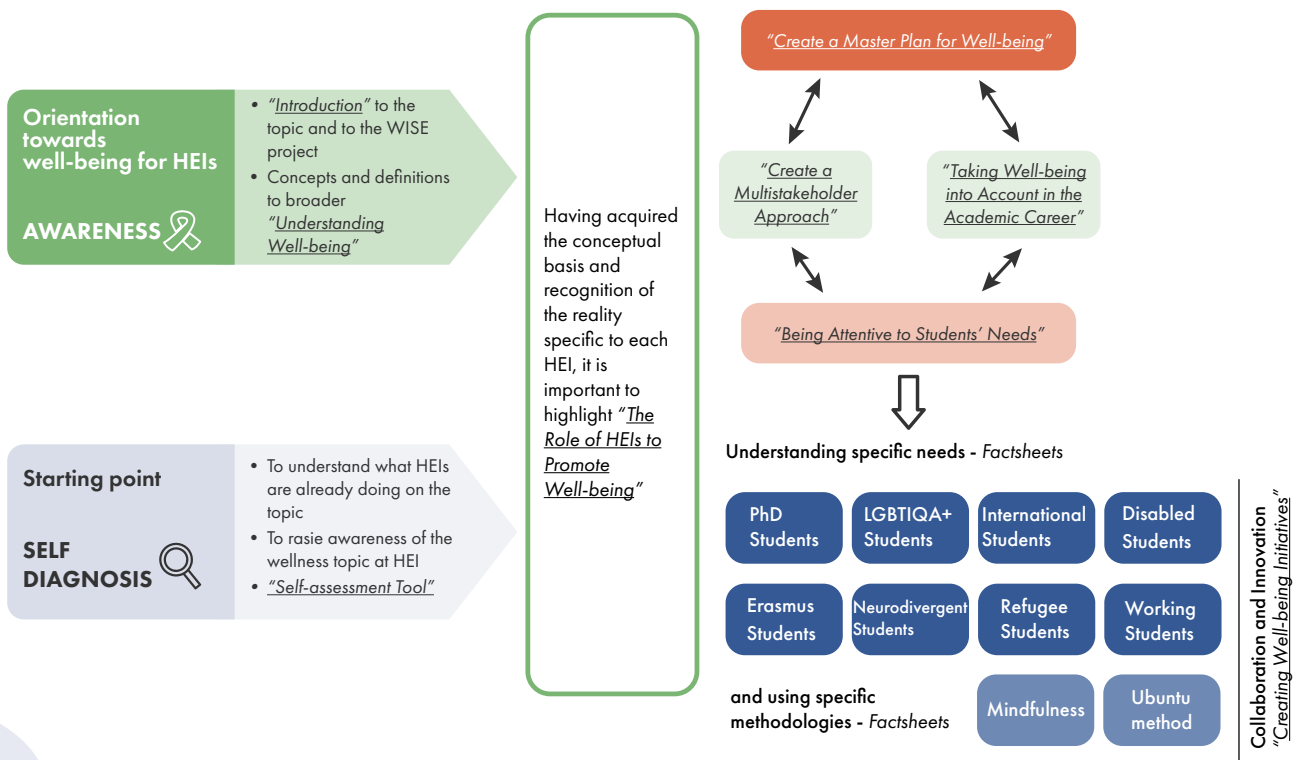• Student life offices and educators at Higher Education Institutions, for a complete and articulated response, with specific support programs.

Overall:

All academic members – teachers, students, and non-academic staff – for implementing actions in favour of well-being on a daily basis, making HEIs a promoter of the well-being of all.

How can this toolkit be used? What can I expect from this toolkit?

The toolkit is expected to function as a guiding document for correct action that prioritises the well-being of students and places it as a precursor to full personal, academic, and professional fulfilment. The kit includes numerous in-depth and

Orientation towards well-being for HEIs

AWARENESS
• "Introduction" to the topic and to the WISE project
• Concepts and definitions to broader "Understanding Well-being"

Starting point

SELF DIAGNOSIS
• To understand what HEIs are already doing on the topic
• To rasie awareness of the wellness topic at HEI
• "Self-assessment Tool"

Having acquired the conceptual basis and recognition of the reality specific to each HEI, it is important to highlight "The Role of HEIs to Promote Well-being"

"Create a Master Plan for Well-being"

"Create a Multistakeholder Approach"

"Taking Well-being into Account in the Academic Career"

"Being Attentive to Students' Needs"

Understanding specific needs - *Factsheets*

| PhD Students | LGBTIQA+ Students | International Students | Disabled Students |

| Erasmus Students | Neurodivergent Students | Refugee Students | Working Students |

and using specific methodologies - *Factsheets*

| Mindfulness | Ubuntu method |

Collaboration and Innovation "Creating Well-being Initiatives"

specialised resources on different facets of the subject that are interconnected, and its sequence can be visualised in the previous page.

Each item of the toolkit has specific **learning outcomes** that specifies *who is the target audience, how to put in practice* and *expected results.*

Learning outcome #1: Understanding well-being

Understand the different dimensions that contribute to well-being. Demonstrate the applicability of the concept for a comprehensive student view. Differentiate the explanatory theories of the concept and the dimensions that each one presents. Select the most appropriate theoretical frameworks for designing an intervention in the field of student well-being.

To whom
This content is essential for those involved in the process of defining objectives and goals for a policy in favour of well-being in HEIs and in its implementation, with appropriate procedures and activities.

However, it is important to remember that all actions towards student well-being must actively involve them, so this content provides a solid basis for understanding well-being, which is useful for everyone involved.

How to put in practice
Integrate the topic at the level of strategic planning, with decision-making bodies.

Training actions around the concept of well-being, aimed at professionals of social support.

Awareness campaigns on the topic for teachers and non-academic staff.

Promotion of extracurricular activities that allow reflection on the topic, clarifying it and integrating it into everyday life, for more dedicated attention.

Whenever appropriate, promote the integration of this topic into the curricular context.

Expected results
Broad understanding of the topic. Sharing a coherent understanding by all HEIs. Guidance towards a common purpose based on consolidated knowledge.

Learning outcome #2: Self-diagnosing of well-being practices

Demonstrate what you [HEIs] already do to promote student well-being. Classify the impact of actions already taken. Compare the actions taken with higher levels of performance and understand the gaps to overcome. Select priority areas for intervention, considering the reality of your HEI. Outline future lines of action on this topic.

To whom

This content is essential for those involved in the process of defining objectives and goals for a policy in favour of well-being at HEI and in its implementation, with appropriate procedures and activities. Relevant information is the basis for strategic planning aligned with HEIs objectives and mission.

How to put in practice

This self-assessment process can be implemented simultaneously with other assessment procedures (such as internal quality assurance system, HEI institutional accreditation), or alone. The process must be repeated with a defined regularity (e.g., annually) and each response must be supported by evidence. The self-diagnosis process must be carried out by the service directly responsible for coordinating the welfare policy. Diagnostic results must be shared with the entire HEI community. These indications guarantee adequate monitoring and continuous improvement of policies and procedures.

Expected results

An in-depth knowledge of the reality of your HEI, as well as its student populations, will allow timely and adequate assessment and enable an assertive response.

Learning outcome #3: The role of HEIs to promote well-being

Recognise the environmental factors that challenge HEIs to consider the central importance of the well-being of their academic community. Identify the changes facing young people in accessing Higher Education and their impact on their well-being. Describe the role that HEIs can play in creating supportive environments concerned with the well-being of students. Relate the impact of programs that promote well-being on the full development of students and their transformation into citizens involved and committed to their community. Demonstrate the importance of a preventive perspective in defining policies that promote well-being in HEIs.

To whom
This content is essential for those involved in the process of defining objectives and goals for a policy in favour of well-being in HEIs and in its implementation, with appropriate procedures and activities. A holistic understanding of the importance of well-being in the context of HEI is of primary importance for acting accordingly.

How to put in practice
This content is especially useful for a kick-off activity at the level of strategic decision-making bodies and immediately involving the services and offices that work with the student, as it presents in a panoramic but structured way and highlighting what is essential, the issue of well-being for HEIs.

Expected results
Broad understanding of well-being issues, the factors that compromise this way of being, the contexts that affect the quality of the academic experience and success, as well as the impacts on the student development as a person.

Learning outcome #4: Create a master plan for well-being

Recognise the impacts generated by the activity of HEIs, in the different dimensions of action, on the well-being of students. Describe the responses that can be given to each of these impacts. Identify the principles to follow in designing a master action plan. Relate to the recommendations to be considered when preparing a master action plan.

To whom

This content is essential for those involved in the process of defining objectives and goals for a policy in favour of well-being at HEIs and in its implementation, with appropriate procedures and activities. However, one of the success factors for implementing a master plan on a topic that has countless repercussions on the people who make up HEIs lies in its ability to involve different actors, predominantly internal but not neglecting agents from the external community who can play an active role. Therefore, this item is addressed to all internal actors, to whom it must be communicated and with whom the implemented solutions must be co-created. Likewise, communicating the plan, its objectives and achieved results constitute excellent opportunities to reinforce interaction with members of the surrounding community.

How to put in practice

The 4th learning outcome is based on the results achieved by the 2nd (self-diagnosing on well-being topic) which provide knowledge and an adequate framework for designing a master plan. The data collected must be analysed in depth both by the governing bodies and by all HEI services involved. In parallel, they must be accompanied by consultation mechanisms for all interested and affected parties.

Expected results

Awareness of the impacts generated by the HEI. Beginning of the preliminary process for consistent action in terms of student well-being.

Learning outcome #5: Create a multistakeholder approach

Recognise and map the different stakeholders that affect HEIs and are affected by HEIs actions. Differentiate each of these relationships by the specific impact they have on promoting an HEI that cares for its members and its community.

To whom
This learning outcome is based on the idea of network, considering HEIs as dealing with interconnected and multiple relations with different players. In this sense, all internal stakeholders are expected to participate in mapping activities. Sharing identification of external stakeholders by the HEI's community guarantees a comprehensive approach on the subject and the inclusion of all relevant players in favour of well-being.

How to put in practice
Listening to members of the HEI's internal community in identifying all groups and entities that affect and are affected by its activity. Subsequently, characterise and prioritise each of the identified stakeholders, according to a set of criteria relevant to the HEI and the topic.

Expected results
Empower HEIs with a clear understanding of its network of influence and community involvement. Transform this network of interdependence into concerted action around larger objectives, such as promoting student well-being.

Learning outcome #6: Taking well-being in account in academic career

Recognise the interdependence between student well-being and teacher well-being. Associate the causes that can lead to a loss of well-being on the part of academic staff. Use recommendations to counter factors that affect faculty well-being.

To whom
This content is essential for those involved in the process of defining objectives and goals for a policy in favour of well-being within HEIs and in its implementation, with appropriate procedures and activities. Specially, this content is aimed at those involved in the management of teachers' careers, from their hiring to opportunities for professional development, and access to higher categories in the teaching career, but also to peers with responsibilities in terms of managing faculties, departments, and courses.

How to put in practice
Measures related to career progression are not necessarily within the scope of HEIs but depend on national policy guidelines. Likewise, certain practices that govern scientific research activities respond to a culture of competition that has become widespread and that makes it difficult to review other more collaborative and less stressful models (e.g. publish or perish). However, at the HEI level, it is possible to rethink cultural practices and promote more positive work environments that value the person and their well-being, such as well-being programs, review of school schedules for a better balance with family and leisure, promoting a culture of openness and dialogue, constructive criticism and co-construction of alternative solutions that promote well-being.

Expected results
Academic staff with higher level of satisfaction with work conditions, participation in HEI's mission and goals, and a feeling of well-being. Also, it is expected that academic staff will be prone to contribute to students' well-being.

Learning outcome #7: Being attentive to students needs

Explain the specific challenges faced by a student accessing Higher Education. Describe the implications of these challenges on student well-being. Implement resources and procedures to enable HEIs to be more attentive to the challenges experienced by its students. Integrate attentive listening and care mechanisms across the different HEI members, for supportive monitoring.

HEIs that are concerned with students' well-being understand that experiencing Higher Education can't be reduced to cognitive matters. Enrollment in Higher Education is a complex period of life for traditional and non-traditional students, as it involves changes in the way of living, brings more individual responsibilities and asks for an autonomous growth. In this process, students should be guided and the whole academic community must act as a supportive web. *Being attentive to students' needs* goes straight to this point and gives some reflectional data on the importance of involving staff – academic and non-academic – and peers and to create positive learning environments.

To whom

This content is particularly relevant to teaching and non-teaching staff. The teacher-student relationship is integral to the Higher Education experience and can contribute to an HEI that is more focused on supporting its students. Regarding non-teaching staff, whether they work in offices specially dedicated to promoting well-being or perform other functions, they should also be the target of awareness-raising and training actions for a more interventionist role in detecting problematic situations and monitoring them to the relevant support structures.

How to put in practice

Raising awareness of the issue of well-being, the factors that affect it, the implications it may have on the student, on academic performance, on satisfaction with the course and HEIs, on peer relationships and on the feeling of belonging to the academic community can be worked on using awareness-raising and training actions. Non-formal methodologies, such as the Ubuntu methodology, allow working at an individual and group level on the pillars of self-knowledge, self-confidence, resilience but also empathy and service with very solid results for greater well-being.

Expected results

A more supportive and attentive HEIs' community for matters around well-being.

Learning outcome #8: Understanding specific needs and using specific methodologies

Identify specific challenges in terms of well-being for each group of students. Relate to the unique and specific reality of each HEI. Use information about each group in designing the intervention aimed at that student population. Associate certain intervention methodologies with consistent results in matters correlated with well-being.

Eight groups of students were identified, with specific needs and challenges in the topic of well-being. A dedicated factsheet is proposed for each one of these groups.

For each group, a review of scientific literature and institutional reports highlighted the main issues and impacts on well-being. Statistical data illustrates the current situation in Europe and some good practices from European HEIs can inspire an innovative answer to particular and common challenges. Each factsheet is available in two formats: _shorter_, for a quick overview and a brief description, and _extended_, for a comprehensive and in-depth analysis and to prepare an intervention plan.

Also, two methodologies are described as they have high positive results in Higher Education students: mindfulness and Ubuntu. Both can be adapted to non-formal activities for personal and group well-being.

To whom
Factsheets are useful for those who are in charge with designing programs for well-being and planning activities, as they summarise issues that are involved and propose response scenarios that can be adapted by each HEI.

How to put in practice
Factsheets are not a practical manual "ready-to-use", as they don't pretend to fix a one size fits all solution for each issue. They aim to give a comprehensive overview and a basis to adapt to each HEI and its own reality. Remember that the inclusion of students in the design of policies for well-being is a success factor and a guarantee that the solutions are tailored to each HEI.

Expected results
It is expected that HEIs are able to understand the main issues for each group of students, to set priorities and to define programs and activities.

Learning outcome #9: Create well-being initiatives

Identify the benefits and risks in using the coproduction methodology. Demonstrate the advantages of collaborative and co-production processes in designing responses that promote student well-being. Implement this methodology when preparing action proposals in favour of well-being in HEIs.

To whom
The last content is a hands-on guide for the design of solutions and action plans. This learning outcome is aimed at all those who are responsible for developing action proposals based on a policy to promote well-being in an academic context. Based on a collaborative methodology, all students involved in the process of co-production of action proposals also benefit from this content.

How to put in practice
A set of procedural aspects and a sequential alignment of the steps to be taken through the co-production methodology are listed in the text supporting this point.

Expected results
It is expected that HEIs will gain capacity to act on the topic of well-being using methodologies that give voice and primacy to the perspectives of the beneficiaries: the students.

A platform, available at wise.animafac.net, presents itself as a resource centre on the topic of student well-being and a reference for all HEIs that pursue the objective of promoting the well-being of their members, students, teaching, and non-teaching staff. On the platform, resources are available that illustrate key content and activities are proposed to enable HEI members to perform consistently and prioritise well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the WISE Training Kit on Student Well-being

The WISE Project

The WISE Project is a collaborative effort by seven European partners, dedicated to enhancing student well-being across the continent. Initiated by Animafac, a French network dedicated to supporting student initiatives, alongside six other esteemed partners, WISE embodies a strategic response to the growing concerns surrounding student well-being in the European Higher Education Area.

The Urgency of Now

The onset of the 2020 health crisis underscored the vulnerabilities in student well-being, with many experiencing isolation, mental health deterioration, and academic challenges. Furthermore, emerging concerns like eco-anxiety highlight the evolving landscape of student well-being. WISE responds to these challenges by advocating for integrated strategies that address physical, mental, and social well-being, as defined by the World Health Organization.

Our Vision and Goals

The vision of the WISE project is to foster a European Higher Education Area where student well-being is recognized as a cornerstone of academic and personal achievement. By leveraging quantitative and qualitative research, the project aims to:

- Enhancing our collective understanding of the current well-being landscape and identifying innovative practices.

- Advocating the critical importance of student well-being at both national and European levels.

- Developing and sharing strategies that support the comprehensive well-being of students.

- Equipping Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and student organizations with effective tools and knowledge to implement meaningful well-being initiatives.

Key Outputs and Milestones

The WISE Project's journey towards improving student well-being is defined by key intellectual outputs and milestones:

- Comprehensive reports to map existing well-being initiatives across Europe.

- The creation of a digital platform to serve as a repository of knowledge on student well-being.

- The development of specialized training kits for university staff and student organizations, designed to facilitate the adoption of best practices in well-being initiatives.

The Training Kit: Empowering HEIs to Lead

This training kit, an integral part of the Project's outputs, is designed to empower university staff with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration to initiate, develop, and sustain student well-being initiatives.

Structured in three modules, this training kit guides HEIs through a comprehensive journey from conceptual understanding to practical application:

1. **Understanding:** Introduces the foundational aspects of the WISE Project, including its objectives, the significance of student well-being, and the latest research and studies. This module sets the stage, highlighting why and how HEIs can become catalysts for change in student well-being.

2. **Diagnosing:** Features a self-assessment tool enabling HEIs to evaluate their current well-being initiatives, identify strengths, and pinpoint areas for enhancement. This reflective process is crucial for mapping out a path forward.

3. **Acting/Innovating:** Provides a suite of actionable recommendations, guidelines, and resources tailored to assist HEIs in implementing and sustaining well-being initiatives. From policy development to the launch of targeted programs, this module is about turning insight into impactful action.

By embracing this kit, you contribute to a transformative effort aimed at creating a supportive, inclusive, and thriving educational environment for all students.

How You Can Make a Difference

You are invited to engage with the project's resources and contribute to the evolving dialogue on student well-being. The journey towards enhanced student well-being is a collective endeavor, requiring the engagement and collaboration of all stakeholders within the higher education ecosystem. This kit will guide you through the WISE project's insights from our comprehensive studies, and the critical role of well-being in student life. By understanding the current state and challenges of student well-being, you will be better equipped to diagnose and innovate within your institution.

CHAPTER 1
Understanding Well-being

Introduction

Student well-being has become a priority in the 21st century and many organizations try to promote student well-being. Governments, public authorities, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and student organizations are concerned about student well-being and enact policies to promote it.

With regards to the role of HEIs, the majority of university staff recognize that addressing student well-being is part of their role (Crawford & Johns, 2018). However, they often do not feel confident in knowing how to support students and report that they do not have the resources, skills, or knowledge when it comes to this matter (Hughes et al., 2018).

Challenges in defining well-being

Well-being is a term widely used and researched but remains a complex and challenging concept to define (Barkham et al., 2019; Dodd et al., 2021; GuilHE, 2018), and no widely accepted definition exists in the relevant literature (Douwes et al., 2023).

In addition, several terms are frequently used in conjunction with well-being (such as mental, psychological, subjective, personal, etc. well-being), without clearly defined distinction between them (Dodd et al., 2021).

The lack of a clear definition of well-being negatively impacts research on this important topic. Reliable measures of well-being are required in order for HEIs to identify students' needs and provide the necessary support, and this is not possible without a consensus on what well-being is (Dodd et al., 2021). To date, no specific scales that measure well-being in student samples have been developed.

Next, we provide a description of the key elements of well-being and the main reasons that HEIS should make student well-being a key priority. Then, theories regarding well-

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Measuring Well-being in a College Campus Setting.

American College Health Foundation

Measuring Well-being in Higher Education.

Higher Education Policy Institute

being and some of the dimensions related to it are discussed. Finally, a brief description of the issues concerning well-being of minority groups is presented followed by an outline of strategies to promote student well-being in HEIs.

What is well-being?

One of the most widely used definition of well-being is that provided by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2021):

"A positive state experienced by individuals and societies. Similar to health, it is a resource for daily life and is determined by social, economic and environmental conditions. Well-being encompasses quality of life and the ability of people and societies to contribute to the world with a sense of meaning and purpose."

Moreover, *"well-being exists in two dimensions, subjective and objective. It comprises an individual's experience of their life as well as a comparison of life circumstances with social norms and values"* (WHO, 2013).

Other definitions

US Center for Disease Control and Prevention

"While there is no single definition of well-being, there is a general agreement that well-being includes having positive emotions (e.g., contentment, happiness), not having negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment,

and positive functioning. In simple terms, well-being can be described as judging life positively and feeling good."

(Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2022)

New Economics Foundation (NEF)

"Well-being can be understood as how people feel and how they function, both on a personal and a social level, and how they evaluate their lives as a whole. To break this down, how people feel refers to emotions such as happiness or anxiety. How people function refers to things such as their sense of competence or their sense of being connected to those around them. How people evaluate their life as a whole is captured in their satisfaction with their lives, or how they rate their lives in comparison with the best possible life."

(Michaelson, Mahony, & Schifferes, 2012)

UK Government's Foresight Report

"Well-being is a dynamic state, in which the individual is able to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships... and contribute to their community."

(Foresight Mental Capital and Well-being Project, 2008)

Multidimensionality of well-being

Despite differences between the various definitions, well-being is generally seen as a multidimensional concept that entails subjective aspects such as the experience of positive emotions, overall functioning, as

well as the person's evaluation of their quality of life and capacity for personal growth. In addition, well-being also includes objective aspects, that is life situations such as health, education, work, social relationships, built and natural environments, security, civic engagement and governance, housing and work-life balance (WHO, 2013).

Moreover, external conditions (e.g. income, materials, employment status and social networks) are thought to interact with personal factors (e.g. health, resilience, optimism and self-esteem) to influence an individual's functioning and emotions (Michaelson, Mahony, & Schifferes, 2012).

A widely used psychological model of well-being suggests that it encompasses two types: hedonic (pleasure-related sentiments, such as happiness and life satisfaction) and eudaemonic (self-actualization, functioning, and development of human potential) (Diener et al., 1999; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2008). Thus, well-being goes beyond being free from illness and instead emphasizes the person's ability to thrive or perform at one's best (Douwes et al., 2023; Gable & Haidt, 2005).

Research on the way students and HEI staff perceive well-being support the notion that it is a multi-dimensional concept. For example, Douwes et al. (2023) found that students perceive well-being in terms of the balance between their academic life and life outside of university; students reported that well-being is influenced by a variety of internal, external, and academic factors,

and emphasized a person's the ability to cope with adversity.

Similarly, the annual report on student well-being at Columbia University, U.S.A., defined well-being "as an overall sense of contentment, satisfaction, and positive functioning. It includes overall health, mental health, and individuals' sense of belonging, connection, and resilience. Well-being can be shaped by students' own behaviors, such as sleep and substance use, and their self-efficacy, coping skills, social support, and points of connection. It can also be influenced by external determinants such as financial vulnerability and other sources of stress" (Columbia University Life, 2021).

The relationship between well-being and mental health

Well-being as a precondition for mental health

The WHO (2005) defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her community."

In this definition, mental health and well-being are considered distinct, albeit related, concepts, with the former being a necessary condition for the latter (WHO, 2005).

Well-being and mental health as no mutually exclusive concepts

On the other hand, the dual factor model suggests that mental health and well-being

are different concepts, each lying along a continuum. Mental health reflects whether a person suffers from a mental disorder, and is assumed to lie on a continuum with no mental disorder on one end and severe mental disorder on the other. Well-being is also thought to lie on a continuum with resilience and flourishing on one end and suffering on the other. This model suggests that a person may experience high well-being, despite having poor mental health (Greenspoon & Saklofske, 2001; Suldo & Shaffer, 2008; Wang, Zhang, & Wang, 2011).

WISE perspective

In our project, we draw upon the latter definition and assume that well-being is about being able to enjoy life and to function in spite of challenges and difficulties, rather than be associated with the absence of difficulties.

Conclusions

In sum, well-being entails multiple dimensions and is influenced by a variety of factors, some of which are personal and subjective (how one perceives oneself, the world and one's internal states), while others are external and can be assessed more objectively. Overall, well-being refers to the person's capacity to experience positive emotions and to function, in spite of life obstacles and is related to one's subjective evaluation of one's life. The balance between academic and personal life seems to be a key element of student well-being.

Key theories regarding well-being

In this section we outline two psychological theories on well-being that can be used to guide the design of interventions by HEIs with an aim to enhance student well-being.

Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) suggests that well-being is associated with an optimal level of development, mastery, and functioning. The theory suggests three basic psychological needs namely autonomy, competence, and belonging. In line with this, well-being depends on the extent to which the environment enhances or diminishes these three basic needs (Ryan & Deci, 2001, 2017). Based on this framework, in order to promote student well-being HEIs could design interventions that promote these needs, as described below (Brooker & Vu, 2020).

HEIs could:

Autonomy

- Provide students with opportunities to actively follow their interests and express themselves
- Involve students in curriculum design

Competence

- Help students achieve mastery through knowledge and skill acquisition

Sense of belonging

- Provide opportunities for students to

participate in student organizations

- Promote deep connections with students that share the same interests, and thereby strengthen their sense of belonging

- Create a safe and inclusive academic environment

Dynamic systems theory

From a dynamic systems perspective, HEIs comprise different systems (e.g., student groups, educator groups, administrative staff, etc.), which interrelated and so change in one system can affect others (Brooker & Vu, 2020; Haggis, 2008; Lerner & Overton, 2008). Based on this framework, in order to promote student well-being HEIs could:

- identify the sub-systems that are most receptive to change

- make changes in these sub-systems and create, in this way, widespread change in other sub-systems.

Why does well-being in HEIs matter?

HEIs are places where a sizable population of youth congregates, as over 40% of young adults in Europe are enrolled in higher education (Eurostat, 2023). This implies that a sizeable section of the population may be impacted by the efforts of HEI to enhance student well-being, and these efforts may have a ripple effect in the broader community.

In addition, students face several challenges

that may impact on their well-being, as discussed next.

Life transitions

Attending university coincides with important developmental transitions, as students typically transition from late adolescence to adulthood through their academic years. Finding a balance between one's identity as an adult and a student can at times be challenging and stressful. Going to university usually is accompanied with many life changes that can be challenging and may negatively affect student well-being, such as:

- moving away from home

- experiencing full independence

- undertaking financial responsibilities

- establishing adult relationships

- managing academic load

- developing new ways of learning

    (Laidlaw et al., 2016)

Supporting students during these transitions can assist them in achieving ideal developmental trajectories and reaching their full potential. Also, by enhancing their own well-being, students can also make positive changes in their communities and assist others, with the tools they obtained at university (Brooker & Woodyatt, 2019).

Challenges

Furthermore, students may also experience distress during their studies, due to academic,

as well as other external factors, such as:

- high workload
- exams
- postponement of professional career due to extending education
- financial strain
- relationship problems
- anxiety about getting a future career and managing the demands of professional life

Given the above, HEIs have a responsibility to ensure that students have the help they need to make the adjustment from high school to university life, complete their education, and eventually enter the workforce (Bewick et al., 2010).

Mental health problems

In addition, mental health issues may constitute an extra challenge for students in HEIs. The majority of students at HEIs are at the age of onset of most psychological problems and disorders (Kessler, Amminger, et al., 2007; Kessler, Angermeyer, et al., 2007).

Research shows that a significant number of students in HEIs face psychological difficulties, such as distress, anxiety and depression (Backhaus et al., 2020; Bewick et al., 2010; Larcombe et al., 2016; Ramón-Arbués et al., 2020).

Some studies show that university students tend to report higher levels of distress and more psychological disorders than the general population and their peers that don't pursue higher education (Larcombe et al., 2016; Lewis et al., 2021; Stallman, 2010).

Also, research shows that students' distress increases when they enter university and fluctuates during their studies, but does not return to pre-university levels (Bewick et al., 2010).

In sum, it seems that university time is a period of heightened distress and can have a long-term impact on well-being.

Impact of low well-being

It is important to note that extended periods of reduced well-being can have a significant impact on the course of studies.

Psychological problems have been shown to be associated with:

- learning disturbance
- academic dissatisfaction
- academic impairment
- tendency to drop out of studies

Thus, psychological problems can affect:

- academic performance
- class attendance
- completion rates
- grades and, consequently, job prospects

On the other hand, positive psychological experiences are related to satisfaction and persistence on the course of study (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018; Orygen, The National

Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health, 2017). Thus, improving students' well-being can influence their academic success in both undergraduate and graduate years. HEIs that prioritize the well-being of their students will produce a greater number of flourishing, happy, and academically successful students.

New challenges

New challenges have surfaced in recent years, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and wars, that have affected both the functioning of HEIs and young people's lives (Chen & Lucock, 2022; Doolan et al., 2021; Kurapov et al., 2023).

For example, there is evidence that student wellbeing and academic life were negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, including social distancing, isolation, lockdowns, online learning, and daily activities (Doolan et al., 2021). Also, during the pandemic,

elevated levels of anxiety, depression, and low levels of resilience were observed in students (Chen & Lucock, 2022).

This means that there is a greater need than ever for HEIs to prioritize and promote student well-being.

Conclusions

It seems that students face many and different challenges at every stage of their academic journey. Therefore, HEIs should prioritize student well-being and implement initiatives (a) to prepare students for university life, (b) maintain and enhance well-being during studies, and (c) to prepare students for life after graduation and the transition to the world of work. In other words, a holistic approach to student development is needed rather than a sole focus on learning, with an aim to help students achieve their full potential through academic, personal, and social success.

🔍 **Want to learn more?**

Grand Challenges in Student Mental Health.
Student Minds

Student Wellbeing in Higher Education. A degree of Uncertainty.
Randstad

The Top 6 Challenges College Students Face.
Watermark

University Mental Health: Life in a Pandemic Listening to higher education communities throughout 2020/2021.
Student Minds

What are the main dimensions of student well-being?

It is generally agreed that student well-being relates to several different factors, both personal, -such as self-doubt, confidence, emotional intelligence, perfectionism, and external, -such as academic, social and environmental factors (Brooker & Vu, 2020; Douwes et al., 2023; Turhan, 2018; Riva et al., 2020). So, it seems that a variety of positive and negative experiences can contribute to variations in well-being.

In this section, we outline some of the factors that affect student well-being that can be influenced by HEIs. These include mental health, academic, social, cultural, environmental and financial factors.

Student mental health

As mentioned above, a significant proportion of the student population face mental health difficulties, such as distress, anxiety and depressions (Bennett et al., 2021; Knipe et al., 2018; Stallman, 2010).

Mental health difficulties can negatively affect academic life, and sometimes students who struggle with mental health miss a significant number of lectures while their workload continues to grow (Stallman, 2010).

Also, students with mental health problems are more likely to be dissatisfied with their studies, drop out, and have more doubts about the worth of their studies compared to their peers without mental health problems

(Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018).

Mental health can significantly affect academic life and well-being, especially if psychological problems remain untreated, as is frequently the case.

Help seeking

Many students do not seek help from official support systems within or outside the university (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Kearns et al., 2015) and find it more accessible to reach out to non-specialists for support, such as university staff and student groups (Bennett et al., 2021).

The two main reasons for students' tendency to not seek help from HEI's counselling and mental health services include fear of stigma and fear of their difficulties being documented (Kearns et al., 2015; Knipe et al., 2018).

In addition, many students seem to expect and accept significant distress as part of life at university (Laidlaw et al., 2016; Stallman, 2010) and the majority of students consider their emotional issues not sufficiently significant to warrant professional help (Bennett et al., 2021).

What can HEIs do?

HEIs are places that integrate students' primary activities, including academic and social activities, with health and other support services found in the same environment. Therefore, HEI's campuses are ideal places to assess, create, and share best practices. HEIs have the opportunity to address

important public health issues affecting young adults by taking into account, identifying and effectively addressing mental health difficulties as they appear in students (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010).

Therefore, HEIs can:

- take into account and address factors that prevent students to seek help

- educate academic and other staff, as well as students about mental health (Sampson et al., 2022)

- employ preventive measures to promote student mental health and well-being, e.g. provide training on how to recognize early signs of mental health deterioration (Turhan, 2018)

- create safe and supportive environments that promote equity, diversity and inclusion

- provide accessible help both within specialist counselling services and within departments, e.g. through the role of personal tutors.

Academic Life

New students often hold unrealistic expectations about university life that can result in mental health problems (Turhan, 2018). Academic life comprises both positive and negative experiences that might affect well-being, and life at university is often not as exclusively positive as many new students expect.

It is not uncommon for new students not to be prepared for the workload and rigor of academic life and become overwhelmed. Their prior educational experiences might not have adequately prepared them for their study in university, and early academic skill development is essential for students' success and well-being (Turhan, 2018; Sampson et al., 2022).

Academic experiences

According to research, one of the biggest positive contributors to student well-being relates to their academic experiences, which include class projects, lectures, and studying (Brooker & Vu, 2020).

However, other academic factors, such as heavy workloads and examinations, can negatively affect students' well-being (Brooker & Vu, 2020; Douwes et al., 2023; Sampson et al., 2022).

Heavy workloads can affect especially mature learners, who do not have access to the same level of advice and face difficulty adjusting to new styles of learning and being in groups with younger students (Turhan, 2018).

Similarly, exams can create worry and pressure, and students who experience performance anxiety may not be able to complete their assessments (Turhan, 2018). Generally, negative exam experiences might sometimes make a student feel less competent (Brooker & Vu, 2020).

Academic performance

Poor academic performance relates to

distress and, thus, low well-being (Mboya et al., 2020). Also, Boulton et al. (2019) found a positive relationship between students' engagement and well-being and proposed that higher engagement leads to higher academic performance, which in turn leads to increased well-being and increases engagement still further.

However, success at the university isn't defined only by academic performance but also by retention and attrition rates. So, retention and attainment can also be important measures of well-being at HEIs (Douwes et al., 2023).

Students' role in HEIS

Also, a student-centred approach to learning and assessment can facilitate student well-being. Students' well-being is enhanced when they feel appreciated, acknowledged, and involved. So, flexibility, autonomy, and student involvement in the course design, delivery of lectures, and assessment process may lower current stress levels and enhance their well-being (Douwes et al., 2023; Turhan, 2018; Riva et al., 2020).

Students need to develop basic skills and knowledge in order to have autonomy in their studies. For example, they can learn basic skills in their first year of studying and explore their specific interests during the subsequent years by choosing the subjects (Turhan, 2018). Also, how educators and teachers behave and communicate is crucial for student well-being. Examples of good teaching practices include learning students'

names, providing details for assignments and feedback, "checking in" on students to assess learning, and demonstrating an interest in students' lives (Riva et al., 2020).

Professional skills

As already mentioned, HEIs should help students acquire not only academic skills but also skills that will enable them to deal with the challenges that they will face in the workplace, such as how to prioritize and handle pressure at work, the ability to collaborate in groups, leadership etc. (Turhan, 2018).

This is crucial since a poor work-life balance can result in poor physical and mental health, decreased productivity, negative effects on home life, animosity between employers and employees, as well as loneliness and isolation for independent contractors, which can all lead to poor well-being (Turhan, 2018).

What can HEIs do?

Studying is full of challenges, but with the appropriate support from HEIs, students can flourish and become academically successful and joyful individuals.

Therefore, HEIs can:

- provide counselors with specialist knowledge of the issues students face, who can support them in difficult academic times (Turhan, 2018)

- communicate with students that seem to disengage and provide support, guidance, and options in order to help

them get back on track before their well-being and academic success significantly deteriorate (Douwes et al., 2023)

- enhance student autonomy, flexibility and involvement in academic settings (Douwes et al., 2023; Turhan, 2018; Riva et al., 2020)

- educate staff in order to communicate with appreciation and respect toward students

- help students achieve balance between their academic and personal lives and later between work and personal lives

Social Life

Social factors have a significant impact on students' well-being. Students' well-being at this point in their lives is greatly influenced by their relationships with important people, including classmates, teachers, and family (Brooker & Vu, 2020; Douwes et al., 2023).

It is notable that isolation among students is more common as compared to the general population (Bennett et al., 2021). Leaving home and living away from family can be stressful and it can be difficult for students to build relationships with peers who share similar beliefs and interests, when they first arrive at a university.

Social support

Academic life is full of stress (such as worries about study fees, financial difficulties, future employment, etc.), and social support can act as a barrier to it and thus promote well-

being. Specifically, it was found that social support mediates the negative relationship between academic stress and student well-being (Poots & Cassidy, 2020).

Also, in the learning environment, human qualities like kindness, compassion, approachability, empathy, caring, effective listening, and communication have a significant impact on students' well-being, as they help to reduce the impact of stressful experiences in the class (Riva et al., 2020).

Social support from academic stuff is as significant as support from friends and family. In fact, for many students, the support they receive from friends, family, and partners is equally valued as the official help offered by mental health experts (Bennett et al., 2021). Thus, lack of close relationships can negatively affect student well-being and students who do not report close or satisfying relationships with friends or family tend to report more distress (Hersi et al., 2017).

Sense of belonging

Moreover, it has been found that relationships with academic staff and friendships and academic classes and projects are some of the most influential factors on students' sense of belonging whilst at university (Columbia University Life, 2021).

Students' sense of belonging can be promoted by being a member of student groups or unions, while it helps students feel that they are part of the campus community, ask for help when they are in need and

guards against emotions of being lost (Turhan, 2018).

However, experiencing a sense of belonging might be more challenging for international students and this can be detrimental to their well-being. In addition, lack of diversity, misunderstanding of one's cultural and social background and stigma can cause a sense of rejection and anxiety (Riva et al., 2020).

What can HEIs do?

HEIs should focus more on social support and sense of belonging, as they constitute two social factors that contribute significantly to well-being.

Therefore, HEIs can:

- provide opportunities for connection and social integration

- ensure that academic staff show off human qualities while interacting with students

- help students develop their social skills

- organize activities to help students enhance their connection with their loved ones

- encourage students to participate in students' groups and provide the adequate resources to these groups

- create mentoring or peer-support opportunities

- care for students' integration and raise cultural awareness, as it will contribute to students' well-being (Riva et al., 2020)

Cultural activities

Nowadays, most HEIs try to follow a holistic approach rather than focusing just on assisting students in acquiring academic knowledge and abilities. As a result, a large number of HEIs provide a range of cultural activities, such as physical, art, religious, and volunteer activities. Students spend a significant amount of time on university campuses, so it makes sense to provide them with opportunities to socialize and pursue their interests.

Fitness and athletic centers in particular are important HEIs services since engaging in physical exercise can improve both mental and physical health (Turhan, 2018).

Additionally, art clubs, such as laboratories for sketching, film, and music activities can help students explore their creative side and unwind after a long day. Because they are enjoyable and provide students with a sense of achievement, all of these activities can promote students' well-being.

Additionally, some students feel that practicing their faith and religious activities are crucial to their overall well-being. So, having a place on campus where students can meditate, pray, or contemplate can help them deal with their everyday stressors (Turhan, 2018).

Also, volunteering is one of the best ways for students to experience becoming an engaged and active member of the community. Being able to contribute to one's community is a crucial component of

well-being, and thus students' mental health and well-being can benefit from community involvement. Moreover, volunteering can encourage a healthy lifestyle and raise self-esteem (Turhan, 2018).

Cultural activities can also be found by joining a club, group, or student union, and participation in these can also help to foster a sense of belonging and social engagement with like-minded individuals (Turhan, 2018).

Additionally, all these activities give students the chance to build a social network and relationships, which is crucial for their retention at the university and their well-being, as was previously mentioned.

What can HEIs do?

It is important for students' well-being at HEIs to feel that they are part of a community that can cover all their basic needs. So, HEIS should offer not only academic activities, but also cultural activities that provide opportunities for leisure activities, social communication and a sense of belonging. This is critical for students who are at risk of isolation.

Therefore, HEIs can:

- have places for students to perform physical, art and religious activities
- emphasize the benefits of participating in them
- arrange volunteer activities, since doing so not only benefits the community, but also allows students to apply the skills

they have gained from their studies in their communities (Turhan, 2018).

Financial and environmental factors

Finally, a student's living circumstances are just as crucial to their overall well-being as their social, academic, and health aspects.

In particular, it was found that two of the key factors influencing students' well-being was comfortable and reasonably priced living arrangements and help managing money (Turhan, 2018).

Living conditions

The living environment can affect finance, but also social life and academic competence (Turhan, 2018).

Some students live independently while others remain in university residence halls or with their parents, but in all cases living arrangements can present challenges for students.

Living alone, for instance, comes with a greater financial load and less opportunities for social interaction, while on the other hand, living with others bereaved privacy and may provide challenges while trying to study in a quiet environment.

Additionally, safety on campus and in student housing is crucial and can have an impact on well-being.

Higher education institutions must act to protect students from violence, particularly sexual violence, which is on the increase.

A significant number of university students report having been victim of sexual harassment, stalking, or assault by strangers, other students, or staff (Bennett et al., 2021; Columbia University Life, 2021).

Finances

Students also feel a great deal of worry and stress regarding their financial situation (Bennett et al., 2021; Turhan, 2018).

The high expense of housing and of university courses, make it difficult for students to focus on their academic requirements (GuildeHE, 2018).

Also, due to the high expense of education, many young adults from low-income families may not be able to attend higher education and pursue their dreams.

What can HEIs do?

Therefore, HEIs can:

- take actions to provide low-cost accommodation, especially for students in need
- collaborate with agencies that provide accommodation to students (Turhan, 2018)
- care about the living conditions in regency halls
- provide opportunities for jobs that can be combined with studies
- provide student loans without commission
- avoid over-burdening students financially

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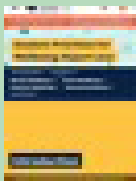
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Student Union UCL

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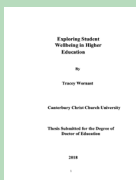
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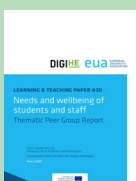
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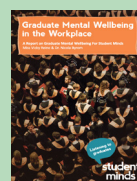
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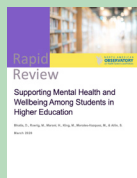
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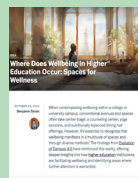
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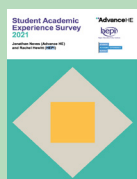
Student Academic Experience Survey 2021.

AdvanceHE and Higher education Policy Institute

Well-being of Minority Groups

University experience is not the same for all students. Students who belong to underrepresented groups, such as international students, LGBTQ students, low-income students, and students with disabilities, have unique experiences and characteristics that can impact on both their well-being and academic lives.

Some minority groups are more likely to feel less valued and experience a reduced sense of belonging compared to their peers (Columbia University Life, 2021)

Also, they are more at risk to experience isolation, abuse, harassment, bullying, and show higher levels of anxiety and depression and lower levels of well-being when compared to their peers (Bennett et al., 2021; Turhan, 2018).

Examples of difficulties that minority groups may face at HEIs:

Low socioeconomic students: Increased likelihood of dropping out of higher education than students from higher socioeconomic categories (QILT Social Research Centre, 2019)

International students: May experience language barriers, absence of family support, financial strain, misunderstandings, stigma and cultural differences (Turhan, 2018; Riva et al., 2020).

LGBTQ+ students: May experience lack of adequate support systems and recognition, such as use of correct pronouns and names (GuilHE, 2018).

Disabled students: May experience difficulties in accessing university settings and learning materials.

HEIs should gain a greater understanding

of these students' needs, promote their rights and create societies that represent them (Turhan, 2018). Targeted support and individual adjustments should be provided in order to ensure they enjoy a comfortable and equal university experience like other students.

🔍 **Want to learn more?**

Well-being for students with minorized identities

American Council on Education

Understanding Student Mental Health Inequalities: International Students.

Student Minds

LGBTQ+ Student Mental Health: The challenges and needs of gender, sexual and romantic minorities in Higher Education.

Student Minds

What Strategies should HEIs follow?

Despite the increasing recognition that HEIs need to address issues relating to student well-being, many HEIs do not know how to approach the issue and fail to implement strategies to promote it. Brooker and Woodyatt (2019) proposed four key goals to enhance student well-being.

1. Ascertain the magnitude of the difficulties at each university, by assessing both positive and negative aspects of well-being in the specific context. Through this process of self-assessment, the improvements that are needed will become evident; moreover, any changes implemented need to be evaluated with respect to their effectiveness.

2. Identify vulnerable groups, specific factors or periods during academic life that may contribute to the deterioration of well-being. Students belonging to vulnerable groups have unique experiences that might seriously impact their well-being. Specific factors or periods may contribute to the improvement of well-being and resilience. Also, they can moderate the effect of contextual influences on student well-being.

3. Apply targeted interventions to support

students. For example, the design of the curriculum and relationships with educators and staff can promote well-being.

4. Increase staff psychological literacy, as many staff members believe they lack the necessary expertise to take action.

Concluding, HEIs should take these seemingly simple steps to begin their journey toward well-being. This could be a great start to start focusing more on student well-being.

Want to learn more?

A Framework for Promoting Student Mental Wellbeing in Universities

Melbourne CSHE

Student and Staff Wellbeing in Higher Education. From fixes to foresight: Jisc and Emerge Education insights for universities and startups.

Jisc and Emerge Education

A framework for promoting student mental wellbeing in higher education | Part I: The Continuum of Care and Togetherall.

Togetherall

Concluding remarks

In conclusion, with the rise of attention on student well-being in educational settings, the need for consensus in the definition of student well-being becomes crucially important as is the development of reliable measures of student well-being. A clear definition is needed to design and apply interventions to support student well-being.

Student well-being is a multidimensional concept that refers to the experience of positive emotions and successful functioning, while achieving a balance between personal and academic life. HEIs need to focus on well-being regardless of whether the objective is to lessen distress or boost resilience and positive emotions.

University life can seriously impact student well-being as it is a stressful period and HEIs should support students through their experience.

Finally, creating supportive communities at HEIs is the key to lead students to become successful members of society. HEIs should consider students as a whole person and prepare them to deal with the unknown future.

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CHAPTER 2

Self-assessment Tool for Higher Education Institutions

For each question, choose one option from 1 to 5 to assess each item. Reflecting on these questions, could you offer examples of well-being practices implemented in your university? After answering each question, compute your overall score for each dimension and use the following description to identify the level of well-being provided by your institution.

Level 3 – high level

At this level there is proof that the university adopts a comprehensive approach toward mental health and wellbeing, which is strongly based on evidence from various sources. It takes into account the needs of the entire community and implements effective, specific interventions and activities.

Level 2 – medium level

At this level minimal progress has been made but there is evidence of actions to move work forward. Evidence of good practice exists, yet it is not uniformly integrated throughout the university. In some cases, these practices may be isolated.

Level 1 – low level

At this level there has been no progress in this area, no attention or resource has been applied. Principles and good practices regarding well-being require urgent attention.

For each dimension, analyze your level and reflect on ways to better support student well-being. Are there areas where you could improve, based on these results, what are the strengths and weaknesses of your university? Analyse examples of good practices implemented by your university. Are these practices effective in supporting the actions mentioned by each question?

1. Learning and adjusting to academic life

Description: The section refers to the university's concern in facilitating the transition of young people to student life through activities aimed at building self-confidence, adapting/adjusting the educational process to the needs of students, and ensuring the mental health and well-being of students.

Questions	Description and further improvements
My university is interested in identifying difficulties related to student transition to the university life.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*	
My university supports student transition to the university life.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*	
Teachers include in their teaching practices support activities for promoting student mental health and well-being during their studies.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*	

Roadmap for the toolkit on student well-being

Questions	Description and further improvements
My university offers career counselling activities to the students.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	
My university provides training and resources to support teachers in dealing with students' issues related to health and well-being.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	
At my university, learning and teaching practices enable students to develop academic confidence and improve performance.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	
There are learning support services and activities implemented by the university to improve student learning and address learning difficulties.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Questions	Description and further improvements

Teachers are concerned about the impact of learning, teaching and assessment on the mental health and well-being of students.

Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

2. Support services

Description: This section evaluates the university's concern in providing students with various support services. It also investigates the quality of the support services that students benefit from, as well as the university's efforts to cooperate with student associations to increase the students' well-being.

Questions	Description and further improvements

Support services are accessible to all students:

Student Health Center/ Medical center	**Rating scale** (1=never, 5=always) ① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Student Life Office	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Student Housing organisation	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Student organisation	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Career Counseling Center	① ② ③ ④ ⑤

Roadmap for the toolkit on student well-being

Questions		Description and further improvements
Support services are accessible to all students:		
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*		
Support services are responsive to students' needs		
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*		
Support services are actively involved in helping students		
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*		
Support services cooperate to offer support to students		
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	1 2 3 4 5	
Wellbeing practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*		
Does your institution cooperate with student associations to organise events or offer services focused on increasing student well-being?		
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*		

3. Social relationships

Description: The following questions are intended to evaluate the university's initiatives regarding actions to facilitate students' social integration, prevent isolation and loneliness, and generate and maintain social cohesion within the student community.

Questions	Description and further improvements
How effectively does the university facilitate the social integration of students?	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) 1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	
My university initiates actions to identify the causes and effects of social isolation of students.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) 1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	
There are effective actions to help students dealing with loneliness.	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) 1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Questions	Description and further improvements
How effectively does the university promote and maintain social cohesion within its community?	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) 1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*	

4. Campus life, facilities, environment

Description: This section investigates how the university increases the students' well-being. It addresses aspects related to the physical environment created by the university and various facilities meant to sustain health and well-being.

Questions	Description and further improvements
My university provides a physical environment to foster positive physical, mental, and social well-being, encompassing elements (such as accessibility, natural light, suitable furniture amenities like showers etc).	
Rating scale (1=never, 5=always) 1 2 3 4 5	
Well-being practices **Could you offer examples or explain your rating?** *(Not mandatory)*	

Questions	Description and further improvements
My university's sustainable development strategy incorporates considerations of the impact on health and well-being	

Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

My university actively promotes its facilities and environment for use by students.

Rating scale (1=never, 5=always)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

5. Marginalisation, discrimination, or harassment

Description: This section evaluates the university's commitment to promoting inclusion and reducing instances of discrimination, marginalisation, and harassment through appropriate practices. It addresses aspects of employee training to effectively manage such issues and the regulations concerning these negative phenomena.

Questions	Description and further improvements

To what extent does your university effectively prevent and respond to the marginalization, discrimination, or harassment experienced by individual students and various groups within its community?

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Are your employees trained to deal with and respond to the marginalisation, discrimination, or harassment experienced by individual students?

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Does your university have a point of contact for all questions related to diversity and inclusion?

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Does your higher education environment is safe and prevents harassment and discrimination situations from happening?

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Questions	Description and further improvements

Do you feel that the procedures put in place by your university are sufficient to response in case of harassment or discrimination situations?

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Inclusion and diversity measures for cultural change are implemented in my university.

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	① ② ③ ④ ⑤
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

6. Health and risky behaviours

Description: The following questions aim to assess how the university is focused on offering extracurricular programs that allow students to create a healthy lifestyle through sports and healthy nutrition. Regarding potential risks and dangers that students may face (substance abuse, alcohol consumption, suicide), the processes by which the university can identify, assess, and intervene effectively to prevent or mitigate negative consequences are addressed.

Questions	Description and further improvements

My university provides extra-curricular programs and activities for students addressing the following issues:

Physical activity	**Rating scale** (1=low extent, 5=high extent) 1 2 3 4 5
Healthy nutrition	1 2 3 4 5
Substance/illicit drug use	1 2 3 4 5
Alcohol consumption	1 2 3 4 5
Risky sexual behaviors	1 2 3 4 5
Gambling	1 2 3 4 5
Suicide risk	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

My university has an approach to mental health linked to its core institutional mission (mental health and well-being are explicitly included in the strategic plans of the university)

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Questions	Description and further improvements

My university has effective practice, processes and staff in place for identifying risk to staff and students

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

My university provides interventions for those at risk.

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

My university supports students to report concerns regarding risky behaviours.

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

My university creates a culture that visibly prioritises healthy lifestyle.

Rating scale (1=low extent, 5=high extent)	1 2 3 4 5
Well-being practices Could you offer examples or explain your rating? *(Not mandatory)*	

Demographics:

Name of the university: ....

Your role at the university[1]: ....

Gender: ....

Seniority[2]: ....

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1 *Psychologist, Teacher, Vice-rector, etc*
2 Number of years since you have been working at this university

CHAPTER 3
The Role of HEIs to Promote Well-being

Higher education through its promotion and exchange of knowledge, research, and innovation plays a considerable role in shaping society and can generate significant social, technological, economic, and environmental impacts at a regional, national, or even global level (Unesco, 2024).

Furthermore, they also play a major role in enabling the intellectual and personal development of their students. By equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to meet the demands of an ever-changing labour market, allowing them to obtain economic security and a stable future (Newton et al, 2016; Brock, 2010).

Additionally, HEIs play a dominant role in the transition of students to adulthood and the formation of their identity. As they provide a safe environment and the opportunity for young adults to explore new ideas and interests, experiment with new experiences, interact with people from different backgrounds, develop important life skills, clarify their values and grow as global citizens, which can also help them prepare for their future roles within society as whole (Newton et al, 2016; Brock, 2010).

Albeit as per Riva et al (2024), higher education students in Europe and elsewhere are struggling with a decline in their mental health and well-being, coinciding with rising rates of anxiety and depression among the 14–24-year-olds, an age cohort amongst which many university students fall within.

Therefore, their move to university is a high-risk period for the onset of poor mental health and well-being. It coincides with a critical developmental period and exposure to major stressors such as academic pressures, worries about future employment opportunities given the current uncertain economic and political climate, living on their own for the first time, developing new friendships, and managing finances made more difficult by the cost-of-living crisis (Riva et al, 2024; Newton et al, 2016).

This well-being and mental health crisis have made HEIs aware that student well-being must be part of their strategy. Currently most European universities now have one or more departments dedicated to these issues and there is genuine cooperation between university services and student associations to address student welfare (Brau et al, 2024). Moreover, university staff are

uniquely positioned to directly shape the student experience (Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024).

For Riva et al (2024) a student population at ease with their well-being is paramount to the success of HEIs. Their reputation, student retention, productivity, teaching, and learning is all significantly dependent on student well-being.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted many of the shortcomings of the traditional student support services provided by universities and research shows that the nature, culture, norms, and practices of HEIs may negatively affect the mental health and well-being of students (Riva et al, 2024; Brau et al, 2024). In many cases creating or even exacerbating these issues (Lister et al, 2022). HEIs still have a lot of work to do to address student well-being and to combat the still pervading stigma against mental health. Many students still perceive having mental health problems as a weakness, making them less willing to seek help (Storrie, K. et al, 2010). Particularly if they perceive that the culture at their institution reinforces that notion (Henderson, L. et al, 2018).

Given their pivotal role in society at large and their profound impact on student's personal development and transition into adulthood, higher education institutions have a responsibility to promote, develop and implement policies and initiatives that prioritise student well-being. A healthy student population is not only integral to their

success but also for the broader progress of society.

To achieve this, higher education institutions should adopt a holistic approach that addresses the diverse dimensions of student well-being. Individualistic or intervention based approaches tend to show limited success and do not address underlying issues within university culture and practices (Lister et al, 2022). By prioritising well-being within their frameworks and strategies, institutions can serve as catalysts for the development of national strategies that comprehensively address health and well-being. This approach aligns with the growing appreciation that the health of people, communities and the planet are interconnected (Brau et al, 2024; Riva et al, 2024).

One effective way to holistically address student well-being is through a whole-university approach. As Hughes et al. (2019) emphasise, this approach involves, "not only providing well–resourced mental health services and interventions but taking a multi–stranded approach which recognises that all aspects of university life can support and promote mental health and well-being". This comprehensive approach is widely endorsed in the literature on well-being in higher education (Riva et al., 2024).

De Pury et al. (2023) highlight that this approach acknowledges the powerful impact of culture, environment, and inequalities on mental health and well-being. Its goal is to transform the university

into a healthy setting and to empower both staff and students to develop the insights, skills, and understanding needed to manage and maintain their own well-being (Hughes et al., 2019; de Pury et al., 2023).

Riva et al. (2024), argue this requires ensuring that well-being services are adequately resourced, effective, and accessible. Also a strategic institutional commitment to well-being, including integrating it into institutional policies or strategies. According to de Pury et al. (2023), a key element of successful implementation involves co-producing a mental health strategy with staff and students, ensuring alignment between student and staff mental health and well-being.

A whole-university approach adeptly balances prevention, early intervention, the need for properly resourced and effective support services, and the promotion of an environment where open discussions about well-being are encouraged (de Pury et al., 2023). However, it is important to remember that each university must tailor its initiatives and strategies to its unique needs and context as there is no one size fits all solution (Riva et al., 2024).

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Create a Master Plan for Student Well-being

We know that many students suffer from ill-being problems, especially certain groups of students are also particularly vulnerable when it comes to questions of well-being (discrimination feelings derived from particular situations such as being a refugee, having a disability, among others). The health crisis due to SARS-CoV-2 has had a strong impact on the well-being of students in all its dimensions. Also, global environmental issues cause new forms of discomfort, such as eco-anxiety, affecting mental health of the youngest generations.

Student well-being represents an immense challenge for higher education institutions (HEIs), but also for student organisations acting in favor of their peers. A master plan to face this issue is a priority and WiSE project wishes to contribute to this purpose.

To answer this challenge, HEIs should emphasise the commitment with students' well-being. The framework of Social Responsibility of HEIs (Observatory of Social Responsibility and Higher Education Institutions [ORSIES, 2018]) gives us an integrated vision of HEIs impacts and enables us to understand the issue of well-being as a crossing point for the different axes of action of academic institutions.

Axes of action in HEIs	Impacts on well-being	Contributions of the axis to well-being in HEIs
Organisational	Impact on members quality of life, well-being, free and democratic participation in all spheres that affect members; sustainable vision of governance; respect for natural resources as exhaustible.	Defining specific policies and procedures on well-being raises awareness to the topic and affirms HEI's efforts to be socially responsible, compassionate, and attentive to its members.

Axes of action in HEIs	Impacts on well-being	Contributions of the axis to well-being in HEIs
Educational	Impact on personal and professional training, enabling active, responsible, inclusive, and supportive citizenship and based on significant knowledge appropriate to the most pressing needs of communities.	Including well-being topic on curricula raises awareness on student and academic staff as a matter for all and encourages joint action.
Knowledge/cognitive	Impact on the producing and disseminating relevant knowledge, in the spirit of open sharing that empowers society to act and transform	Research on well-being raises awareness on the topic and promotes relevant knowledge that can be applied to improve policies, procedures, and a general and public commitment to the issue
Social	Impact on partnerships with different social players, creating a network of shared responsibilities and duties	Involving the community and other relevant partners in an approach to promoting well-being provides co-responsibility for a common purpose and promotes integrated and innovative solutions

Table 1: Adapted from ORSIES Green Book for Social responsibility and HEIs (2018) by WiSE. NB: The four axes are derived from Valleys et al. (2009)[1]

Well-being can act as an aggregator of synergies, bringing together the 4 guiding axes of an HEI for a robust response to the well-being needs of its community, students and staff.

A master plan for student well-being provides structured and phased guidance to achieve results in a sustainable way. The Green Project Management [GPM, 2018] model can give a useful approach and a rationale to create, act, and monitor a master plan for student well-being. Its main principles[2] can be adapted to the specific goal of our master plan:

1. Valleys, F., de la Cruz, C. &, Sasia, P. (2009). Responsabilidad Social Universitária: Manual de primeiros pasos. McGraw-Hill Interamericana

2. https://greenprojectmanagement.org/about/what-is-sustainable-project-management

Principles	Inputs in master plan for student well-being
Commitment and accountability	Recognizing to all student the right to well-being and the duty [of HEIs] to fulfill this need with adequate policies and procedures
Ethics and decision making	Prioritising action [HEIs'] for students based on respect for the dignity of all and with an inclusive and non-discriminatory objective; positively discriminating, recognizing the uniqueness of each student and their respective circumstances
Integrated and transparent	A holistic approach on HEIs' governance, that balances economic, social, and environmental consequences for each policy, and sharing results with all stakeholders that act on well-being ecosystem
Principles and values based	Linked with ethics and decision-making principle, [HEIs'] policies and procedures arise from shared values of democracy and participation
Social and ecological equity	Considering human being vulnerability and its interconnected link with society and the environment, all action in favor to well-being should be developed in respect with this context
Economic prosperity	Sustainable projects link present to future, ensuring an intergenerational solidarity. All plans for well-being should follow a temporal line that does not jeopardize the enjoyment, for future generations, of equal measures to support their well-being

Table 2: Adapted from GPM reference guide (2018) by WiSE. NB: The six principles are derived from UN Global Compact, The Earth Charter and ISO 26000 – Guidance for Corporate Social Responsibility

Considering the six principles as guidelines to create a master plan, some recommendations can be done. ORSIES Green Book (2018) helps to understand this dynamic. This book summarizes a set of lessons learned from the working group that developed a master plan for the social responsibility of HEIs. These reflections are of great relevance to this process: the elaboration of a master plan for the well-being of students and the entire academic community.

1. Raising awareness of HEIs about the importance of well-being and necessary prioritisation.

This is the initial step and is fundamental to ensuring that well-being is identified as a priority for HEIs. To this end, it is important not only that the theme of well-being permeates all axes of action of a HEI (cf. framework of Social Responsibility of HEIs from ORSIES (2018, as mentioned above) but also that it is included in the strategic documents guiding HEI's action.

2. Implement this awareness with concrete measures included in the HEIs' reference documents.

A strategic approach is necessary, to integrate a holistic view and create a well-being friendly and concerned HEI. Human Rights Due Diligence framework can bring some guidance, with a rationale of action described on Figure 1:
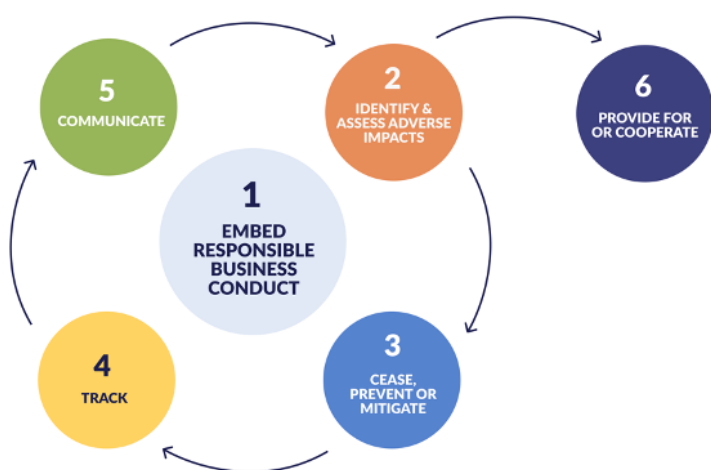
Figure 1: Human Rights Due Diligence framework (OEDC, 2018, as cited in https://www.humanrightsduediligence.org/the6elements)

For the HEIs to conduct itself in favor of well-being, this issue should be incorporated by all members *(step no. 1)*. To achieve this goal, an exhaustive survey of all factors, contexts, and actors with an impact on the well-being of the academic community must be carried out, to identify risks and possible adverse impacts *(step no. 2)*. With the objective of Cease, Prevent or Mitigate these adverse risks, HEI defines a strategy that is included in its **Strategic Plan** and proposes a **policy** to implement this

strategy. In turn, the policy must be broken down into **procedures** that describe what each player does and how they do it. These lead to concrete and planned **practices**.

It is crucial to ensure total alignment between Strategic planning - Definition of Policies - Deployment into Procedures - Concrete actions/practices *(step no. 3)*. The actions are then put into practice and there are monitoring mechanisms to assess their implementation and results in real time *(step no. 4)*. This monitoring must be shared with the academic community, ensuring their engagement and transparency of action *(step no. 5)*. This consultation makes it possible to generate informative inputs that are once again integrated into a new cycle of continuous improvement. Cooperation between all interested parties and the involvement of actors external to HEI enriches this process of identification - planning - action and evaluation that underlies all **continuous improvement processes** *(step no. 6)*.

3. Institutional training

Training in fundamental topics of well-being can be necessary. HEIs should identify training needs for specialised members, to improve their responsiveness. But training and awareness of the topic should also be a matter for all students, teachers, and non-academic staff. Multiple events or

training sessions can be programmed so that the topic becomes present within HEIs. Identifying partnerships can be profitable (More details can be found in the next chapter).

4. HEIs top management commitment

Leaders' commitment to well-being is in an unequivocal way is necessary for the purpose of leading HEIs to be promoters of well-being. Servant leadership is supported on ethics of care and building bridges (further information can be found in the "Ubuntu method fact sheet") and its principles should guide institutional behavior. Leaders are invited to recognise their role as promoter and disseminator of the topic.

5. Delegating responsibilities

In addition to their role in steering HEI's direction, leaders must allocate specific responsibilities to different institutional players, thus ensuring that the topic of well-being is based on competent services and is performed by all those who make up the well-being ecosystem. A clear design of the action network, maintaining its flexibility to respond to the specific challenges of each well-being situation is desirable.

6. Involving all members

The network referred in 5 must be based on the involvement of members of the academic community. Interventions must be co-designed and not defined top-down.

Consultation mechanisms and attentive listening to different players are essential to ensure effective involvement and to enhance the co-creation of appropriate solutions (More details can be found in the "Being attentive to students' needs" chapter).

7. Identifying obstacles and promoting change

Implementing a focus on well-being is a path forward, with various lessons learned, advances and setbacks. For change to occur, a culture of continuous improvement is essential, which requires monitoring, self-evaluation, and critical thinking.

8. Sharing best practices

This path should not be lonely and sharing experiences, challenges and implemented solutions benefits everyone. Integration into networks (Higher Educations Institutions networks or thematic networks such as university social responsibility or healthy campus ones, for example) provides access to good practices and a logic of dissemination must be encouraged (More details can be found in the "Creating well-being initiatives in higher education" chapter).

9. Social change

This 8 steps process leads to social change or HEI's transformation, so that well-being becomes an issue on a national and European scale. WiSE project intends to assume a transformative proposal, which

leads to the adoption of public policies and awareness on a European scale by the different players in Higher Education. The release of the NESET report (Riva et al., 2024) is also an important step towards this goal.

In summary, 4 critical success factors for creating a master plan should be remembered:

Leadership: well-being as a leading and top management purpose for HEIs

Strategic planning: well-being as a priority for HEIs' action plan

Stakeholders' involvement: well-being as an issue that can link all HEIs' partners

Communication: well-being as a shared matter and implies co-created actions

This implies the intersection of 1. *internally*, an organisational culture of HEIs that prioritises well-being; 2. *externally*, active partnerships with the community, for broader, concerted, and effective responses; 3. supported by *public policies*, national and European, that welcome and enable this movement.

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Create a Multi-stakeholder Approach for Student Well-being.

Effectively promoting student services at HEIs, how internal and external stakeholders can work on it.

HEIs are network organisations. Their action has impacts and affects both internal and external groups, as they are affected by those groups. In management literature, those groups are called "stakeholders", and these are described as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organisation's objectives" (Freeman & McVea, 2001). This way of understanding an organization and its intertwined partners was designed for strategic management purposes but can also be very useful for an overview of the constellation of collaborations that each organisation can manage.

When we understand HEIs as "caregiving organisations" (Waddington, 2017), as their main role is helping students to learn, a stakeholders' framework can bring a holistic view of all contributions that can be aggregated to serve this goal. Also,

we follow the rationale of the framework Whole University approach that considers four domains of intervention: learn, support, work and live and we consider that HEIs have four main impacts (Valleys et al., 2009) and that it must be held responsible for its actions in each of these: organisational (as an employer and as an entity that welcomes students), educational (as an entity providing scientific, professional and personal training for citizens), cognitive (as an entity that produces and disseminates knowledge) and social (as an entity interacting with society and involved in its development).

Post et al. (2002) proposed a three-dimensions diagram to map and organise/prioritise stakeholders. When applied to HEIs, the three dimensions are: 1. Resource Base (stakeholders who are vital to organisational functioning); 2. Scientific-

technological structure (stakeholders who operate in the same scope, with interests in the same core areas); and 3. Social political arena (stakeholders who operate in the same geographic space, although they do not share the same core areas of activity).

The arrangement of stakeholders in the three dimensions gives us a reading grid that can be fruitful, also for understanding the networks that can be woven to serve the organisational purpose. As organisations that care and place the well-being of their

community as a goal, this mapping allows us to foresee contributions and prospective joint action.

Next, a mapping proposal is presented for reference for HEIs. Note that each mapping is unique and non-transferable, so this action will necessarily depend on consideration by each HEI. Also, please note that the list of stakeholders is not exhaustive, it is only intended to be an initial basis for work and reflection for each HEI.

Resource Base

Stakeholder	Impact on HEI's activity	Impact on HEI's purpose of well-being
Students	HEIs exist to form students. They are the raw material and the result of what makes an HEI	They are the beneficiaries of policies and actions in favor of well-being; can assist in the design, implementation and dissemination of practices that promote the well-being of the student community
Teachers	Teachers are essential to accomplish HEI's triple mission: learning, investigating and knowledge transfer	In the teacher-student relationship, they contribute to early identification of situations that are contrary to the well-being of students; they can assist in the design, implementation and dissemination of practices that promote the well-being of the student community; must be beneficiaries of measures to support their well-being
Staff	HEIs don't work without Staff. They perform technical and operational coordination functions at HEIs	The various services included accompany the student and enable the Staff to identify situations that are contrary to the well-being of students in a timely manner; they can assist in the design, implementation and dissemination of practices that promote the well-being of the student community; must be beneficiaries of measures to support their well-being

Stakeholder	Impact on HEI's activity	Impact on HEI's purpose of well-being
Management Bodies	They plan HEI's strategy and define its political lines of action	They define the strategy in favor of the well-being of students and the academic community in general, design policies that implement this strategy and implement procedures that guarantee its application; monitor the results of their policies, procedures and activities and aim to continuously improve their performance
Faculties; Departments; Schools	They correspond to the management bodies closest to the academic community and implement, at that level, the measures approved by the management leadership.	Thanks to their greater proximity to members of the academic community, they can contribute to a more appropriate design of measures to promote well-being
Student Organisations	They are student representation structures; they are elected by them and aim to ensure the best conditions for studying and living on campus.	As student representatives, they implement support measures, contribute to the creation of welcoming spaces for all students and can play an important role in the detection and early intervention in situations that threaten the well-being of the student community; they can assist in the design, implementation and dissemination of practices that promote the well-being of the student community

Scientific-technological structure

Stakeholder	Impact on HEI's activity	Impact on HEI's purpose of well-being
Other HEIs (national or international level)	Partners in the training of students and the development of scientific research; at national level, they compete for students and funding; at an international level, they can also host student mobility programs	Can share good practices in terms of student well-being and encourage joint action in favor of students; promotes a common standard of action where well-being stands out as a priority objective
Research Groups	Location for hosting research work inherent to any HEI; raise revenue for HEI; promote the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge	Can develop research projects around areas of student well-being; can increase available knowledge and awareness of the topic
Professional Societies	They define entry requirements into the profession (they can regulate admission to certain professions); ensure best professional practices; encourage the continuous training of their professionals; promote the appreciation and public recognition of the profession	Can collaborate with training entities (HEIs) and develop awareness-raising actions appropriate to future professions; raise awareness among future professionals about the importance of well-being in (future) professional performance
Employers	Recruit students; host applied research projects; contract services to HEI and welcome partnerships with courses and faculties, for mutually beneficial projects	Can collaborate with training entities (HEIs) and develop awareness-raising actions appropriate to professional contexts; raise awareness among future professionals about the importance of well-being in (future) professional performance; can host intervention projects around well-being in an organisational context

Stakeholder	Impact on HEI's activity	Impact on HEI's purpose of well-being
Government Bodies (Higher Education policies)	Regulate and finance Higher Education; define policies for Higher Education, research, and knowledge transfer	As regulatory entities, they can create conditions so that measures to support student well-being are applied in all HEIs; they can prioritize this issue as a primary area of attention and create programs to encourage its implementation by HEIs; can make the subject a primary axis of support for the activity of HEIs
National Board of Deans	They act as an advisory body to the Government for Higher Education policies; they also act as pressure bodies for decision-makers, so that measures to support and enhance Higher Education and HEIs are approved	As entities with the capacity to pressure the Government regarding policies for Higher Education, they can raise awareness of the necessary adoption of measures to support the well-being of students, for all HEIs; they can prioritise this matter with the guardianship; they can also promote the dissemination of good practices that already exist on this subject
Accreditation agencies	Ensure that HEI's operations follow internationally recognized quality standards	Can introduce the promotion of student well-being as a quality assessment criterion; can set criteria for action on this subject and include their monitoring in accreditation processes

Social political arena

Stakeholder	Impact on HEI's activity	Impact on HEI's purpose of well-being
Community residents	The community that works or lives in the area surrounding HEI and its colleges/schools	Can contribute to measures to promote the quality of life of everyone who lives or works in the HEI environment, including students
Media	Media organisations, local or national, with an interest in the news resulting from HEI's activities and which give public notoriety (publishing news about HEI)	Can give visibility to news that disseminates good practices in favor of student well-being; contribute to creating a culture of valuing this subject in society
High Schools	Schools where future Higher Education students are located and where it is important to publicise the training offer	Can value and prioritise HEIs that include in their student recruitment actions the dissemination of measures that promote student well-being; encourage high school pupils to value well-being
Local or Regional Government Bodies	Depending on the countries, they may not have a direct implication on the functioning of the HEI but they benefit from their results: qualified graduates who can remain in the territory; applied research projects or partnerships in different fields	Can promote partnerships at local level to support student well-being; can contribute to measures to promote the quality of life of their populations, including students
NGOs; Civil society organizations; Special interest groups	Represent issues and/or population groups with specific interests and needs and can collaborate with HEIs in these areas	Can contribute with specialised knowledge and contribute to increasing HEI's awareness of issues related to the well-being of all students; can collaborate in the provision of specialised services in various areas of well-being
Political parties	They represent different political and ideological views and defend intervention models in Higher Education	Can contribute to putting the issue of student well-being on the political agenda

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CHAPTER 6

Taking Well-being into Account in the Academic Career Path

Defining the academic career path

It can be defined "as a sequence of academic work experiences and roles that evolve across a lifespan" (Mantai, L., & Marrone, M., 2023).

Academic staff are heterogeneous groups in European higher education. There is a significant difference between academic staff categories across countries. They can be differentiated by a series of features (Crosier et al, 2017; Mantai, L., & Marrone, M., 2023):

- Their main activities such as teaching and research, teaching only or research only.

- Type of institution they work at such as a university or another type of higher education institution.

- Contract status whether indefinite or fixed term.

- Integration or not within a desired career path.

- Number of persons at each level of the career system.

Albeit, despite this heterogeneity overall at universities across Europe, an academic career follows four main stages (Frølich et al, 2018):

- Doctoral studies

- Postdoc and junior positions

- Lower-level senior

- Higher level senior positions

Why does well-being matter in the academic career path?

It is imperative to address the well-being of academic staff because student's success, mental health and well-being are dependent on those of their teachers, advisors, and mentors (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023). Multiple research studies, for instance, have

highlighted the importance of supervisors for PhD well-being (Tikkanen L. et al, 2024).

Furthermore according to Brewster et al (2022), academic staff are also increasingly required to support students with mental health issues at university. Poor well-being negatively impacts staff productivity which then has the knock-on effect of impacting the support they can give to students. Additionally, it can lead to individual suffering for staff and to the loss to universities of able and experienced personnel.

Thus, to address student well-being, it is also important to consider that of academic staff as they are codependent. Improved staff well-being is associated with being mentally, emotionally, and practically equipped to deal with student well-being needs. On the other hand, low staff well-being affects the ability to provide effective pastoral support and impacts the quality of teaching, which can affect students' education experience and their own stress and anxiety levels (Brewster et al, 2022).

There have been various recent studies that shine a light to the mental health crisis amongst academic staff. One study in the UK claimed that out of 2046 academic and academic related staff surveyed, 53.2% showed probable signs of depression (Wray. S and Kinman.G, 2021). In another study by the Wellcome Trusts on researchers from around the world and across multiple career stages, 34% responded they had sought professional help for depression and anxiety and 70% reported feeling stressed on an average working day (Moran H. et al, 2020).

Hammoudi Halat et al (2023) argues there are also differences in terms of well-being depending on their career stage with early and mid-level career academics having some of the lowest levels of well-being.

What affects academic staff well-being:

Academic workplace culture:

Career paths in academia are seen as incredibly demanding with high expectations where academics are expected to excel in everything. This includes working long and unpredictable hours, dealing with conflicting demands with strict deadlines, handling multiple counts of criticism and rejection (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

They also entail high competition where the focus is on impact and productivity, i.e., publishing, with little value to their well-being or how these results are achieved (Riva et al, 2024; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

These results are achieved through excessive workloads where most academics are expected to teach, conduct research, collaborate with peers, deal with administrative and bureaucratic tasks and serve their university community (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Riva et al, 2024).

Moreover, results also come at the expense of sanctioning the normalisation of chronic stress and other unhealthy behaviours such as workaholism, and presenteeism (where academics even work while feeling unwell). This has led to many academics feeling difficulties with their health and well-being such as fatigue, stress, anxiety, sleep problems, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, mental health problems, somatic symptoms (headache, hypertension, gastro-intestinal issues or heart attacks), a strain on personal relationships, a sense of isolation and loneliness at work and research burnout (Riva et al, 2024, Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023)[1].

Lack of work life balance:

The high workloads and expectations to achieve prestige in academia lead to an incompatibility between professional and personal lives. Many feel unable to take breaks and engage with other meaningful activities often to the detriment of taking care of themselves and their families (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Social relationships:

According to Nicholls H. et al (2022), the lack of positions caused by job precarity can foster a sense of competition between colleagues. Also, the demands and expectations associated with academia have fostered a sense of toxic competition to get ahead, which can encourage the creation of negative self-comparisons and fractured relationships between colleagues, imposing limits on opportunities available for peer support.

Lack of job security:

Can be due to employment being dependent on securing funding or grants or to a lack of tenure track and permanent positions available in academia (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Furthermore according to Riva et al (2024), precarious contracts are the prevalent business model for universities across Europe, in countries such as Germany, Estonia, Austria, Finland and Serbia, only around 30 % of academics are employed under an indefinite contract. These contracts are often used for part-time employment opportunities and junior positions, whereas advanced stages of the academic career tend to have more stable contracts. Job precarity has been found to cause stress, anxiety thus affecting health and well-being. Additionally, it makes staff more vulnerable to harassment, abuse of power, discrimination, and exploitation.

Moreover for Hammoudi Halat et al (2023), in some institutions there might be a lack of clarity regarding expectations of academic staff and the requirements for career progression.

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1. Which can be defined as a feeling of mental tension and emotional exhaustion caused by pressure to accomplish a very demanding task in a very short amount of time. (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023)

The marketisation and massification of universities:

Hammoudi Halat et al (2023) argues the rising number of higher education students has led to an environment where institutions compete against each other to attract more students, where students are seen as a customer and have now increased expectations.

As Nicholls H. et al (2022) posits, this has also contributed to increased workload intensity often without an increase in staff and resources to meet the new demand and expectations, which is another challenge many HEIs face due to understaffing and resource limits. The overarching burden for staff in higher education is to do more with less despite the situation being unsustainable (Jayman M. et al, 2022).

Well-being support and discourse in HEIs:

A lack of open discourse around well-being related difficulties with institutions can lead to the perpetuation of the cliché that a successful academic is infallible and immune to such difficulties.

Additionally, it can lead to reluctance from academics who would need support to disclose difficulties or dissatisfaction, due to feelings of inadequacy that they are not living up to the image of proper academics and that they are failing to cope and not strong enough to survive in academia (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023, Wray and

Kinman, 2021). In the view of Hammoudi Halat et al (2023) they feel that they would be giving the impression that they are weak and that this will be detrimental to their career.

For Nicholls H. et al (2022) other academics might feel reluctant to disclose their need for support out of fear of overburdening others, they might expect negative reactions from others, or other times they decided to open up understanding from colleagues only lasted for a short while.

Furthermore, they might have a lack of awareness as to what well-being support is currently offered by their institution (Brooker, 2023) or student well-being tends to be prioritised over staff well-being at their institution (Brewster et al, 2022).

Stress from teaching and student interactions:

Dealing with students that are struggling, unprepared or disruptive can cause academic staff anxiety due to the pressure of ensuring student success and if they are not adequately prepared to effectively support them (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Brooker, 2023). According to Brewster et al (2022) academic staff must also often balance student support which is often not valued or recognised with other demands and expectations.

Gender issues:

Female academics found themselves with the conflict of whether to start a family versus

career progression. Many perceived having children was stigmatised and discouraged in academic environments due to the loss of productivity (Nicholls H. et al, 2022). Further many women researchers experience sexual harassment or misconduct and female academics also face a lack fo progression opportunities (Riva et al, 2024). Also, the burden of pastoral support for students often falls on female academic staff (Brewster et al, 2022).

Recommendations:

Re-allocation of workload

HEIs should carry out a re-evaluation of the workflow for academic staff and ensure a reasonable allocation of responsibilities and fair distribution of tasks. For this HEIs should seek to invest in sufficient resources for staff and infrastructure such as more administrative support for routine tasks, capacity building of staff to maximise efficiency and introduce a workload management initiative that reflects workload and working hours (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Wray and Kinman, 2021; Prescott et al, 2023).

Furthermore, in this re-allocation HEIs must be careful that the burden of pastoral support is not taken up by a sole group.

Invest in wellness programmes and encourage work/life balance:

HEIs should invest in individual support initiatives to facilitate physical, mental, and working health. These can include access to flexible working conditions including more autonomy and flexibility to manage workload (Wray and Kinman, 2021) and encouraging managers to discuss workloads with their teams on a regular basis and work with them to prioritise tasks (Mind, 2021),

Further measures may include setting limits to when emails can be answered after working hours, adding a requirements for employees to take their full annual leave, encourage workers to take regular breaks from work during the day, make staff aware of the risks of presenteeism and of the provision of cover for staff who are on sick leave, more support and understanding for staff with caring responsibilities (Wray and Kinman, 2021; Mind, 2021). By establishing for instance a childcare centre on campus, allowing unlimited sick leave to care for ill dependents, developing a care strategy and offering flexible working policies for caregivers (Moreau M.P., 2019; von Benzon. N, 2022).

Leading by example:

The Mental Health at Work Commitment by Mind (2021) suggests that to change work culture, managers should lead by example and act like role models for staff. This will give a clear signal that well-being is a priority and ensure proper accountability in the long term. They can do this by being seen visibly upholding standards and practices that support well-being. This can

include promoting a work/life balance through for example, taking their full annual leave entitlement, taking full lunch breaks, working sensible hours, avoiding working on the weekends.

Additionally, Mind (2021) suggests institutions could include an objective in supporting staff well-being in their annual performance review, to make managers accountable for the well-being plan.

Clarity on career progression and contracts:

Hammoudi Halat et al (2023) suggest providing transparency on which are the expectations for both tenure and promotions. Also, universities should consider offering mentorship for staff across career stages and departments.

Additionally, there should be clearly defined policies for fixed term contracts, to make it clearer when this type of contract is appropriate and to limit the amount of time someone can be in this type of contract (Mind, 2021). This can help staff know about their rights and diminish uncertainty.

Raise awareness of resources and tools available:

Well-being support resources should be communicated in a timely, effective, and inclusive manner (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023). This can be accomplished through internal communications, posters, noticeboards, staff newsletters, magazines,

intranet pages etc. They should also be easy to find and accessible to all staff and via different modes (Mind, 2021).

Tailored well-being support and resources for staff:

Institutions should offer counselling for all kinds of staff without any limits in terms of sessions, which can be accessed via different modes (online, in person etc). The counselling and support services offered to staff should ideally be with counsellors that understand the sector and all content from well-being resources should be fit for purpose (Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Further tailored support staff can be provided as support for early career staff to help them manage their expectations on workload and well-being (Wray and Kinman, 2021), guidance for staff to support students with mental health issues and support for line managers to manage their own well-being (Mind, 2021; Lantsoght, 2023). Additionally, Mind (2021) argues while institutions should ensure provisions of inhouse support they should be able to signpost if necessary to external services.

Training for staff:

Institutions should seek to improve the mental health literacy of staff and provide opportunities to learn about how to manage their own mental health and resources for their own professional development (Mind, 2021; Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023). This can be achieved by embedding mental

health training within induction and providing mental health training to all staff overall, including some targeted training for certain roles such as managers (Brewster et al, 2022; Mind, 2021).

These training opportunities should be available to all staff both permanent and temporary in the institution and staff should also be allowed to take time off to attend training. Often this training is only available for permanent staff (Brewster et al, 2022), or they do not have enough time to attend the training (Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Foster a climate where staff can openly discuss well-being issues:

High level staff and leaders should contribute to fostering a climate where staff can openly discuss their well-being issues and thus combat the stigma against it (Wray and Kinman, 2021; Mind, 2021).

For this according to Mind (2021) it is important to be open and supportive in the way we talk about mental health and well-being at work. This entails refraining from using negative language and unhelpful stereotypes that contribute towards stigma.

Additionally, it's essential for staff and managers to have a solid understanding of well-being and effective strategies for managing it. This can be facilitated through awareness training and workshops. Institutions should inform staff about the available support resources from the outset, starting with their induction and continuing

to reinforce this awareness throughout their employment. Regularly sharing practical tips can further empower staff to take charge of their own well-being. By fostering open discussions and raising awareness, we can encourage staff to seek assistance and proactively address well-being challenges (Mind, 2021).

Further recommendations include creating peer support groups and cross disciplinary communities between staff and students, to contribute and create a sense of collective responsibility towards well-being (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023; Mind 2021). Finally promoting positive working relationships including informal opportunities to meet with colleagues (Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Change the workplace culture:

It is instrumental for well-being and requires a long term holistic and institutional approach. There should be a shift to a focus on compassion and community as the better staff feel the better experience will students have. For Brewster et al (2022), a culture that prioritises productivity and workload over well-being sets an unhealthy example to students. HEIs should seek to foster a culture of openness that normalises conversations about stress, mental health and other issues that can impact well-being (Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Brewster et al (2022) claims the change in culture can begin with a change in the institution's approach to well-being. From

being reactive and targeted at individual actions to a more proactive, strategic, and preventive approach which targets structural workload demands and seeks to enable a positive work environment. It is necessary to move away from simply offering individual level interventions, such as mindfulness or time management workshops. While they might be helpful to some staff, these interventions do not tackle the root causes of well-being issues, such as culture of overwork at the institution (Brewster et al, 2022; Wray and Kinman, 2021).

Wray and Kinman (2021) assert, these interventions also shift the responsibility away from the institutions, onto staff members making them feel like their issues with well-being are their responsibility alone. They fail to treat the structural issues causing stress to staff and simply deal with the symptoms. To some staff these initiatives feel as if institutions can claim they are doing something, whilst failing to solve the structural issues and enact real change that would truly help staff. Well-being interventions must make sure to tackle the root causes within institutions.

Additionally, well-being policies and practices must become part of an institution's culture by clearly addressing staff and student well-being in the institution's strategy. These policies must also be clearly communicated and implemented including appropriate sanctions for violations (Prescott et al, 2023).

In conclusion, institutions should seek to implement a whole university approach[2]. This approach recommends that all aspects of university life promote and support student and staff well-being (Jayman M. et al, 2022). Using a collective, creative response, through a proactive and collaborative approach to well-being (Riva et al, 2024). Another core aspect of the approach is its strategic commitment to student and staff well-being. Often conceptualised in the form of university policy or strategy around staff and student well-being (Riva et al, 2024).

Evaluate staff well-being levels and review current strategy in place:

HEIs should carry out a thorough evaluation and research of present circumstances and investigate factors associated with staff stress and burnout (Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023). Academic staff must be given the opportunity to co-produce and evaluate support initiatives in place (Wray and Kinman, 2021). HEIs should also ask staff on how to improve the physical work environment and take action to ensure its suitability (Mind, 2021).

They must also review their current approach to well-being looking for areas that need improvement, as ineffective support can be as detrimental as no support and look for ways to embed well-being within their culture (Prescott et al, 2023; Mind, 2021).

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2. Introduced earlier in this toolkit in the section "What can HEIs do for well-being".

Also, they should collect data on how often support tools are accessed and request feedback from staff on how effective and accessible they are (Mind, 2021).

Following this review a commitment to meet staff´s mental health needs to be made and upheld by the whole community at the university and continuous reflection on this issue should be encouraged (Prescott et al, 2023; Hammoudi Halat et al, 2023).

Design well-being plan with staff input

HEIs should actively engage academic staff in the planning and implementation of well-being strategies, particularly by seeking input from those with lived experience of mental health challenges (Mind, 2021). This can be accomplished through inclusive and participatory processes that ensure their experiences are meaningfully integrated into the development of these strategies (Hammoudi Halat et al., 2023)[3].

Mind (2021) emphasises that the revised well-being plan should be a dynamic, living document, regularly reviewed and updated. To illustrate its practical application, the plan should include case studies that provide managers with concrete examples. It should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of those involved in its implementation, including specific timelines for addressing issues.

Additionally, HEIs should effectively communicate any changes made in response to staff feedback, demonstrating that staff input is valued. Wray and Kinman (2021) further suggest that the plan should incorporate mechanisms to identify and minimise barriers to accessing support, as well as strategies for managing conflicts at an early stage.

Following the production of the plan, HEIs should routinely monitor staff well-being to help

institutions understand what affects them and how well they are supporting them. Also, produce an annual well-being report which can be shared with staff and

other stakeholders to increase accountability and encourage discussion (Mind, 2021).

Conclusion

The current academic workplace culture has fostered a toxic environment that substantially harms the well-being of academic staff. Contributing factors include job precarity, the expectation to provide pastoral support to struggling students. An overly competitive atmosphere, where the constant expectation to produce research results at all costs is coupled with an ever-increasing workload, eroding any semblance of work-life balance. The stigma surrounding discussions of mental health in the workplace, driven by the perception of

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3. The Creating a student initiative section in this toolkit and the co-production approach proposed, can also be used to develop well-being staff initiatives.

academic infallibility, further exacerbates this issue.

Additionally, the marketisation of universities forces academics to deliver more with fewer resources to meet the rising expectations of students. These pressures, along with the unique challenges faced by female academics, are central to the well-being crisis in academia.

If institutions are to tackle this crisis they must move away from an individualistic, reactive approach and towards a proactive one where they tackle the root causes of this crisis. They must implement a whole university approach, where institutions work together with academic staff to come up with a strategy that puts staff and student well-being at the centre of it.

The strategy should aim to become part of the culture within institutions, transforming them into a more compassionate one where people can openly talk about well-being issues, access adequate resourced and effective support services and empower staff to develop their own knowledge and skills to manage their own well-being.

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CHAPTER 7

Being Attentive to Students' Needs

Drawing HEI's well-being ecosystem demands a holistic view, recognising that HEIs work as an open system, locating the organisation in its context, and highlighting the interplay between those two parts. Waddington (2017) explains that changes occur when those parts interact, because "an open system performs the task of transforming inputs into outputs" (p. 12). Following this rationale, as inputs we find students, staff, but also financial or physical resources. Due to a transformation process as HEIs are affected and affect all surrounding parts, these inputs became outputs, in the shape of "compassionate[1] citizens, employable graduates, satisfied staff and impactful research" (p. 13).

For this transformation process to occur, and focusing on the student's perspective, it is necessary to recognise that a student's experience of Higher Education encompasses three stages: being, belonging and becoming (Meehan & Howells, 2019). The conceptual frame of this model can be translated into three questions:

1. being – who am I?

2. belonging – how do I fit in?

3. becoming – who will I be?

During their Higher Education period, students sail around these three points of view, relying on their own and their environment. It is important that HEIs support this "trip", with policies, procedures, programs, and actions that give confidence and empower students, "promoting self-agency, resilience and independence" (Universities UK, 2015, p. 9), instead of a deficit model, that offers support (only) in case of a student's problem. It means that

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1. Waddington leans on Worline and Dutton's (2017) definition of compassion, which refers to "attentiveness and noticing another's need, and a willingness to alleviate the suffering of others in order to enhance their well-being" (Waddington, 2018, p. 88).

well-being should be a priority and an issue for the whole academic community, as a condition to take part in all opportunities and challenges that Higher Education and its Institutions can offer.

Students' satisfaction and students' well-being: an interconnected network.

Lately, HEIs are pressured to attain and maintain high levels of student satisfaction. Although satisfaction and well-being are not similar concepts, they both put students and their academic experience at the center of concern. Satisfaction has mainly a marketing purpose, for attracting and retaining students, and HEIs are evaluated and compared within these criteria (Bates et al., 2019), whereas well-being sends us to a psychological and socio-relational state of being, supported on belonging and pointing to becoming. Nevertheless, it could be a win-win joint concern, as a satisfied student is more prone to feel welcomed, integrated and involved in academic life.

Specifically, literature on students' satisfaction points that it is quite challenging to define answers that surpass "one size fits all" approach, where ranking criteria risk lack of context. In fact, student experience is a complex and multidimensional "lived" experience (Bates et al., 2019) and "traditional metrics often do not take into account emotive components" (Jurkowitsch et al., 2006, as cited by Bates et al., 2019,

p. 5). So, to act on students' satisfaction, or to act on students' well-being, it is important to gain a "student-centric conceptualisation of student satisfaction [as well as for well-being, we add]" (Bates, 2019, p. 21) and to have a profound knowledge on student diversity at HEI (gender, age, nationality, religion but also working status or family obligations) and design support activities that meet multiple expectations. To accomplish this goal, **students must be involved in the design of intervention solutions and the responses** directed to them.

Relationships between staff and students are fundamental in the equation of well-being.

Teachers can provide students with important resources and skills that enable them to "develop peer relationships, engage in meaningful interactions, and link the emergent knowledge and confidence of the students to their aspirations for their future goals" (Meehan & Howells, 2019, p. 1386). Teachers, in their role of educators in Higher Education, are seen as an empowering factor for students (Bates et al., 2019). Which means that teachers, but also non-academic staff, are key players for the belonging stage that was mentioned above. Their role is most perceived with freshman students, but the whole Higher Education experience is impacted by them.

Riva et al. (2020) referred to this relationship as interdependency, which means that HEIs

that make well-being of students a priority understand that a network of different relationships is necessary to support this purpose. The teaching-learning experience is at the core, and other relational activities should be considered, as "well-being provides the basis for successful, and at times challenging, learning to take place" (p. 104). It should be noted that the learning environment includes academic and non-academic staff, as both compete for positive students' well-being. Riva and colleagues (2020) suggest that HEIs should look actively at teacher-student relationships, as "positive student/staff relationships can enhance students' sense of belonging, often associated with well-being" (p. 109). In their study, Bates et al. (2019) underlined the importance of people, and specially people associated with the learning community, such as staff, peers, colleagues, in shaping positive experiences, for students.

Some tips can be shared to nurture well-being in learning environment (adapted from Chakraborty, 2023):

- **supportive classroom environment:** focus on developing a sense of belonging, classroom environments offers emotional safety, and builds trust among students. Teachers can provide guidance, offer a listening ear, and help students facing different challenges.

- **pay attention to students:** teachers have a daily relationship with their students, which means that they can

contribute to identify mental health concerns, being attentive to changes in students' behavior, mood, or academic performance. Also, teachers can early provide the necessary support, as a figure of reference and trust, with whom students can have an open and non-judgmental conversation and advice for seeking specific or specialized support.

- **using active learning methodologies in class** that foster collaboration between students and develop autonomy and interdependence skills.

- **integrating well-being in the curricula:** to raise awareness and to empower students with knowledge on mental issues and well-being. At the same time, they fight stigma against the subject and promote a culture of empathy and support in academia.

- **sharing information:** recognising teachers as part of the well-being support system, teachers add precious information about each individual student that should be integrated with other sources, such as family, peers, and friends.

Student's well-being is not only a matter inside classes, but other supportive tips can also be added, centred on peers and on non-academic staff:

- To encourage **peer support**, collaboration is the main goal: in group projects, collaborative work, or peer

mentoring programs, this network creates a dynamic of participation, values the contribution of each member to the group and generates cohesion, thus contributing to a feeling of belonging that generates the well-being of each student.

- **student organisations** must prioritise supporting their peers and must assume that they are the main organised peer support network. In addition to contributing to the implementation of organisational responses, student organisations must propose other specific responses, based on their intervention on the ground, among peers.

- **non-academic staff** in general can act on students' well-being. When administrative services are student-centered, they can give precious guidance, and counselling to different problems that can occur. On the other hand, non-academic specialised staff can deal with students-issues, namely in accommodation, food, social support, health, sport, among others. Also, if they act in a network with external entities, they can provide access to other specialised services.

For a broader understanding of the benefits of an expanded network at the service of student well-being, please consult the chapter "Create a multi-stakeholder approach for student well-being".

All these tips require specific training and

knowledge that HEIs must provide to members of their community. Staff and students must be aware of the subject, and universities must deliver information about it. It is important that this information highlights the importance of positive mental health and well-being. Specific training adds the capacity for more effective and informed intervention.

But teacher-student relationship also points to the importance of well-being for both parties, as "staff precarious welfare restricts their ability to positively impact student well-being as it prevents them from effectively contributing to a caring, kind, and compassionate learning environment" (idem). This means that **HEIs should take care of staff well-being to put students' well-being as a priority.**

Some tips to take care of staff's well-being (adapted from Chakraborty, 2023):

- define boundaries and dedicate time to your own well-being, leisure, and family life.

- engage in self-care activities, such as leisure, exercise, or creative ones.

- seek support from peers, share problems and give/receive advice, as everybody can learn from others' experience.

- training on these subjects can be useful, for a comprehensive view of the subject, giving confidence and increased responsiveness.

Finally, a three-dimensional approach to

act on students' well-being is proposed, to integrate the multiple layers that constitute this construct:

1. **at an individual level:** where students are looked at as individuals, rather than part of the anonymous student body. Programs and activities should be implemented to support individual needs.

2. **at a group level:** where students are looked at as relational, with peers, with supportive staff, and with teachers. Procedures, programs, and activities can be designed to raise awareness, to monitor and to act as an early warning, so that close relationships are also supportive relationships.

3. **at an organisational level:** where support activities for the well-being of students are previewed at strategic planning level, with specific goals, defined policies, and adequate procedures to implement those policies, and at operational practices level, with systematic activities and permanent monitoring, with a view to continuous improvement. To design this, a range of methods are necessary to understand the student experience, which is always individual, relational, and contextual.

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CHAPTER 8

Creating Well-being Initiatives in Higher Education

After developing a strategy for well-being within your institution the next step is to develop well-being initiatives, one potential approach and key towards creating a whole university approach is co-production.

Definition

Co-Production as defined by the National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health (2019) is "*an ongoing partnership between people who design, deliver and commission services, people who use the services and people who need them.*" It has been highlighted as a tool to integrate well-being within the university environment (Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024).

It entails collaboration between service users and service providers by treating them as equal stakeholders, to develop strategies and solutions through joint decision making (Piper R. et al, 2019). In the context of this toolkit service users are higher education students (or staff, depending on who the target of your planned well-being initiatives is), and service providers are the institution itself. Co-production will involve for instance institutions working with students in the development, implementation and evaluation of well-being strategies.

Co-production goes beyond consultations or surveys (Fabian M. et al, 2022), it seeks to engage stakeholders actively and sustainably by treating them as partners throughout all stages of the creation of the initiative, using their knowledge (Piper R. et al, 2019; Priestley et al, 2022) and ensure a two-way learning process to achieve outcomes that could not be achieve by each group individually (Fabian M. et al, 2022; Priestley et al, 2022).

The value of this approach in developing well-being initiatives lies in its foundation on the idea that those who use, may use, or refer others to services, along with those

who provide them, are best positioned to suggest improvements or create better alternatives (Piper R. et al, 2019; National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019). Their insights, grounded in personal experience and context, offer invaluable perspectives (Piper R. et al, 2019).

Furthermore, it is essential to consider the opinions of those most affected by these initiatives, in this case students. Their lived experiences grant them a deep understanding of what works, what doesn't, and why. Knowledge that staff might not possess, as they may not directly use the services, or be unaware of the specific challenges and lived experiences of their students (Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024).

Co-production allows institutions to tailor well-being initiatives to specific domains and to incorporate context-specific knowledge that they might otherwise lack (Fabian M. et al, 2022), while prioritising student voices throughout the process. This approach empowers students by ensuring they are heard (Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024) and actively contribute to the development and improvement of services that better fit their needs (Piper R. et al, 2019).

Given the diversity within the student body, it is crucial for institutions to engage a wide range of voices and perspectives to adapt well-being services to the unique contexts and needs of their students (Priestley et al, 2022; Fabian M. et al, 2022).

Benefits for institutions

Involving students in the co-production of well-being initiatives offers numerous benefits to institutions. Firstly, it helps shape the implementation of these initiatives, ensuring they are relevant to students' needs and priorities, as they are based on their lived experiences at university. This approach challenges assumptions and aligns services with how students are likely to engage with them, enhancing their effectiveness (Wavehill, 2022). Instead of having a third party involved in creating a solution, who may not understand the complexities and competing factors of students which must be taken into account (Riva et al, 2022).

Co-production also fosters trust between students and their institution, facilitating positive relationships among students, academics, and staff. This collaboration allows students to form meaningful connections with the administration, improving the overall institutional climate (Wavehill, 2022; Piper R. et al, 2019). Additionally, it enhances transparency by making the institution more responsive to issues identified by the student community (Piper R. et al, 2019).

By involving students in the design and improvement of services, institutions can bridge the gap between students' expectations and what is feasible, (Piper R. et al, 2019). Staff tend to be more aware of broader structural limitations, such as

legislation, financial restrictions and wider targets which students may not know about. They can ensure students expectations are established and carefully managed early on, thereby mitigating potential dissatisfaction (Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024; Piper R. et al, 2019)

This process also shifts power dynamics, allowing students to voice their opinions and criticisms without fear of negative repercussions (Piper R. et al, 2019). This gives students the confidence to put their ideas forward, as they can feel their ideas are treated with equal value and respect (Lister, K. et al, 2022). Moreover, according to O'Hara (2023), students can bring innovative ideas, fresh perspectives and lived experiences which challenge and enhance existing academic approaches and thinking (O'Hara, 2023).

Moreover, co-production strengthens support for the institution's leadership. When students are engaged in decision-making processes, they are more likely to support and feel invested in the institution's work. Strong support is key to changing the culture into one that prioritises student well-being (Piper R. et al, 2019). This approach contributes to the implementation of a whole-university approach and creating clear pathways for student body engagement (Piper R. et al, 2019).

Initiatives and services developed through co-production tend to be more cost-effective, responsive, and have higher satisfaction rates among users (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019). Over time, this can lead to sustainable reductions in avoidable costs and other long-term financial benefits if the co-production process is continuously embedded into the institution's well-being strategy (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019).

Furthermore, it helps staff develop their mentoring, facilitation and coaching abilities as well as acquiring a more grounded appreciation of the diverse needs and aspirations of students (O'Hara, 2023). It empowers professionals working in student-facing services to take more risks and develop greater empathy, ultimately enhancing the quality of support provided (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019).

Benefits for students

Participating in co-production can educate students on issues related to student well-being, providing them with safe, purpose-driven spaces to share their experiences and views. This engagement fosters a deeper appreciation of others' experiences, reduces feelings of isolation, and strengthens peer networks (Piper et al., 2019).

Additionally, by participating in these discussions, students can learn new strategies to cope with and navigate their own well-being challenges, by acquiring enhanced mental health literacy (Wavehill, 2022; Priestley et al., 2019).

Moreover according to Piper R. et al (2019), these initiatives can lead to an improvement in students' health outcomes. This is partly due to the services provided by their institutions becoming more tailored to their specific needs. When students feel that their contributions are meaningful, their sense of self-worth increases, as they recognize that they are playing a significant role in addressing important issues.

Participating in co-production activities also has the potential to boost students' confidence in their institution's support services. After engaging in these activities, students may feel more comfortable accessing these services, as they become more aware of the support available to them (Wavehill, 2022).

Involvement in co-production plays a valuable role in student development by offering opportunities to learn transferable skills that benefit their education, extracurricular activities, and future employability (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019; Piper et al., 2019).

Through such involvement, students can develop project management, organisational, research, presenting, listening, analytical, critical thinking, community building, and leadership skills (Wavehill, 2022; Piper et al., 2019). Acquiring new skills can also help with boosting student's self-esteem and well-being, particularly if they had a positive experience with co-production (Campbell

et al., 2019; Hayes, B.& Serbic,D., 2024).

Finally, co-production can provide a platform for previously marginalised students, giving them a voice and ensuring their perspectives are heard (Piper R. et al., 2019; O'Hara, M., 2023).

Challenges

Institutions collaborating with students through co-production can encounter several challenges, as highlighted in Wavehill's (2022) reports on the Mental Health Challenge Competition for Office for Students. Key issues include difficulties in recruiting participants, often due to concerns about confidentiality, anxiety about discussing mental health issues with people they do not know. Fear of negative repercussions from speaking up about their issues, out of concern it might affect their chances of obtaining future opportunities.

Another issue with recruitment identified by O'Hara (2023), may involve a lack of time from staff and students to dedicate to co-production. They both have competing demands from their job, studies, personal lives limiting their availability and willingness to engage in co-production. It might also be the case that when recruiting participants, the same people keep signing up and are involved. Meaning new opinions are not being heard (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019).

Further concerns identified by Wavehill (2022) include students may also feel their

concerns are not serious enough or worry that staff would not understand their needs. Additional challenges include students raising sensitive or difficult issues, which can be hard for staff to address, and reluctance to participate due to stigma or cultural sensitivities. These barriers, similar to those deterring students from accessing well-being services, must be addressed to ensure effective co-production.

Navigating power dynamics and fostering genuine power sharing present significant challenges in the co-production process (Roper et al., 2018). Traditional hierarchies within universities may resist change, particularly in power dynamics (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019; Carr et al., 2016), creating barriers to empowering students and ensuring their voices are valued equally alongside staff (O'Hara, 2023). As a result, the extent to which power and control are genuinely shared in co-production can be inconsistent or even superficial (Mannell et al., 2023).

As Wavehill (2022) points out, this raises concerns that co-production might become a box ticking exercise rather than a meaningful collaboration. In such instances, students may be invited to contribute their opinions, and then none of their suggestions are considered with barely any changes happening

Alternatively, student participation might be confined to a narrow scope, with most decisions already made by staff (Wavehill, 2022). Past experiences of being ignored

can discourage students from engaging in these processes (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019). To overcome this, staff must reassure students that their voices will be sincerely considered and that their contributions will have a meaningful impact on student well-being.

How to deliver co-production

1 Obtain buy in from the university leadership

The first step should be to obtain support from the university leadership on using co-production to design well-being initiatives, to enable support and engagement from all levels of staff. This can be achieved by making co-production a priority in the institution's strategy and by establishing a strong partnership with the student's union, so that those who are experienced in student engagement are supportive (Piper R. et al, 2019). They will be invaluable in helping the institution select students to participate in co-production.

Here it will also be necessary to understand what it is the institution wishes to achieve by using co-production and to agree on which staff members will be involved in co-production, whose tasks will include the recruitment of students and working with them to develop new initiatives (Wavehill, 2022; National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019). Institutions must make sure that the right staff members with the necessary skills, experience and attitude

are involved from the outset (Carr, S. & Paterl, M., 2016).

Some questions to consider at this stage:

- Why use co-production?
- What do we wish to achieve through co-production?
- Which staff members should be involved in it?

2 Evaluate status of well-being at the institution and identify needs

After obtaining the necessary support from the leadership it is necessary to evaluate and audit the status of well-being within the institution and identify its needs (Piper R. et al, 2019), this is where the toolkit's self-assessment tool can come into play.

It can help you discern which areas of well-being are not being properly addressed by the institution, either because the university lacks a service for them, or they need an improvement and to identify the student population that will need to be targeted in the development of new initiatives and that will need to be involved in co-production.

Other methods in which the status of well-being can be evaluated is through analysing data from feedback gathered at counselling services (Piper R. et al, 2019), a student survey, or focus groups.

Some questions to consider at this stage:

- What is the best way to obtain student feedback and audit available services? What methods have worked in the past?
- What well-being services are available? What is missing?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current services in place?
- How can it be built upon and not duplicated?
- Who is and who is not accessing well-being services? What kinds of experiences are people having?
- Are there delays in accessing services and in receiving care?
- What do students say that they need from a service?
- How do students describe existing services?
- What do students identify as supportive to their well-being?
- Which services are students aware of?
- Which student group must be prioritised? Who will be the target of the initiative? Who do you hear less from?
- Which are the well-being needs of this group?

3 Recruiting participants

Now you must recruit the student participants for co-production. This can be done by working with student organisations or through a mass advertising campaign using social media if you wish to involve

as many students as possible. Recruiting a diverse group of students, ensures initiatives designed will address the well-being of a range of different demographics (Hayes, B.& Serbic, D., 2024).

Other methods may include targeted approaches such as liaising with course staff and student course representatives, student networks or societies, who can then advertise the opportunity via leaflets or word of mouth in personal networks (Piper R. et al, 2019, Wavehill, 2022).

To develop initiatives targeting specific groups, particularly underrepresented students, it is essential to tailor your recruitment methods. Wavehill (2022) suggests customising your approach by offering incentives such as cash or vouchers. Engaging trusted staff and students to spread the word through personal networks can also build trust and encourage participation. For example, if the initiative focuses on disabled or neurodivergent students, partnering with disability services to promote the opportunity can be effective.

Ensuring that students can self-select to participate and eliminating barriers to participation is crucial. This might involve offering closed sessions or individual opportunities, allowing students to choose an environment where they feel most comfortable, whether that is surrounded by their peers or in a one-on-one setting (Wavehill, 2022).

Questions to consider:

- What has worked to recruit participants in the past?

- Where can we find the students that we need for co-production?

- What are the best communication strategies to reach the target student groups?

- With whom can the institution work with to recruit students?

- With whom would students feel more comfortable working with?

4 Risk analysis, establish objectives and which aspects are open to co-production

After selecting the students that will partake in co-production it is important for staff and students to meet and establish the ground rules for collaborative working (Carr, S. & Patel, M., 2016). Also, map out and discuss potential challenges and barriers they might face and how to overcome them (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019). They must also discuss a plan for managing communication between participants (MHE, 2022), clear, accessible, and efficient communication is fundamental for the success of co-production.

Additionally, here the aims and objectives of co-production will be defined as well as what aspects are open to co-production (Piper R. et al, 2019). The boundaries and remits of each party, what is expected from students and staff partaking in co-production

(National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019) and the work each party will do.

It is imperative that when defining the aims and the work each party will do, students play a meaningful role in shaping well-being initiatives. That they are not simply a box checking exercise where their opinion is requested but in the end, holds no real weight (Wavehill, 2022). Throughout the process staff must also guarantee good communication with students to help them understand the impact of their contributions and how they have been acted upon (Wavehill, 2022).

Questions to consider:

- What are some challenges we might face?

- How will we overcome these challenges?

- How will disputes be resolved during co-production?

- What are the best communication channels for us?

- What is the objective of co-production? What kind of initiative do we want to produce?

- Who will benefit from it?

- What are the tasks and responsibilities of each party? What would be required of each to fulfil the objectives of co-production?

- What communication and feedback mechanisms will be used during the process?

- What are the boundaries of this work? What does each party feel comfortable working on or helping with?

- What are each parties' expectations of this activity?

- How can we ensure students feel they are being genuinely listened to?

5 Developing a well-being initiative by engaging students

Students can be involved in a wide range of methods, the method used will be down to the preferences of the institution and down to the objective of co-production.

Some examples of how students can be involved within co-production include:

- Researchers- students involved in the development or delivery of research approaches for developing an initiative during co-production (Wavehill, 2022).

- Fellows- students which help improve how the university functions, by providing detailed feedback and analysis from a student perspective (UCL, 2024). In this case, they would be responsible for devising mental health and well-being activities to be delivered as part of co-production (Wavehill, 2022).

- Peer supporters- These are trained student volunteers that help other students by offering non-judgmental, confidential support by lending a listening ear to

other students (LSE, 2024; NUS, 2024).

- Focus groups- these are small groups of people where they are asked about their attitude and feelings towards a service or idea for example (John Hopkins University, n.d).

- Problem solving booths-it seeks to enable conversations between people on mental health and well-being. It consists in setting two chairs opposite to each other, where one participant takes the role of either the helper or helped. When someone decides to participate, they are sat in the helper chair, then the volunteer in the helped chair will ask questions, they can pre-determined on issues around well-being or completely random (Piper R. et al, 2019, ThriveLDN, n.d).

- Student Voice Forum- an approach designed by the UK charity Student minds. It involves guiding participant students in discussing their well-being experiences at university. The facilitators guide participants to discuss their experiences and collectively come up with suggestions for how to improve well-being at university (Piper R. et al, 2019).

- Content creators- students involved with designing and creating resources or outputs as part of an initiative, such as self-help resources or toolkits, for other students to access (Wavehill, 2022).

- Engaging students in close reading of

draft initiatives-this involves engaging students, equipping them to read through plans for the development of an initiative and for them to provide in-depth feedback (Piper R. et al, 2019).

Questions to consider:

- What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of these approaches?

- Which one would work best for the kind of student population we wish to engage?

- Would a combination of approaches work best, if so which ones?

- With whom would we need to cooperate to successfully engage with students?

6 Implementation and dissemination of initiative

Following the end of the co-production process, is the implementation and dissemination of the initiative in question that was the objective. It is very important that upon communicating the establishment of this initiative, the institution clearly communicates that it was the result of engaging students (Piper R. et al, 2019) and which aspects came from student contributions (National Collaborating Centre for Mental Health, 2019).

Additionally as Piper R. et al (2019) suggests, students should be engaged in the dissemination strategy. Which allows them to act as well-being champions, promote the work of the institution and ensures the

student voice is heard within the institution.

Question to consider:

- Which are the best communication channels to disseminate this initiative?
- What is the best way to engage students in the dissemination strategy?

7 **Feedback for the new initiative**

The final step is measuring the outcomes of this strategy if it is indeed fulfilling its purpose and it matches the student's expectations. Students can also be involved in designing the success criteria for it (Piper R. et al, 2019).

Questions to consider:

- What should be the success criteria for this initiative?
- How can we measure success?
- How can we make sure it is living up to student's expectations?

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Mindfulness-based programmes

Mindfulness-based programmes are being used in diverse contexts (health, education, workplaces) to reduce stress, anxiety, difficult emotions and persistent negative thoughts, helping people to cope better with intense emotions and negative thoughts. There is strong evidence that those programmes have a positive impact on the lives of participants.

You can start with mindfulness training as an introduction to mindfulness practices, learning its principles and how mindfulness skills impact on general well-being. However, if you practice mindfulness regularly, the greater will be the benefits achieved, leading to a richer and more vivid experience of being alive; only in this condition will you be qualified for further training or to teach mindfulness.

There is a growing body of evidence which points towards tangible benefits of mindfulness. Here is a summary of some of its multiple benefits.

The benefits of mindfulness-based programmes:

Well-being and Mental Health: mindfulness helps to recognise worry,

Photo by Chelsea Gates on Unsplash

manage difficulties and cope with anxiety; developing mindful awareness, noticing what is happening when it happens, also helps young people to be more aware of thoughts and feelings, appreciating the gifts of life and flourishing.

Concentration and Cognition: mindfulness practices help us train our mind to direct attention. This may improve the ability/ capacity to concentrate and be less distracted, also improving the processes that underlie effective cognition and learning (executive function, attention and focus, metacognition and cognitive flexibility).

Social and Emotional Learning: mindfulness skills enhance relationships awareness; it also improves openness, receptivity and emotion regulation, offering a richer understanding of relations and life connections, promoting self-esteem and optimism.

Behaviour: Mindfulness may help the young to self-regulate more effectively, manage impulsivity and reduce conflict.

Mindfulness practice

Mindfulness practice is sometimes compared to physical exercise, because experts often describe mindfulness practice as a form of mental exercise. Regular and sustained mindfulness practices are described as helping to strengthen our attentional muscles and change the way we think and behave.

Research shows that practicing mindfulness has many benefits. There is strong evidence that mindfulness-based programmes reduce anxiety, depression, and stress and help people cope with illness and pain (Khoury et al., 2013). Some studies show that the practice of mindfulness increases positive moods and cultivates compassion for self and others (Eberth & Sedlmeier, 2012; Khoury, Sharma, Rush, & Fournier, 2015). It may also improve some forms of attention and memory.

Mindfulness practices will bring into awareness experiences that are pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. The theoretical models that mindfulness draws from state that these pleasant, neutral and unpleasant

experiences are part of the normal human experience. Seeing them arise and pass away is part of the learning process (Williams & Penman, 2011).

Regular Mindfulness Practice allows you to:

- ☑ Reduce stress
- ☑ Improve sleep quality
- ☑ Improve Attention/Concentration
- ☑ Improve Quality of Life
- ☑ Less conflicts/greater cohesion and connection to others
- ☑ Improve the ability to deal with anxiety, unwanted emotions and chronic pain.

The Eight-Week Mindfulness Programme / Course

This course introduces you to mindfulness over eight weeks via group sessions of approximately 90 minutes per week and the group is led by a highly experienced instructor.

This course aims to demonstrate the benefits of mindfulness practice, providing participants tools that allow them to deal better with:

1. **Unpleasant emotions** (e.g., stress, anxiety, sadness, anger, jealousy etc);

2. **Negative thoughts**;

3. **Uncomfortable physical sensations** (e.g., pain chronicle)

High quality evidence shows the benefits of an **eight-week mindfulness course**, such as:

- a reduction in stress, burnout and anxiety
- a reduction in the sense of task and time pressure
- an improved ability to manage thoughts and behaviour
- an increase in coping skills, motivation, planning and problem solving
- an increase in self-compassion and self-care

Programme content

(eight sessions / an example by psychologist Maria João Varela):

1st Session

- What is stress? Problems associated with stress;
- Introduction to the concept of Mindfulness;
- The Myths of mindfulness
- The importance of breathing
- Mindfulness of breathing (formal practice)

2nd Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- The problem of control
- Mindfulness of the senses (formal practice)

3rd Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- What is acceptance? Difference between acceptance and resignation

- How can acceptance help us?
- Mindfulness (Formal practice of acceptance)

4th Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- Body & mind interaction
- Benefits of a better body awareness
- Mindfulness (Informal body scan practice)

5th Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- Autopilot (the problem of rumination & worry)
- Eating mindfully (informal practice)
- Mindfulness (formal mindfulness practice of thinking)

6th Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- The three emotional/motivational systems
- Introduction to the concept of compassion and self-compassion
- The myths associated with compassion
- "Imagery" exercise
- Compassion Meditation (Posture, Calming breathing rhythm, Use of facial expressions and tones of voice)

7th Session

- Sharing the difficulties with practice. Overcoming barriers
- Imagery exercise ("Peace postcard")
- How to develop and cultivate a Compassionate Self

- Practice of Compassion ("Building and cultivating the compassionate Self")

8th Session
- Sharing the experience of the course (the greatest benefits and greatest difficulties)
- Practice of "Loving Kindness" meditation
- End of course.

Some testimonies / positive impact

"It helped me when I was angry or stressed. It taught me how to keep calm and relaxed. It is amazing."

"The best thing about ... was everyone getting together and talking about our feelings. This made me feel less alone."

"I get frequent anxiety attacks, but they're getting bearable thanks to this course."

"The best thing was the Beditation. That exercise was actually useful as it helped me sleep at night. It is something I'll take away from the entire course."

"It really helps with when I'm nervous about exams and I can just do a mindfulness activity and it makes me feel calmer."

"It was needed especially during certain periods which can cause stress or anxiety. It really helped me concentrate and remain calm during exam periods".

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Katherine Weare's paper Evidence for Mindfulness: Impacts on the Wellbeing and Performance of School Staff.

Programme content (eight sessions), adapted from the Portuguese course by Maria João Varela.

Ubuntu method

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy is a non-formal education program that adopts a pedagogical model, developed by IPAV (Instituto Padre António Vieira; Portugal), centered on participants, through a participatory and experiential approach.

The word "Ubuntu" is a combination of two terms: "Ntu" which means person and "Ubu" which means to become. This philosophy reveals a centrality in the person in their singularity and, simultaneously, proposes a path that each person is called to follow - becoming a person.

The Ubuntu concept, which finds expression in several African languages, condenses a humanist philosophy of life, transversal and independent of any country, culture, religion, or political affiliation. The Ubuntu philosophy deals with the essence of the human being who values the importance of the "self" in his search for meaning through the encounter with others, in a relationship of constructive interdependence. Thus, the Ubuntu philosophy proposes that everyone learns to discover themselves and others, communicating, relating, preserving, and enhancing each person's uniqueness.

This deeply relational path, which begins with the "I" and ends with the "we", inspired the promoters of the Ubuntu Leaders Academy to propose an interpretation, possible to be implemented in a method that can help each person discover themselves as Ubuntu leader.

This method is built on three foundations - the ethics of care, servant leadership and building bridges. These guide the training program of the Ubuntu Leaders Academy and are strengthened by the development of five essential skills for each participant, understood here as pillars of the Ubuntu method: self-knowledge, self-confidence, resilience, empathy, and service. The first three dimensions are more individual in nature and the last two focus on the relational dimension that is established with others. Although there is a special focus on the five skills mentioned, the Ubuntu Leaders Academy is a space where the learning

and integral development of participants is prioritized, promoting other skills such as teamwork, critical and self-reflective thinking, communication, problem solving, among others.

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy has already involved more than 110,000 young people from 193 countries in its programs. It has more than 5,000 trainers. Today, the project has implementing partners in 24 countries with actions in different formats and models. The programs already implemented are listed:

- Ubuntu Junior, aimed at educators and children aged 8/9.

- Ubuntu Schools, aimed at educators and young people aged between 13 and 18.

- Higher Education, aimed at trainers and young people up to 35 years old.

- Professional Training Institution, aimed at trainers and managers and people actively looking for work.

- Shelter Houses, aimed at technicians and managers of shelter institutions and young people in care, aged between 13 and 25.

- Neighborhood, with intervention extended to the local community, where the dimensions of the school, families and companies are involved.

- Associational and community context, aimed at technicians, volunteers and young people from community associations and institutions.

The training program proposed by the Ubuntu Leaders Academy is flexible, adaptable and is constantly evaluated, always with great attention and focus on the participants and valuing life-long learning. In this sense, although there are pre-defined session plans, the development of each session is tailored to the particularities of the group of participants and the concrete challenges of each sociocultural context.

As a project based on non-formal education, it takes a non-hierarchical approach between animator and participant, giving each participant back responsibility and autonomy in the construction of their own training process which depends mostly on the openness and willingness of each participant to give and to receive. The animation team is the face and guarantor of fidelity to the principles of the project, always developing an attitude of respect, listening and a permanent awareness that, as Paulo Freire said, "those who teach learn by teaching and those who learn teach by learning". The animator is also responsible for facilitating the learning processes and promoting a good environment and cohesion in the group being formed.

Relevant skills for Higher Education students

The Ubuntu concept and method have been asserting themselves as very relevant in the development of socio-emotional skills with young people, particularly those who are in a process of self-knowledge and important development of their personal and professional path and objectives, based on a new conception of its meaning and purpose, fundamental axes for promoting a successful, integrated, and happy

academic life. As previously mentioned, the Ubuntu method focuses mainly on the development of five socio-emotional skills: self-knowledge, self-confidence, resilience, empathy, and service. The first three dimensions are more focused on the development of the individual. On a second level, the pillars of empathy and service are focused on the development of social and relational skills.

Although there is a special focus on the five skills mentioned, the Ubuntu Leaders Academy promotes other skills such as teamwork, critical and self-reflective thinking, communication, and problem solving. In the specific case of higher education, these skills are fundamental for promoting higher quality educational practices and more appropriate, integrated, and inclusive forms of academic life with a view to the whole development of students.

Examples of initiatives/ practices already implemented in the HE context

Here are some examples of activities carried out:

1. **Training actions in terms of socio-emotional skills and the Ubuntu method as a strategy for promoting academic success (Training of trainers).** These actions are divided into 3 concrete phases: a theoretical-conceptual training seminar (2 days of seminar), where the Ubuntu philosophy and method is presented, as basic work proposals; a second theoretical-practical training seminar,

with experimentation with tools and new recreational-pedagogical resources within the scope of this method (2 days of seminar); and finally the application of this new knowledge regarding the development of socio-emotional skills among HE students (5 days).

2. **Training actions for students to increase socio-emotional skills that can reinforce academic success processes, in a workshop format (5 days).** These actions are promoted using the Ubuntu method and implemented by trainers (educators/ technicians) from each participating HEI.

3. **Promotion of activities to welcome new HE students and promote the Ubuntu Leaders Academy.**

4. **Promotion of activities among HE students** with the purpose of fostering empathy and understanding the differences between people; reflect on the way we see ourselves and others and show the importance of looking beyond appearances and prejudices.

Recommendations for use/ replication

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy is a non-formal education project that, in the context of HE, provides for the training of the academic community, using an integrated, holistic and inclusive strategy that involves the entire community. For its use/replication to be in line with the defined objectives, it is recommended:

1. Ubuntu Week must be promoted by trainers who are in the training process

or who have completed training as Ubuntu trainers.

2. All participants and trainers must participate in Ubuntu Week at all times.

3. The existing dynamics in the session plan must be followed, without changing the timing of its implementation (any suggestion to change the session plan must be shared with the IPAV team so that it can confirm its viability).

4. The Ubuntu Week facilitation room must have space for the trainees to be placed in a U shape, it must have projection, sound equipment and the possibility of darkening for moments of film viewing.

5. The materials required for each dynamic must be previously secured.

6. Participants must be informed that their participation is voluntary.

Additional resources

Ubuntu Leaders Academy - https://www.academialideresubuntu.org/en/

Building Bridges – Ubuntu - Servant Leadership (book)
https://www.academialideresubuntu.org/en/publications/book

Escolas Ubuntu - https://www.escolasubuntu.pt/ (Portuguese version only)

Revista Científica Ubuntu 'Ubuntu - Revista de Ciências Sociais e Humanas'
https://issuu.com/ipavieira/docs/ubuntu_revista_de_ciencias_sociais_n1_digital
(Portuguese version only)

FACT SHEET
PHD STUDENTS

Definition:
PhD or Doctor of Philosophy is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'philosophiae doctor', is a doctoral research degree and the highest level of academic qualification a student can achieve. It takes between 3 and 4 years to complete, culminating in a thesis offering an original contribution to a specific field to a high academic standard (Benett, M., 2023; Times Higher Education, 2023).

In a survey study by the university of Groningen (Netherlands) more PhD students reported doing a PhD had a negative effect on their mental health than a positive effect (van Rooij et al, 2018). Another study by Levecque et al (2016) on the mental health of PhD students in Flanders (Belgium) showed that the prevalence of health problems amongst PhD students is high with:
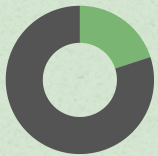
80% feeling unhappy and depressed.

28% report sleeping issues caused by worries.
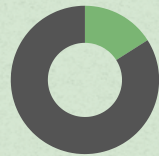
16% feel worthless
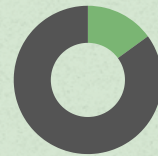
15% express inability to make decisions.

42% of UK Doctoral Researchers answered that they believe having a mental problem during your PhD is the norm and that most of their peers experienced them (Hazell C.M. et al, 2021).

Almost one third of the PhD students in Flanders are at risk of having or developing a mental health disorder. They were also found to experience significantly more mental health problems compared to the highly educated general population.

Factors affecting PhD students' well-being

- The independent nature of PhD work can create isolation.
- Lack of good role models.
- Bullying, harassment and discrimination are extended within academia.
- Financial insecurity.
- Lack of knowledge of the well-being resources and services available.
- Well-being services and initiatives do not meet the needs of PhD students.
- Feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome.
- Difficulties maintaining a work/life balance
- The existing research culture widely considered as toxic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated spaces for PhD students on campus.
- Acknowledge systemic issues caused by the research culture.
- Establish good supervisor-student collaboration.
- Embed well-being into the PhD curriculum.
- Ensure PhD students are fairly compensated by being provided with a living wage.
- Ensure PhD students know where to find well-being support and services.
- Offer targeted services and training for PhD students.
- Develop mentorship programmes and peer to peer support groups.
- Foster the development of a PhD community.
- Involve PhD students and staff in discussions about well-being.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
PHD STUDENTS

Definition:
PhD or Doctor of Philosophy is an abbreviation of the Latin phrase 'philosophiae doctor', is a doctoral research degree and the highest level of academic qualification a student can achieve. It takes between 3 and 4 years to complete, culminating in a thesis offering an original contribution to a specific field to a high academic standard (Benett, M., 2023; Times Higher Education, 2023).

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

There is a growing body of literature looking at PhD mental health and well-being. With existing research consistently finding higher stress levels, mental health concerns and even physical symptoms reported by students. Even studies that sought to explore the positive emotions associated with the doctoral experience reported negative emotions as the dominant affective state for PhD students (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018).

A study on the mental health of PhD students in Flanders (Belgium) showed that the prevalence of health problems amongst PhD students is high with (Levecque et al, 2016):
- 41% reporting constant strain,
- 30% feeling unhappy and depressed.
- 28% report sleeping issues caused by worries.
- 16% feels worthless,
- 15% express inability to make decisions.

Almost one third of the PhD students in Flanders are at risk of having or developing a mental health disorder. They were also found to experience significantly more mental health problems compared to the highly educated general population.

In a study in the UK by PRES only 14% of post graduate researchers reported low levels of anxiety compared to 41% of the general population (Williams S., 2019).

In a survey study by the university of Groningen (Netherlands) more PhD students reported doing a PhD having a negative effect on their mental health than a positive effect and they rate their current mental health substantially lower than during their Bachelors and Masters. Almost 50% of respondents expected that their mental health would improve once they started working outside academia after finishing their PhD (van Rooij et al, 2018).

In a study on the mental health of UK Doctoral Researchers 42% answered that they believe having a mental problem during your PhD is the norm and that most of their peers experienced them, 35.8% considered ending or taking a break from their studies due to poor mental health (Hazell C.M. et al, 2021).

WHAT AFFECTS PHD STUDENTS' WELL-BEING:

Isolation:
The independent nature of PhD work can create isolation. Quite often PhD students must work in isolation for long periods of time, like for example while doing fieldwork, visiting archives, working from home or while writing their thesis. Additionally, PhD students working in interdisciplinary fields might also feel isolated if they do not feel they belong in any department. Isolation can hinder learning, lead to increased anxiety, impact sleeping schedules and focus and can even lead to a decrease in the perceived meaningfulness of their studies and even to complete disengagement (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018; Watson D. et al, 2022; Sverdlik A. et al, 2018).

Lack of good role models:
This is a person who is looked up to by others as an inspirational example to be imitated. These role models are particularly important for women and PoC who are underrepresented in academia. This lack of representation can lead to feelings of not belonging, isolation, and loneliness which can affect their productivity and mental health at work (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Bullying, harassment, and discrimination:
Bullying, harassment and discrimination are extended within academia with women, disabled, LGBTIQA+ , people of colour and mixed-race researchers more likely to experience it; they are groups which have tended to be excluded by academia. Often top-down power dynamics can prevent the disclosure of bullying, harassment, and exploitation (Nicholls H. et al, 2022; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Financial difficulties:
Another common issue relates to financial support from doctoral programs and the financial insecurity students face. In a recent survey, 50% of students reported financial issues as something they are most concerned with since starting their studies. Students with financial struggles have a greater risk for depression (Pervez A. et al, 2021).

Studying for a PhD can be very expensive. According to Ayres Z.J (2022) Some self-fund their studies while others receive some sort of funding from their institution, however they are poorly funded in some circumstances they are being paid at or around the poverty level, especially due to the increased inflation which has not been accompanied by an increase in PhD funding to keep up with this increase. Also, students might face having to pay upfront for attending conferences.

Financial insecurity can impact student's well-being in that they have to worry about paying rent, other living expenses and can make prioritising self-care including eating adequately more difficult due to its unaffordability. To cover these costs some PhD students might consider working additional jobs. Some international students may be constrained by their Visa stipulations in terms of employment hours per week and be unable to take an extra job to cover costs (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Lack of knowledge of the resources and services available:
Sometimes PhD students may not be aware of the services available at their institution, might hold the erroneous perception that they are unsuitable for them or may not be able to properly address their needs and that these services are mainly geared to undergraduate students. This perception may be caused by a lack of signposting or adequate communication through the channels PhD students interact with or because the focus of most well-being campaigns in their campus is on issues that are more likely to affect undergraduate students (Waight E. et al, 2018).

Well-being services and initiatives do not meet the needs of PhD students:
In a 2019 survey only 29% of PhD students said that the mental health services at their institutions were tailored and appropriate to their needs. Most institutions have a reactive approach to supporting students, particularly regarding mental health where they wait until an issue arrives before intervening. Moreover, much of the well-being offer is a one size fits all, they are generic meant to act as a catch all, although this is also due to lack of funding or simply adapted from a similar version for undergraduates. As a result, these initiatives feel disingenuous and as a tick box instead of benefiting students (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Additionally, these services and initiatives do not acknowledge the underlying systemic issues causing problems to students in the first place. They mainly focus on what the PhD student can do to look after themselves. Thus in a way relieving institutions from the responsibility of tackling these systemic issues, which would require a lot more resources to accomplish (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Furthermore, they tend to not be developed in collaboration with PhD students, not considering cultural differences amongst students and much of the advice tends to be ableist resulting in well-being support not being fit for purpose. Also, some people delivering support might be unfamiliar with what PhD programmes are like and thus struggle to provide adequate support when requested (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Lack of permanent employment and uncertainty about the future:
The academic career carries a lot of uncertainties; there are very limited opportunities for young academics to become permanent academic staff members in institutions. Currently many of the contracts are temporary, with poor working conditions and uncertainties about reappointments. Many PhD students who opt for an academic career risk having to constantly move from one contract to another, without having the opportunity to establish themselves in a particular research programme. This has led to some countries struggling with academic staff retention and a decrease in the number of students pursuing a PhD (Huisman J. et al, 2002).

Feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome:
Impostor syndrome "is a mental state characterised by feelings of persistent self-doubt, fraudulence, and fear of failure" despite evidence of recognition and achievements. (Pervez A. et al, 2021)

PhD students tend to develop impostor syndrome because during their undergraduate studies they might have excelled, however in their PhD they find themselves surrounded by other students who are as intelligent as them and they go from exceptional to average amongst their peers which often comes as a shock (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Furthermore, in more prestigious institutions PhD students keep being told that they are in one of the best institutions, that only selects the best and that you need to excel to succeed in academia. This can also contribute towards them feeling they are not up to the institution's standards and expectations (Metcalfe et al, 2018).

Other elements that can also cause impostor syndrome can include the culture of criticism embedded in many PhD programmes, with professors and other peers looking for weaknesses in student's work (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Additionally, PhD students strive to live up to this ideal image of what it means to be an academic, which is someone who can withstand large amounts of stress, can juggle huge workloads and be a high achiever in their field. This might discourage them from seeking help so they are not perceived as frauds and that they cannot live up to what is expected of them. This can lead to PhD students to feel like they do not belong, that they don't deserve their position, that they are not good enough and that their supervisor made a mistake (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Difficulties maintaining a work/life balance:
Academia and its inherent overworking culture often reinforce the notion that dedication to a PhD overrides everything else, including student's personal lives. Many students struggle to juggle social, familial, and even self-care due to the financial constraints, lack of time and motivation caused by the demands of their PhD programme. Which often causes guilt on students for 'wasting' time on social interactions which is seen as detracting from academic progress (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

This work/life imbalance has been found to correlate with higher levels of burnout, depression, and lower well-being. Additionally, if this imbalance continues for a long time students might even consider dropping out of their programme which would be a colossal loss for both the student and the institution in terms of economic, psychosocial and opportunity cost. (Sverdlik A. et al, 2018; Schmidt M. et al, 2018).

The existing research culture:
Research culture in higher education is widely recognised as toxic, often down to the way success is measured in academia. Where hard work is valued above all else and PhD students must often forgo work/life balance to get ahead, by ensuring enough results are produced on a regular basis. Even if they need to work during the weekend or beyond working hours (Martin R. et al, 2023; Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Further issues it is plagued by include, problems with personnel management, peer pressure, high workload demands, paper deadlines, pressure to publish, bullying and harassment, overwork, a prevalence of stress and poor mental health, a lack of diversity, job precarity, frequent evaluations and brutal competition amongst peers. The latter one creates an unkind and aggressive working environment, often preventing them to reach out to their peers for help and support and contributes to an environment where showing weakness can cause the loss of opportunities. A 2019 survey found that about 36% of PhD students had sought help for anxiety or depression for research work associated with stress and 76% responded working over 41+ hours per week. (Martin R. et al, 2023; Nicholls H. et al, 2022; Schmidt M. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018)

It is also widely perceived by PhD students that mental health problems are inevitable and consider those who did not experience them as lucky. They also perceive that the culture seems to normalise and even celebrate suffering in academia. Where PhD students felt they had to show the right amount of struggle and difficulty if they did not, they felt that the whole department and their supervisor did not believe they were taking their PhD seriously. Also academics were seen as encouraging unhealthy work practices and PhD students felt they did not care about their well-being, as some overlook the severe challenges their students might face in academia because if they made it so can everyone else (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Hazell C.M. et al, 2020).

Poor experiences with research supervisors:
The structure and quality of the working relationship between PhDs and their supervisors has been identified as a key factor influencing PhD well-being. (Watson D. et al, 2022). A PhD student's relationship with their supervisor can truly make or break their PhD (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Supervisors have been found to play a major role in student satisfaction, persistence, and academic achievement.
(Watson D. et al, 2022).

They can be a source of support on the one hand by providing emotional support, containing worries, strengthening the doctoral researcher's confidence, pushing them to be a better researcher advocate for their success beyond their PhD and increasing motivation.

On the other they can be a stressor and negatively impact mental health if supervision does not meet the students' needs and expectations, was unhelpful or harmful if for instance the supervisor bullied or gaslight the student (59% of PhD students that had experience bullying said the perpetrator was a supervisor) (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Scmidt M. et al, 2018; Watson D. et al, 2022; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

Some factors that can lead to poor supervision include the supervisor not having the right capabilities and a lack of training on how to effectively supervise PhD students. It can be the case that someone can be greatly respected by their academic achievements and expertise and be a terrible supervisor (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

They might also be hesitant to provide pastoral support. Could be because they feel unsure this is something that is expected from a supervisor and whether they should be the one to provide it. Are concerned they do not have the right expertise for this since they have not received adequate training on how to support students well-being needs and there might not be adequate guidance on how to do this (Waight E. et al, 2018; Martin R. et al ,2023; Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Some supervisors may carry some particularly damaging biases that can damage student well-being. Such as the belief that a PhD is meant to be hard, that suffering while completing a PhD is a rite of passage and since they were able to complete it and be successful you should be able to do it. Which ignores the existence the PhD student may experience which are not applicable to their PhD experience. Another bias is that pastoral care is not their responsibility or they are simply disinterested in the well-being of their students. This can make it difficult for students to receive well-being support from them. Finally, for some supervisors sympathetic to the plight of their students, they might dismiss it after some time because they assume they have gotten over the problem or forgotten about it. (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018; Ayres Z.J, 2022; Waight E. et al, 2018).

Further factors include supervisors not having enough time to act as supervisors to their students, as they are under constant pressure to publish to bring in more funding grants (Ayres Z.J, 2022). PhD students picking up from their supervisors some of the most toxic and unhealthy behaviours, that are part of the current research culture of which supervisors act as conduits for, after whom they role model themselves from. Which include prioritising research over everything or answering emails after working hours, because their supervisors do it and feel they must do it too (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Hazell C.M. et al, 2020; Martin R. et al , 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Establish dedicated spaces for PhD students on campus:
This helps create attachment to the university and help foster a sense of belongingness, an important element of well-being (Nicholls H. et al, 2022). This space can be used by PhD students to discuss work, life, and research with other colleagues. This can be done via peer networks, mentor programmes or events on topics related to life within academia like retreats, PhD cafes or thematic days within departments and even the provision of designated physical spaces on campus or in university buildings for PhD students (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Acknowledge systemic issues caused by the research culture:
HEIs must recognise the role research culture in institutions plays in causing significant stress to PhD students (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Research has shown that there seems to be a culture of normalising and even celebrating suffering in academia (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020). HEIs must realise that the issues are sector wide and systemic, not just specific to a particular institution. This may help PhD students manage their well-being during their PhD (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

For this a two-pronged approach is necessary, which manages symptoms and addresses the causes of systemic issues and moves away from the deficit model towards the social model. It is imperative that efforts to improve and protect the well-being of PhD students is endorsed by the whole institution (Hazell C.M. et al, 2020). Thus staff should lead by example by following health habits such as not making working overtime the rule and taking time off when sick. (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

The pivotal role of supervisors on PhD student well-being:
Several studies claim poor well-being is often related to poor supervision (Universities Denmark, 2023). Thus, it is essential to establish good supervisor-student collaboration, by constituting clear and constructive communication, that forms professional and personal expectations on the direction and quality of the project of both PhD students and supervisors (Universities Denmark, 2023). Moreover, HEIs need to be able to deal firmly with any issues arising in the supervisory relationship, warranting that these occurrences are dealt with swiftly, transparently and fairly for parties (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Additionally, supervisors should be trained to understand, identify, and address well-being concerns or to be able to direct students to the right support and resources available at their institution and how PhD students can access them. Supervisors play an important role in supporting PhD student well-being. as they are ideally placed to notice when their students are becoming stressed, as they are their first point of contact and perform a line management role for them (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018). By being aware of PhD student struggles they can be more open and receptive to discussing them with their students (Pervez A. et al, 2021). Therefore, HEIs should embed emotional support in supervisor training, including training in mental health literacy and the development and use of tools/strategies to manage and improve the supervisory relationship (Watson D. et al, 2019, Metcalfe J. et al, 2018).

Supervisors can also help with combatting impostor syndrome by ensuring their students are getting positive feedback, before moving onto the next research objective supervisors should take a moment to compliment the work their student has done (Ayres Z.J, 2022).

To effectively support PhD students supervisors must also feel their own well-being is a priority for the institution. For this HEIs can reflect the role of supervisor in PhD student well-being in job descriptions, performance reviews, and promotion and progression systems showing the institutional culture fosters well-being and that there is an expectation for supervisors to provide pastoral care (Metcalfe J. et al, 2018). To support supervisor well-being HEIs can also create a peer-to-peer forum for supervisors where they can obtain feedback from other supervisors. Supervisors must also receive regular feedback on their supervision skills (Kismihók G. et ak, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Embed well-being into the PhD curriculum:
This can entail academic supervisors allocating time to allow students to bring up any concerns that might be affecting them and by creating a targeted and sustainable well-being programme. By having this programme take place frequently it would help cement the idea that well-being is a priority for the institution, where everyone should contribute towards an inclusive and pleasant work environment (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

Alleviating financial pressures:
HEIs should look into understanding the financial needs and concerns of their PhD students and ensure that they are fairly compensated by being provided with a living wage, while keeping pace with inflation and that internships are not paid in experience. Also, reimbursements from paying upfront study related costs such as attending a conference should be quick or these costs should be covered by the institution and a hardship fund should be available for students that need it. This could help alleviate a portion of the psychological distress associated with being a PhD student (Pervez A. et al, 2021, Ayres Z.J, 2022).

Ensure PhD students know where to find well-being support and services:
HEIs should endeavour to integrate PhD students into the community during induction and throughout their PhD. During induction PhD students should be introduced to the organisational, professional, and social communities, the obligations associated with their employment and the institutional working life (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Also, during induction, they should be signposted to the services available to them. They can be communicated in a tailored manner to PhD students via posters, in student handbooks or online. This approach could contribute towards changing the support culture at the university by giving visibility to the institution's well-being efforts and demonstrating that well-being is an accepted part of the PhD process (Waight E. et al, 2018).

PhD students must also be made aware about their rights and what resources are awarded to them. This can include clarity on how to change supervisor, sick leave, maternity leave etc (Ayres Z.J, 2022). Further, it must be confirmed students know whom they can turn to for assistance to challenges related with their supervisors or supervision (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Offer targeted services and training for PhD students:
HEIs must guarantee open access to well-being resources, training, and services to PhDs. In many universities they are not able to access these services because they are not permanent staff members or students (Nicholls H. et al, 2022). They must also make sure well-being initiatives are organisationally and economically well established to ensure their continuity and quality and that they are known to PhD students (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Some targeted services and training HEIs can include:

- Counselling and therapy specifically geared to the needs of PhD students (Ayres Z.J, 2022).
- Workshops designed to facilitate personal development, combat impostor syndrome, build individual resilience, and teach strategies that students could use to sustain their own mental health such as mindfulness for example (Watson et al, 2019 and another).
- Psycho education programmes that introduce PhD students to a variety of self-care strategies, allow them to find the strategies that work for them and encourage PhD student to make time to regularly execute their preferred strategies (Hazell C.M et al, 2020)
- Training, counselling, workshops, and seminars in project management, on how to structure and write a dissertation, on delivering teaching which are important parts of the PhD experience. Providing this kind of training can contribute towards well-being as it reduces uncertainty of the PhD process and its quality (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Training which prepares PhD students to establish and maintain good collaborations especially with their supervisors (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Careers seminars to reduce uncertainty about the future after completing a PhD. Where PhD students can hear about career paths both within and outside academia. This will help them with knowing which skills and networks are useful to develop and the existing demands for a variety of career paths (Universities Denmark, 2023).
- Add a section on PhD well-being and non-academic support on the student services website. It would allow students who are not on campus to easily find resources and often serves as a first port of call to find information to students. It can help overcome some potential barriers to access support such as embarrassment or stigma. Therefore, universities should make efforts to understand what sources of online support PhD students access and use, and which may be the most helpful (Waight E. et al, 2018).

Develop mentorship programmes and peer to peer support groups:
Studies have shown that isolation is toxic for PhD students, and that social support can protect against poor mental health. Spending time with peers could be beneficial if there is a sense of shared experience and of walking alongside each other. Friendship was also seen to buffer against stress and protect against mental health problems, through the provision of social and emotional support and help in identifying struggles. Therefore, initiatives that provide PhD students with the opportunity to network and socialise both in and outside of their studies are likely to be beneficial (Hazell C.M et al, 2020).

An example of these initiatives are peer support groups and mentoring. They are an important source of good mental health and professional development as they can facilitate peer to peer learning, experience sharing and help students develop confidence and problem-solving skills (Universities Denmark, 2023; Watson et al, 2019). They have also been found to help with reduced academic anxiety and isolation and help build a sense of community by facilitating social and emotional support (Watson et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2022).

Also, mentorship and peer groups can supplement supervisors by providing other avenues through which students can obtain essential information and benefit from opportunities to further develop the skills and experience required to complete their programmes (Lorenzetti D. et al, 2019). It can be rewarding for PhD students to share knowledge and experiences about the PhD process with others in a similar situation to them, outside of the supervision space (Universities Denmark, 2023).

HEIs could consider facilitating peer support through professional development and training to encourage buy-in from PhD students and others. Furthermore, institutional investments in mentorships and peer support groups can yield significant rewards in terms of student retention, skills development, and programme completion (Lorenzetti D. et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2019; Panayidou, F. et al, 2021).

Foster the development of a PhD community:
HEIs should facilitate the development of a PhD community using an array of methods suited to the circumstances of the institution. This can include virtual communities, cohort training programmes, student-led initiatives, as shared working space, or social events (Watson D. et al, 2019).

Studies have identified the creation of communities as important for well-being. They can serve as a mechanism for sharing knowledge, a repository of resources that could be useful for coping and succeeding in Ph.D. study or even provide emotional support and practical problem solving of issues related to PhD studies and assist with professional and personal development. They are also key for international students who might have limited social networks (Watson D. et al, 2019; Watson D. et al, 2022).

Involve PhD students and staff in discussions about well-being:
When discussing PhD well-being students should be consulted by gathering feedback and evaluating their needs. Additionally, PhD associations should be involved in discussion on well-being as well as academic staff. Inputs from all parties will help staff understand the issues specific to this cohort, especially if supervisors are out of touch with what a PhD programme is like (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

In these discussions honest conversations about mental health management and mental health literacy should be encouraged. Finally, a good framework with enough resources, with the correct actors included and integrated in the institution's organisation and goal setting should be established (Ayres Z.J, 2022; Universities Denmark, 2023).

In this framework a clear division of responsibility of which well-being tasks should be assigned to who and how relevant well-being initiatives can be included in the PhD student's everyday life should be enacted (Universities Denmark, 2023). For instance, at department levels academic leaders can introduce initiatives to create supportive environments for PhD students. This could include promoting mentorship and guidance, fostering a culture of collaboration and a sense of belonging, training people in the department to increase their mental health awareness, and encouraging a work–life balance through social events with family and friends (Nicholls H. et al, 2022).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

University of Manchester (UK): the university offers courses, resources, and toolkits to support PhD supervisors. Including cultivating well-being for PhD supervisors and supporting PhD mental health and well-being (University of Manchester, 2024).

Loughborough University (UK) has a PhD social and support network, organised by other doctoral researchers, where they support PhD students through non-academic issues and organises activities for PhD students to socialise and connect with other students (Loughborough University, 2023; Loughborough PhD Social Support Network, 2023).

Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (Spain) offers a series of transversal courses for its PhD students they include courses on mindfulness to deal with stress, PhD thesis writing and defence in English, how to write abstracts for scientific articles (UAB, 2023).

University of Southern Denmark (Denmark): its library has established special facilities for PhD students such as conversation pods, which can be used for interviews or supervisor meetings, a lounge area, and an open area, which can be used for presentations (Universities Denmark, 2023).

Technical University of Denmark (Denmark) implemented a PhD reform by making clear where PhD students can exert more influence. There is now one PhD committee per PhD school and these new PhD committees concentrate on development and initiatives at the school level where the student's perspective is significant. Also the institution's PhD association is included in several development initiatives at the institutions and is financially supported in relation to its activities (Universities Denmark, 2023).

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FACT SHEET

LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Definition:
LGBTIQA+ Stands For:
L is for lesbian
G is for gay
B is for bisexual
T is for transgender
I is for intersex (Intersex individuals are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary definitions of male or female).
Q is for queer (Questioning)
A is for asexual/aromantic (Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction, while aromantic individuals do not experience romantic attraction).
+ is for other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.
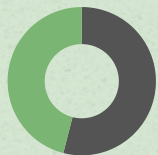
In a UNESCO survey (2021) of young people in Europe, 54% of LGBTIQA+ people said they had been bullied at least once based on their gender identity or sexual orientation.

In the FRA survey (2020) on LGBTIQA+ individuals in Europe, 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.

Only 20.6% of trans students and 36.7% of LGB+ students feel completely safe in campus and LGBTIQA+ students who have experienced some kind of homophobic or transphobic harassment are 2-3 times more likely to consider dropping out (NUS UK, 2014).

Young cohorts of LGBTIQA+ individuals are more likely to experience poor mental health including depression compared to heterosexual individuals (IGLYO, 2013).

Factors affecting LGBTQIA students well-being

- Discrimination and stigma.
- Lack of acceptance and support.
- Mental health challenges.
- Identity exploration and affirmation.
- Physical safety concerns.
- Access to care and supportive resources.
- Intersectional identities.
- Legal and policy context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide culturally competent support and counselling services.
- Provide comprehensive health services.
- Create safe and inclusive spaces.
- Provide LGBTIQA+ affirmative training.
- Establish inclusive and anti-discrimination policies.
- Provide accessible resources including gender affirming resources.
- Promote on campus visibility and representation.
- Foster community partnerships.
- Encourage peer support networks
- Seek feedback and collaboration from LGBTIQA+ students and organisations.
- Be respectful, use the terms, names and pronouns that people use to describe themselves.
- Offer gender-inclusive facilities.
- Foster LGBTIQA+ representation in curricula.
- Support LGBTIQA+ student organisations.
- Instil a sense of belonging amongst LGBTIQA+ students.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Definition

LGBTIQA+ Stands For:
L is for lesbian
G is for gay
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I is for intersex (Intersex individuals are born with physical sex characteristics that do not fit typical binary definitions of male or female.)
Q is for queer (Questioning)
A is for asexual / aromantic (Asexual individuals do not experience sexual attraction, while aromantic individuals do not experience romantic attraction)
+ is for other diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (Green Party, 2024)

"LGBTIQA+" is an inclusive acronym that represents a diverse range of sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expressions. Each letter in the acronym stands for a different identity or characteristic within the LGBTQ+ community. The "+" symbol indicates that the acronym is inclusive of additional identities and variations within the LGBTQ+ community. Other variations of this acronym exist and acronym choice can vary depending on the groups or issues being discussed and the available evidence (Carman, M., et al, 2020).

Understanding and using the language/terminology associated with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer, asexual and other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQA+) is very important.

Moreover, LGBTIQA+ people are not a homogenous group. There is a great deal of diversity within and across LGBTIQA+ communities. There is also a wide range of terms and language related to bodies, gender, sexual orientation, sexual attraction, sexual behaviour, and legal and medical processes.

The LGBTIQA+ Spectrum Is Made Up Of:
- Sexual or romantic orientations: this is romantic and sexual attraction to people of different genders, the same, to more or none (Green Party, 2024).
- Gender identities: one's sense of whether they are a man, a woman, both, or neither. Gender identity may or may not match a person's biological sex (CFCA, 2022; Green Party, 2024). Therefore, there are two main groups of people depending on their gender identities:
- Cisgender people: those whose gender identity corresponds with what they were assigned at birth (CFCA, 2022).
- Trans people: those whose gender differs from what was assigned at birth (Trans Hub, 2024).
- Intersex conditions: They are people who have innate sex characteristics that do not fit medical and social norms for female or male bodies (Intersex Human Rights Australia, 2021). Some people have physical characteristics, primarily and/or secondary of both sexes. These conditions may include: chromosome disorders, atypical genitalia or reproductive organs, overproduction or underproduction of sex-related hormones (Green Party, 2024).

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The assumption that people are heterosexual, cisgender or have sex characteristics that fit medical norms for female or male bodies (dominant model) has a negative effect on the health, education and well-being of LGBTIQA+ people. The binary model is very inappropriate to explain the complexity and diversity around those questions.

These students may face unique challenges related to discrimination, prejudice, and lack of visibility in educational environments. Providing support, resources, and inclusive policies can help create safe and affirming spaces for LGBTIQA+ students in European higher educational institutions.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES

Research shows young cohorts of LGBTIQA+ individuals are more likely to experience poor mental health including depression, self-harm and suicidal feelings compared to heterosexual individuals (IGLYO, 2013). Moreover, they tend to perceive their university campus's climate as more hostile and dangerous than their heterosexual peers (Amodeo et al, 2020).

In a UNESCO survey of more than 17000 young people in Europe aged 13 to 24, 54% of LGBTIQA+ people said they had been bullied at least once based on their gender identity or sexual orientation (UN, 2021).

According to the report by the Fundamental Rights Agency (2020) on their survey on LGBT people in Europe, 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.

According to the survey on LGTB+ individuals in Europe by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2020):
- 37% of respondents felt discriminated against in areas of life other than work which included university.
- 29.36% of young respondents felt discriminated against by school or university personnel (IGLYO & ILGA, 2022).
- Respondents aged 15 to 24 experienced higher rates of harassment, with over half of these aggravations involving someone from school, college (Avila Rodriguez, R., 2021).

Data from the NUS UK study on LGBTIQA+ students' experiences in higher education (2014):
- Just 20.6% of trans students and 36.7% of LGB+ students feel completely safe in campus.
- 20% of LGB+ and 33% of trans students have experienced at least one form of bullying and harassment on campus.
- LGBT+ students who have experienced some kind of homophobic or transphobic harassment are 2-3 times more likely to consider dropping out.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE WELL-BEING OF LGBTIQA+ STUDENTS

Several factors can significantly impact the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students in educational settings. These factors are often interconnected and may vary depending on the individual's experiences, identity, and social context. Here are some key factors that can affect the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students:

Discrimination and Stigma:
LGBTIQA+ students may face discrimination, prejudice, and stigma based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression. This can manifest in various forms, including verbal harassment, physical assault, bullying, social exclusion, and institutional discrimination, leading to feelings of shame, fear, and rejection.

In higher education homophobia and transphobia continue to be significant problems. Research has shown that microaggressions and heterosexist harassment were linked to worsening academic outcomes and as a risk factor for dropping out of university due to a lack of feelings of belongingness and social acceptance (Byrom, N. et al, 2022; Amodeo, AL., 2020).

An apparent lack of clear procedures to protect LGBTIQA+ students from harassment means they are less likely to report these incidents as they do not believe anything will be done about them (Bachmann, C L., Gooch, B., 2018; Acciari, L. et al, 2014).

Lack of Acceptance and Support:
Many LGBTIQA+ students experience a lack of acceptance and support from peers, family members, educators, and institutions. Rejection from loved ones, negative attitudes from classmates, a lack of safe social spaces where LGBTQA+ can meet and interact and a lack of visibility or representation in curricula and policies can contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation. Among young people suicide and attempted suicide rates are higher than for heterosexual people (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Despite evidence of negative experiences and challenges, LGBTIQA+ students overall still had a positive view of universities and tended to find university a 'safer space' than the rest of society. Some research has shown that attending university enabled LGBTIQA+ students to begin a new stage in life. Where they could form new social networks and in a way be themselves, by coming out as LGB or trans, as they might not have been able to display this part of their identity in their original environment (Pichardo Galán. J. I. & Puche Cabezas, I., 2019; Formby, E., 2017).

Mental Health Challenges:
LGBTIQA+ individuals are at higher risk of experiencing mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation compared to their heterosexual and cisgender peers. Minority stress, internalised homophobia, and gender dysphoria can exacerbate mental health challenges among LGBTIQA+ students, impacting their overall well-being and academic performance.

Identity Exploration and Affirmation:
LGBTIQA+ students may experience a process of identity exploration and affirmation during their time in education. This process can involve coming out to themselves and others, navigating questions of identity and belonging, and seeking validation and support from peers and mentors. Positive experiences of affirmation and acceptance can enhance well-being, while negative experiences of rejection or invalidation can have adverse effects.

Physical Safety Concerns:
LGBTIQA+ students may face safety concerns related to their sexual orientation, gender identity, or expression, both within and outside of educational settings. Fear of harassment, violence, or bullying based on their perceived or actual identity can impact their sense of safety and security, leading to hypervigilance and avoidance behaviours.

Access to care and supportive Resources:
Access to supportive resources, services, and communities is essential for the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students. This includes access to LGBTQ+ student organisations, safe spaces, affirmative counselling services, and knowledgeable healthcare providers who understand their unique needs and experiences. LGBTIQA+ people are more likely than the general population to report unfavourable experiences accessing healthcare. These negative experiences contribute to a deterioration of well-being because they will delay or not seek out care (IGLYO, 2013; Zeeman, L et al, 2017).

According to IGLYO (2013) these bad experiences stem from negative reactions from healthcare practitioners when they disclosed their sexual orientation, a lack of understanding from healthcare professionals of LGBTIQA+ health issues, lack of access to comprehensive information on health that is not inclusive to other genders and sexual identities and concerns over confidentiality and privacy.

Another issue is a lack of essential mental health resources. Crucial support systems, such as gender-affirming care for transgender people or general therapy for LGBTQIA+ individuals, remain out of reach. There are often long wait times, they are expensive and there is also a lack of professionals with specific training for the unique mental health care needs of LGBTQIA+ people (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Intersectional Identities:
LGBTIQA+ students may have intersecting identities based on factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, and immigration status. Intersectional forms of discrimination and marginalisation can compound the challenges faced by LGBTIQA+ students, exacerbating disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and support.

Legal and Policy Context:
The legal and policy context surrounding LGBTQ+ rights and protections can impact the well-being of LGBTIQA+ students. Legal recognition of same-sex relationships, anti-discrimination laws, and inclusive policies in educational institutions can contribute to a more supportive and inclusive environment for LGBTIQA+ students, while gaps or limitations in legal protections may pose barriers to their safety and well-being.
Studies have shown a clear link between a European country's stigmatising legislation and attitudes and the life satisfaction of LGBTIQA+ individuals living in that country. Especially as LGBTIQA+ legal rights and protection, population attitudes and acceptance of LGBTIQA+ people vary across individual countries (Bränström, R. et al, 2024). With countries like Hungary banning legal gender recognition (IGLYO et al, 2023).

Moreover, LGBTIQA+ issues are at times more politicised which makes it harder for universities to address them. In societies where these issues are divisive topics it is harder to gain consensus about including them in institutional policies (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing these factors requires a multifaceted approach that involves creating inclusive and affirming educational environments, implementing anti-discrimination policies, providing comprehensive support services, fostering allyship and advocacy, and centering the voices and experiences of LGBTIQA+ students in decision-making processes. By prioritising the well-being and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ students, educational institutions can create safer, more supportive, and equitable learning environments for all students.

Here are some recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to effectively care for LGBTIQA+ students:

Provide Culturally Competent Support and Counselling Services:
Ensure that counselling services are staffed with professionals who are knowledgeable about LGBTIQA+ issues and provide culturally competent care. Offer individual and group counselling sessions that address the unique challenges and experiences of LGBTIQA+ students, including coming out, navigating relationships, and managing mental health concerns. Offer targeted career support to LGBT+ students to enhance their employability (University of Essex, 2017).

Provide Comprehensive Health Services:
Ensure that health services on campus are inclusive and responsive to the needs of LGBTIQA+ students. Provide access to LGBTIQA+ affirming healthcare providers, mental health counselling services, sexual health resources, and gender-affirming care for transgender and nonbinary students. Improving access and engagement to appropriate services is important, due to the poorer mental health and substantially higher rates of depression, anxiety and suicide experienced by LGBTIQA+ people compared to the general population.

Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces:
Designate safe spaces on campus where LGBTIQA+ students can gather, connect with peers, and access resources in a supportive and affirming environment. Ensure that these spaces are free from discrimination, harassment, and judgement, and promote visibility and inclusion of LGBTIQA+ identities across campus.

Provide LGBTIQA+ Affirmative Training:
Offer training and professional development opportunities for staff, faculty, and student leaders on LGBTIQA+ terminology, allyship, cultural competency, what constitutes anti-LGBT+ discrimination or abuse and how to tackle it and best practices for supporting LGBTIQA+ students (Formby, E., 2019; Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L. et al, 2018).
This training should emphasise the importance of creating inclusive and affirming environments and provide strategies for addressing bias and discrimination. Training should be incorporated into orientation programs and ongoing professional development initiatives.

Establish Inclusive and Anti-Discrimination Policies:
Develop and implement inclusive policies that recognize and affirm the gender identities and expressions of all students. This includes policies related to name and gender marker changes, toilets and housing accommodations and anti-discrimination policies that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.
Enshrine, enforce, and promote zero tolerance policies regarding homophobic, transphobic behaviour, harassment, and bullying both on campus and accommodation run by the university (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018). Additionally, ensure that anti-discrimination policies are clearly communicated and signposted to all students, faculty, and staff, and enforce procedures for addressing complaints of discrimination or harassment (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018). Establish a point of contact so that students can easily report abuse or discrimination against them or someone they know and what to expect once a report has been made (Acciari, L., 2014; Bachmann, C L., 2018).

Provide Accessible Resources:
Ensure that information, resources, and support services related to LGBTIQA+ issues are easily accessible to all students, including those who may be studying remotely or have limited mobility. Offer online resources, virtual support groups, and remote counselling services to reach students who may not be able to access campus-based resources.

Promote Visibility and Representation:
Increase visibility and representation of LGBTIQA+ identities and experiences through awareness campaigns, cultural programmes, curricula, and extracurricular activities. Celebrate LGBTIQA+ Pride Month and other LGBTQ+ awareness events with activities such as pride parades, guest speakers, film screenings, educational workshops and art exhibits that promote inclusion, understanding and acceptance.
The institution's commitment to LGBTIQA+ inclusion should be visible and be present via the implementation of and support for appropriate policies and practices and for it to be materially and symbolically present across campus spaces (Formby, E., 2019; Pichardo Galán. J. I. et al, 2019).

Foster Community Partnerships:
Collaborate with local LGBTIQA+ community organisations, healthcare providers, and advocacy groups to expand support services and resources available to LGBTIQA+ students. Establish partnerships that provide access to LGBTIQA+ affirming healthcare, legal assistance, and social support networks both on and off campus.

Encourage Peer Support Networks:
Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs where LGBTIQA+ students can connect with peers who share similar experiences and identities. Provide opportunities for peer-led initiatives, support groups, and social events that promote community building and peer support among LGBTIQA+ students.

Seek Feedback and Collaboration:
Regularly seek feedback from LGBTIQA+ students and organisations on their experiences, needs, and priorities for improving support services and creating a more inclusive campus environment. Collaborate with LGBTIQA+ students in decision-making processes, policy development, and programming to ensure that their voices are heard and respected by creating avenues for students to provide input on policies, programming, and initiatives that directly impact their lives and well-being.

Be respectful
Use the terms, names and pronouns that people use to describe themselves. If you're not sure about someone's pronouns, you can ask them respectfully. Staff working on campus should be made aware of the need for sensitive and non-discriminatory language use. Such as to not misname or misgender any students (or staff) and to avoid making assumptions about students using language which can unintentionally exclude them

Offer Gender-Inclusive Facilities:
Ensure that campus facilities, including restrooms, changing rooms, and housing options, are gender-inclusive and accessible to all students, regardless of gender identity or expression. Provide gender-neutral toilets and housing accommodations to accommodate the needs of transgender and nonbinary students and make sure they are clearly signposted (Formby, E. 2015 & 2017).

Offer Gender-Affirming Resources:
Provide resources and support for transgender and nonbinary students seeking to affirm their gender identity, including access to gender-affirming healthcare, counselling, legal resources, and information on name and gender marker changes (Acciari, L., 2014; Formby, E. 2015).

Foster LGBTIQA+ Representation in curricula:
Increase visibility and representation of LGBTIQA+ individuals and experiences in curricula (Byrom, N. et al, 2022; Acciari, L., 2014), textbooks, and classroom discussions across disciplines. Incorporate LGBTQ+ history, literature, and contributions into academic programming to promote understanding and appreciation of diverse identities and experiences. Increase the visibility of LGBT+ staff and students through the development of role models, testimonials, and case studies (University of Essex, 2017).

Support LGBTIQA+ Student Organisations:
Provide funding, space, and administrative support for LGBTIQA+ student organisations and advocacy groups on campus. Collaborate with these organisations to organise events, workshops, and initiatives that promote LGBTIQA+ visibility, education, and advocacy. LGBTIQA+ students tend to be very active in student organisations and in some instances even play a role in LGBTIQA+ student's choice of university. They provide a lot of support to them once they are there (Acciari, L., 2014; Pichardo Galán. J. I. et al, 2019).

Instil a sense of belonging
HEIs should strive to instil a sense of belonging through academic and social integration. It can help prevent student dropout, foster academic development and higher academic success. This can be done for instance by allaying LGBTIQA+ students' fear about safety on campus, encouraging positive interactions with faculty and academics, promoting open dialogue, and organising activities that seek to reduce stigma (Formby, E., 2015; Acciari, L., 2014; Byrom, N. et al, 2022; IGLYO, 2023).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Southampton Solent University held human library events, open to students, staff and local communities. The initiative lends out people who talk about themselves and their lives to encourage understanding and empathy for people whose sexuality, religion or mental health condition has made them subject to prejudice and stigma (BBC, 2019).

University of Worcester organised a training programme for students and staff on transgender education and support (Callander, J., 2020).

University of Iceland: Together NGO Samtökin '78 signed an agreement where everyone participating in teacher training will be trained on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIGESC) issues (IGLYO, 2022).

University of Valencia, University of La Laguna and University of Castilla La Mancha have adopted protocols regarding transgender students and how to accommodate them (IGLYO, 2022).

University of Zaragoza: They have introduced a strategic plan on encouraging respect, diversity, and equality of LGBT+ people (OUAD, 2024).

Complutense University of Madrid: They established an office of sexual diversity and gender identity where they offer support in case of discrimination, help with name change for transgender students, offer training and seminars, and organise events (Unidad de Diversidad, 2024).

Ruhr University Bochum: They installed gender neutral toilets and changing rooms (Ruhr University Bochum, 2024).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Definition:
A student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education" (Shapiro, S. et al, 2014). These students typically come from countries outside of Europe, and they enrol in various educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and research institutions.

In a study by Student Minds on mental health inequalities for international students in the UK, 47% of international students self-reported having mental health.(Frampton, N., 2022).
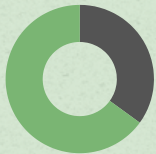
In a survey, 35% of students reported feeling always or quite often stressed or anxious...

In 2021 there were 1.52 million students from abroad undertaking higher education studies in the EU

... and 42% feel that they might not be able to complete their studies (Smitjes, J., 2023).

Around 24.8% of them were studying in Germany, followed by 16,6% studying in France and 8.9% in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2023).

Factors affecting international students' well-being

- Cultural adjustment.
- Academic pressure.
- Financial stress.
- Limited social support.
- Difficulty finding suitable and affordable accommodation.
- Issues accessing healthcare services.
- Discrimination and Xenophobia.
- Limited proficiency in the language of instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically designed to support international students.
- Offer language support services.
- Develop comprehensive orientation programs to help international students acclimate to their new environment.
- Organise cultural integration activities to encourage domestic and international students to get to know each other.
- Establish mentorship programmes.
- Provide counselling and mental health services which are readily available and culturally sensitive.
- Provide financial assistance, if needed.
- Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment.
- Establish feedback mechanisms, to gather input from international students about their experiences and needs.
- Collaborate with local community organisations, embassies, international student associations, and alumni networks.

WISE
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Definition:
International students can be defined as a "student who moves to another country (the host country) for the purpose of pursuing tertiary or higher education" (Shapiro, S. et al, 2014). These students typically come from countries outside of Europe, and they enrol in various educational institutions such as universities, colleges, and research institutions.

International students in Europe contribute to the cultural diversity of academic communities, bring different perspectives to classrooms, and often enrich the overall learning environment.
They may come to Europe for short-term programs, such as language courses or summer schools, or for longer-term degree programs ranging from undergraduate to doctoral levels.
Internationally mobile students are different from two other common definitions of international students, namely "foreign students" and "credit-mobile students."

Foreign students: refers to non-citizens who are currently enrolled in higher education degree courses but who have not necessarily crossed a border to study (Migration Data Portal, 2024; Clark, N., 2009).

Credit-mobile students: refers to "study-abroad" or exchange students, such as those in the EU's Erasmus programme. These students remain enrolled in their home countries while receiving a small number of credits from foreign institutions (Migration Data Portal, 2024).

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

In 2021 there were 1.52 million students from abroad undertaking higher education studies in the EU. Around 24.8% of them were studying in Germany, followed by 16,6% studying in France and 8.9% in the Netherlands (Eurostat, 2023).
In the 2022 i-Graduate Global Student Experience survey, 35% of students reported feeling always or quite often stressed or anxious and 42% feel that they might not be able to complete their studies. Furthermore, in another study 59% of international students in the Netherlands reported struggling with mental health (Smitjes, J., 2023).

In a study by Student Minds on mental health inequalities for international students in the UK, 47% of international students compared to 62% of UK domiciled students self-reported having mental health issues. However, they did report high levels of concern on a range of issues such as well-being (81% for mental well-being and 70% for physical well-being), quality of their student experience, finances or a need for greater support (Frampton, N., 2022).
According to the report this misalignment might be due to the way in which well-being and mental health is conceptualised, understood and communicated which might differ from other cultures and countries. In fact, 62% of international students with experience of mental health issues reported having no intention to disclose them to their university compared to 52% of UK domiciled students (Frampton, N., 2022).

FACTORS AFFECTING WELL-BEING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

International students play a crucial role in enriching the cultural and academic landscape of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) worldwide. However, they often encounter unique needs and challenges during their educational journey:

Cultural Adjustment:
Adapting to a new culture, language, and social norms can be challenging and may lead to feelings of isolation, loneliness or homesickness.

Academic Pressure:
The demands of coursework, exams, and assignments can be overwhelming, especially when coupled with language barriers or unfamiliar academic systems.

Financial Stress:
International students often face financial challenges, including tuition fees, living expenses, and currency exchange rates, which can impact their wellbeing and ability to focus on their studies.

Social Support:
Limited social networks and a lack of familial or community support systems may contribute to feelings of loneliness or isolation.

Accommodation and Housing:
Difficulty finding suitable and affordable accommodation, navigating rental agreements, or experiencing housing issues can add stress to an international student's life.

Healthcare Access:
Accessing healthcare services, understanding health insurance policies, and navigating healthcare systems in a foreign country can be daunting and impact physical and mental wellbeing.

Discrimination and Xenophobia:
International students may face discrimination, xenophobia, or racism based on their nationality, race or cultural background, which can negatively affect their sense of belonging and overall well-being.

Language Proficiency:
Limited proficiency in the language of instruction may hinder academic performance and social integration, leading to stress and frustration.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Addressing the diverse needs and challenges of international students in Higher Education Institutions, is crucial for fostering a supportive and inclusive learning environment. By implementing targeted support services and policies, HEIs can enhance the educational experience and success of international students, enriching the global academic community.

By implementing these recommendations, HEIs can create a more inclusive and supportive environment that enhances the wellbeing and success of international students studying in Europe. Here are some recommendations:

Dedicated Support Services:

Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically designed to support international students. These offices can provide assistance with visa and immigration issues, academic advising, cultural adjustment, and practical matters such as housing and healthcare. This may involve creating integrated support centres or hubs where students can access a range of services in one location.

Orientation Programs:

Develop comprehensive orientation programs to help international students acclimate to their new environment. These programs should cover academic expectations, campus resources, cultural norms, and practical information about living in the host country.

Language Support:

Offer language support services, including language courses, conversation partners, and language proficiency assessments. This can help international students improve their language skills and feel more confident in their academic and social interactions.

Cultural Integration Initiatives:

Organise events, workshops, and cultural exchange programs to promote interaction and understanding between international and domestic students. Encourage participation in student clubs, societies, and cultural organisations to foster cross-cultural friendships and collaborations.

Mentorship Programs:

Establish mentorship programs pairing international students with experienced mentors, such as faculty members, staff, or senior students. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and practical advice to help international students navigate academic and social challenges.

Accessible Counselling Services:

Ensure that counselling and mental health services are readily available and culturally sensitive. Provide counselling sessions in multiple languages and train counsellors to address the unique challenges faced by international students, including homesickness, cultural adjustment, and academic stress.

Financial Assistance:

Offer scholarships, grants, and financial aid packages specifically for international students to help alleviate financial burdens. Provide information about part-time job opportunities, internships, and work-study programs to support students in covering living expenses.

Safe and Inclusive Campus:

Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming campus environment by promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Implement policies and procedures to address discrimination, harassment, and xenophobia, and provide training for faculty, staff, and students on cultural competence and intercultural communication.

Feedback Mechanisms:

Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or focus groups, to gather input from international students about their experiences and needs. Use this feedback to continuously improve support services and programs.

Partnerships and Collaboration:

Collaborate with local community organisations, embassies, international student associations, and alumni networks to provide additional support and resources for international students. Strengthen partnerships with employers to facilitate internships, job placements, and career development opportunities.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Charles University (Czechia): the university offers an array of services to international students. Some include a student well-being advisor who provides support for international students during their adaptation to another country, on visa issues, overcoming language barriers and even support when they feel lonely or overwhelmed by their studies. They also organise online pre-arrival meetings, for incoming international students to answer practical questions, meet other students, to reduce stress from moving to a foreign country and provide useful tips for an easy start.

Maastricht University (Netherlands): they offer an International Student Ambassador programme. It aims to help new students adapt to life in Maastricht by pairing a group of new students with an ambassador (a current student), during their first weeks in the city (Maastricht University, 2024).

University of the Arts London (UK) developed a series of workshops for all students on intercultural exchanges (Ofs, 2023).

University of Bradford (UK) developed a virtual housing fayre to help international students make informed accommodation choices before they arrive in the UK (Ofs, 2023).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET
DISABLED STUDENTS

Definition:
Those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others (UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006)

Only 29.4% of persons with disabilities attain a tertiary degree compared to 43.8% of those without disabilities (ECEU, 2024).

Research has shown a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal risk among students with disabilities, as well as higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Additionally, they were also more likely to use mental health services compared to their counterparts without disabilities.

According to a Eurostudent survey, **25%** disabled students often feel out of place in higher education.

15% of students reported having a disability. The types of disability most often reported are mental health issues, physical chronic diseases, or other long-standing health issues (Eurostudent, 2021).

36 % of students with impairments rate the public and institutional support they receive as not at all sufficient (Eurostudent, 2021).

70 % of students report that their impairment is not noticeable (Eurostudent, 2021).

Factors affecting disabled students well-being

- Physical barriers.
- The availability and adequacy of accommodations and support services.
- Experiencing discrimination or microaggressions.
- Lack of social inclusion.
- Managing physical and mental health aspects of their disability.
- Additional costs associated with disability-related expenses.
- Fear of disclosing their disability out of concern of being treated differently.
- Academic underachievement.
- Attitudes of professors and staff.
- Intersectional discrimination and safety concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Prepare summer schools and courses to help students manage the change.
- Implement accessibility measures and services such as making campus accessible via physical accommodations and providing learning materials in alternative formats.
- Provide dedicated support services for disabled students.
- HEIs should strive to provide access to counselling that focuses on psychological and mental health aspects that affect people with disabilities.
- Conduct regular accessibility audits to identify barriers and prioritise accessibility improvements.
- Provide information and communication materials in accessible formats.
- Develop peer support programs and networks.
- Institutions should encourage the creation of culture that will make students feel safe and encourage them to disclose their disability.
- Establish feedback mechanisms, to gather input from disabled students.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
DISABLED STUDENTS

Definition:
Based on the UN definition of the Convention On The Rights Of Persons With Disabilities (CRPD) disabled students can be defined as people with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in educational activities without accommodations or support (Hayes, A.M. & Bulat, J. 2017). Enabling the participation of disabled people in higher education is a goal of the EU (Hauschildt, K. et al, 2021).

Disabilities can include but are not limited to:

1.**Physical disabilities**: substantial and long-term condition affecting a part of a person's body that impairs and limits their physical functioning, mobility, stamina or dexterity. People may be born with them or acquire it late in life due to an accident, injury, illness or as a side effect of a medical condition. Eg. limb loss, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, epilepsy (Berg, V., 2024).

2. **Sensory disabilities:** usually refers to the impairment of the senses such as sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, and/or spatial awareness. It may include conditions of visual impairment, blindness, hearing loss, and deafness (Pivin-Bachler, J. et al, 2024).

3. **Cognitive disabilities:** refers to when an individual has limitations or challenges in performing one or more types of cerebral tasks (FCC, 2016). This may include learning disabilities, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorders, or intellectual disabilities.

4. **Psychosocial disabilities:** a disability that may arise from a mental health issue (NSW Government, 2023). They can include depression, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

5. **Chronic Health Conditions:** they are conditions that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical or limit activities of daily living or both (CDC, 2024). Some examples of chronic health issues include but are not limited to diabetes, chronic pain, or autoimmune disorders.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES

Around 101 million people in the EU (27%) have some form of disability. Only 29.4% of persons with disabilities attain a tertiary degree compared to 43.8% of those without disabilities.
- 52% of persons with disabilities feel discriminated against.
- 28.4% of persons with disabilities are at risk of poverty or social exclusion compared to 17.8% of persons without disabilities (European Council of the European Union, 2024).

In a study by Universia group on Spanish disabled students in higher education (Universia Fundacion, 2023):
- 20% of students reported experiences of discrimination in university.
- 20% claimed that there is a difference in how they are treated by their peers compared to other non-disabled peers.
- 15% claimed that professors treat them differently compared to other non-disabled students.

Co-funded by the European Union

According to a EUROSTUDENT survey (Hauschildt, K. et al, 2021):
- 15% of students reported having a disability.
- The types of disability most often reported are mental health issues, physical chronic diseases, or other long-standing health issues.
- 70 % of students report that their impairment is not noticeable.
- 36 % of students with impairments rate the public and institutional support they receive as not at all sufficient.
- 25% disabled students often feel out of place in higher education.

Research which compared the mental health needs between disabled and non-disabled students have shown a higher prevalence of depression, anxiety, non-suicidal self-injury, and suicidal risk among students with disabilities, as well as higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts. Additionally, they were also more likely to use mental health services compared to their counterparts without disabilities (Solis Garcia, P. et al, 2024; Coduti, W.A. et al, 2016).

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF DISABLED STUDENTS

Disabled students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) may face various challenges related to accessing education, participating in academic activities, and navigating campus environments. These challenges can affect their well-being and may include physical barriers, communication barriers, inaccessible learning materials, discrimination, stigma, and lack of support services depending on the nature of the disability and the specific circumstances of the student. Here are some common examples:

Accessibility and Mobility:
Physical barriers, while many universities have adapted their infrastructure to support students with reduced mobility many haven't. These may include inaccessible buildings, classrooms, and facilities, which can pose significant challenges for disabled students. Lack of ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and parking spaces can restrict mobility and hinder access to educational resources and campus amenities.
These barriers have a negative impact on student participation and can lead to feelings of exclusion, shame, isolation, discomfort, sadness and might even force them to change or select programmes and institutions based on their accessibility (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023; Fernández-Batanero J.M. et al, 2022; Brau, L., & Ly, M., 2024). Access to reliable transportation options and mobility assistance is crucial for disabled students to navigate campus, attend classes, and participate in extracurricular activities.

Academic Accommodations and Support Services:
The availability and adequacy of accommodations and support services, such as assistive technologies, note-taking assistance, sign language interpreters, extended time for exams, and accessible formats for course materials, can greatly impact the well-being of disabled students. Difficulty accessing necessary accommodations or experiencing delays in receiving support can contribute to academic stress and feelings of frustration or inadequacy.
Moreover, universities tend to have a one size fits all approach for accommodations instead of an individualised one, meaning some accommodations are ineffective. It can also be the case that they are not granted, and the student must fight for them (Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018; Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016; Riva, E. et al, 2024). Also, limited or unsupportive disability services can make students feel the university does not care about them (Fleming, A.R, 2017).

Discrimination and micro aggressions:
Students experiencing overt discrimination or ableist microaggressions experienced higher levels of anxiety and depression as well as a lower academic self-concept (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023). Microaggressions can be defined as subtle verbal, behavioural, or environmental slights and insults that communicate a hostile or derogatory message based on an individual's social status (Lett, K. et al, 2019). Institutional environments which promote or respond ineffectively to disability discrimination are detrimental to the well-being of students (Lett, K. et al, 2019).

Social Inclusion:
Disabled students may experience social isolation, stigma, and discrimination, which can affect their sense of belonging and well-being. Barriers to social participation, such as inaccessible social events, lack of peer support, or negative attitudes from others, can contribute to feelings of loneliness and exclusion.

Physical and Mental Health:
Managing the physical and mental health aspects of their disability, as well as any co-occurring health conditions, can impact the well-being of disabled students. Chronic pain, fatigue, medication side effects, and mental health challenges such as anxiety or depression may affect their ability to engage in academic activities and maintain overall well-being.
Additionally, for some students their disability impacted their academic performances as higher education placed substantial demands on them and they needed to work harder than their nondisabled peers to complete assignments (Brewer, G. et al 2023; Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018).

Financial Concerns:
Additional costs associated with disability-related expenses, such as medical equipment, medications, specialised transportation, accessible accommodation, assistive technologies or personal care assistance, can create financial strain for disabled students. Limited financial resources may impact their ability to access necessary support services and participate in extracurricular activities.

Disclosure and Self-Advocacy:
Decisions about whether to disclose their disability to faculty, staff, and peers, and how to advocate for their needs, can be complex and stressful for disabled students because of the fear of stigma and discrimination.
Concerns about being treated differently or facing negative consequences, may lead to reluctance to seek necessary accommodations or support services, preventing them from accessing the support and accommodation that would help them in their studies (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Social Isolation:
Stigma surrounding disabilities can lead to social isolation and exclusion for disabled students. Negative attitudes, stereotypes, and misconceptions about disability from non-disabled peers and staff may result in peer rejection, marginalisation, and difficulties forming meaningful social connections. Also, the extra time spent on their studies limits their opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Psychological Distress:
Experiencing stigma and discrimination can contribute to psychological distress, including feelings of shame, embarrassment, low self-esteem, and depression. Constantly having to navigate negative stereotypes and societal prejudices can take a toll on the mental health and well-being of disabled students. A disability can take away many aspects of your identity, leaving you questioning who you are, what your value is, and where you fit in society. It's easy to start feeling useless and empty, especially if you can't do the same work or activities as you did before.

Academic Underachievement:
The impact of their disability on their daily lives, for some students their disability impacted their academic performances, as higher education placed substantial demands them and they needed to work harder than their nondisabled peers to complete assignments (Brewer, G. et al 2023; Langørgen, E., & Magnus, E., 2018). Due to this disabled students face many misconceptions and stigma regarding their ability to succeed academically (Solis Garcia, P. et al, 2024).
Stigma and discrimination may undermine the academic performance and achievement of disabled students. Fear of judgement or discrimination from peers and faculty members may lead to decreased participation in class discussions, reluctance to seek help or accommodations, and avoidance of challenging academic opportunities.

They can also play a significant role in their well-being as studies have identified them as the most important stakeholder in the classrooms and the lives of students with disabilities (Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020). Some professors are unwilling to implement accommodations with some even disbelieving the student required accommodations, particularly students with invisible disabilities (Bartolo, P. et al, 2023).

This attitude may be due in part to a lack of awareness amongst teaching staff of the different needs that students may have. Additionally, students often must continually ask for the same accommodations to support them however often this support is denied (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016; McNicholl, A. et al, 2019).

Additionally, some professors are unwilling to adjust their ways of teaching to use a methodology which promotes inclusion in the classroom according to student needs (Hauschildt, K. et al ,2021; Fernández-Batanero J.M. et al, 2022). Moreover, some are unwilling to carry out measures such as sending the lecture notes and slides in advance (Kendall, L., & Tarman, B., 2016).

Intersectional Discrimination and Safety Concerns:
Disabled students who belong to marginalised or underrepresented groups may face intersectional discrimination based on multiple aspects of their identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status. Intersectional forms of discrimination can compound the challenges and barriers faced by disabled students, like bullying, harassment, or victimisation based on disability status.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR DISABLED STUDENTS

To address these factors it is necessary to create an inclusive and supportive environment where all students feel valued, respected, and empowered. Thus promoting the well-being and success of disabled students in higher education.

Creating a friendly and inclusive environment for disabled students in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) requires a multifaceted approach, including implementing a range of supportive measures and accommodations. By implementing these measures HEIs can create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment that empowers disabled students to thrive academically, socially, and personally during their time in higher education.

Here are some recommendations for HEIs to consider:

Transition support mechanisms:
Prepare summer schools and courses to help students manage the change, particularly when they can find it challenging. For example, some summer schools are specifically designed to help students with anxiety or autistic spectrum conditions settle in. It's good to be prepared and know what to expect, and transition guides can be useful to help students get ready for the change.

Accessibility measures:
HEIs can offer accessibility services and accommodations to support students with disabilities. This may include accessible campus facilities through physical accommodations such as wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, and tactile signage.

Also digital accessibility measures are increasingly important, including providing accessible online learning platforms, materials in alternative formats, and assistive technologies. This could include adding subtitles to audiovisual materials, provide class notes in Word format, use different assessment methods, allow the recording of teaching, make course materials detailed and available quickly (Heffernan, T., 2023; OIAHE, 2017; Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020).

Further measures can also include note-taking assistance, and a broad variety of exam accommodations to ensure equal access to education for all students. These initiatives promote inclusivity and remove learning barriers for students with disabilities. Institutions must also ensure that staff and students are aware of the resources and services available across campus.

Dedicated Support Services:
Provide dedicated support services for disabled students, such as disability resource centres or offices of disability services. These services can provide assistance with accommodations, academic support, self-advocacy, careers services for disabled students, guidance on disability-related issues and even additional financial support for disabled students who need to cover additional costs such as accessible transport for attending university (Brewer, G. et al 2023). HEIs must also make sure students are aware of the disability resources and services across campus (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

HEIs should seek to increase resources for the disability support office at the university including funding and more personnel if needed (Fleming, A.R, 2017), provide guidance for students on how to navigate the procedure to request accommodations, clarification on the type of accommodations available and reduce the administrative burden placed on students for them to request accommodations and access support (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

Student Mental Health Services:
Mental health services to support students' emotional well-being are very important in HEIs. These services may include counselling, therapy sessions, mental health workshops, and crisis intervention programs.
HEIs should strive to provide access to counselling that focuses on psychological and mental health aspects that affect people with disabilities (Fleming, A.R, 2017). As many disabled students will be grappling with a variety of physical, interpersonal, and mental health challenges, a comprehensive biopsychosocial framework would be useful to deliver effective care (Coduti, W.A. et al, 2016).

Accessibility Audits:
Conduct regular accessibility audits of campus facilities, classrooms, libraries, dormitories, and other spaces to identify barriers and prioritise accessibility improvements. This may include ensuring wheelchair ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms, signage, and parking spaces are in place.
Moreover, staff involved in disability support services and teaching staff should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the accommodations provided (Parpottas, P. et al, 2023).

Accessible Information and Communication:
Provide information and communication materials in accessible formats, such as Braille, large print, electronic text, and audio formats. Ensure that websites, online learning platforms, and digital materials are designed to be accessible to students with visual, auditory, or cognitive impairments.

Individualised Accommodations:
Offer individualised accommodations and support services tailored to the specific needs of each disabled student. This may include extended time for exams, assistive technologies, note-taking assistance, sign language interpreters, and alternative formats for course materials.

Training for Faculty and Staff /Disability Awareness Training:
Institutions should offer disability awareness training for faculty, staff, and students to increase understanding, empathy, and sensitivity towards disability-related issues. Training may cover topics such as disability rights, accommodations, communication strategies, and reducing stigma and discrimination. Institutions must also, through this training, ensure that staff is aware of what to do if a student discloses their disability (OIAHE, 2017).

Peer Support Programs and networks:
Develop peer support programs where disabled students can connect with and learn from their peers who have similar experiences. Peer mentors can provide valuable emotional support, practical advice, and guidance on navigating campus life and academic challenges.
Having access to supportive relationships and peer networks can positively influence the well-being of disabled students. Connecting with other disabled students, disability support groups, or disability-affirming communities can provide valuable social support, understanding, and validation.

Accessible Transportation:
Ensure that transportation options to and from campus are accessible for disabled students. This may include providing accessible shuttle services, coordinating with local public transportation providers, and offering transportation subsidies for disabled students.

Social Inclusion Initiatives:
Organise social inclusion initiatives and events that promote interaction and friendship among disabled and non-disabled students. This may include disability awareness events, inclusive recreational activities, accessible sports, cultural festivals, and peer-led support groups. Disabled students that have the chance to interact with other students through extracurricular activities performed better academically (Fleming, A.R, 2017; Bartolo, P. et al, 2023).
Ensure events are fully inclusive and accessible for disabled members (Brewer, G. et al 2023).

Accessible Housing Options:
Provide accessible housing options for disabled students, including dormitories with wheelchair-accessible rooms, adjustable furniture, and proximity to campus facilities. Ensure that housing assignments consider students' accessibility needs and preferences.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to gather input from disabled students about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, accommodations, and campus accessibility.

Collaboration with External Organizations:
HEIs can collaborate with external disability organisations, government agencies, and community groups to enhance support services and resources for disabled students. This collaboration may involve sharing best practices, advocating for policy changes, and providing referrals for additional support.
Create an open and supportive atmosphere
Institutions should encourage the creation of a culture that will make students feel safe and encourage them to disclose their disability at any time so they can receive the support they need (OIAHE, 2017). This can be done by revising and creating policies that ensure inclusivity and work to create a culture that does not tolerate disrespect (Lett, K. et al, 2019).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Universities of Saint Gallen Basel and Lucerne (Switzerland) help overcome physical barriers through interactive campus maps. They list wheelchair access and disabled toilets, hearing aid loops in auditoriums, disabled parking spaces, pictograms explaining the accessibility of buildings, and monitors to indicate the use of platform stairlifts (Cardoso, C., 2021).

Masaryk University (Czech Republic): the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs guarantees that the physical and virtual environments of the university, including documents and communications, are accessible to people with disabilities. Furthermore, it has developed inclusive educational methods for the university (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019; Muni Teiresias, 2024).

KU Leuven offers guided training sessions in individual and team sports, for people with and without disabilities to participate in sports together and offer peer support groups for students with a disability to get to know each other (KU Leuven, 2024).

Faculty of social sciences at Charles university (Czech Republic) offers the following support services during studies and based on the student's type of disability including digitalisation of study texts, interpreting, transcription, and recording services, copying services, time compensation in examinations, individual tuition, loan of aids, unique information, and counselling services.

ETH Zurich (Switzerland) guarantees that students with specific needs can take examinations at equivalent levels of performance, but under the appropriate conditions (Cardoso, C., 2021).

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FACT SHEET

ERASMUS STUDENTS

Definition:
The Erasmus programme is a "European funding programme established in 1987 offering university students a possibility of studying or doing an internship abroad in another country for a period of at least 2 months and maximum 12 months per cycle of studies. Erasmus+ now offers the possibility to go way beyond the European borders as well" (ESN, 2024).

In the "Mobile Minds in Motion" project preparation, students were asked about their mental health status and how it influenced their Erasmus experience. More than 2500 student filled out the survey from all around Europe. Some of the main conclusions are:
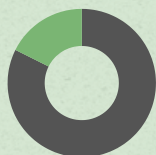
82,7% of the students considered providing mental health support for mobile students was important or very important.
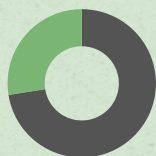
72,5% of the students would strongly or very strongly appreciate receiving mental health support related to their mobility experience before, during or after their mobility.

Already more than 15 million participants benefited from the programme during the last 35 years (European Commission, 2024).

Every year around 246,000 students participate in mobility activities in higher education within the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2022).

Factors affecting student well-being while on Erasmus

- Language and cultural challenges.
- Academic and administrative issues.
- Housing and Well-being concerns.
- Maintaining physical and mental well-being away from family and friends.
- Concerns about personal safety, especially in large cities.
- Emotional and psychological challenges, such as, feelings of homesickness and loneliness.
- Reverse culture shock after returning home.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Dedicated Support Services
- Incorporate offices/departments dedicated for mental health with Erasmus student support.
- Offer language support services and courses.

2) Student Engagement and Integration
- Develop comprehensive orientation and pre-departure programs.
- Train student mentors on well-being topics.
- Promote physical well-being and the use of student well-being apps.

3) Foster continuous support and feedback
- Conduct regular check-ins.
- Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment.
- Establish feedback mechanisms for student input.

4) Student Empowerment
- Educate students on key principles: socialise, learn more, get help, strengthen yourself, and step up.

WiSE
Well-being Innovations for Students in Europe

Co-funded by
the European Union

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
## ERASMUS STUDENTS

Definition:
The Erasmus programme is a "European funding programme established in 1987 offering university students a possibility of studying or doing an internship abroad in another country for a period of at least 2 months and maximum 12 months per cycle of studies. Erasmus+ now offers the possibility to go way beyond the European borders as well" (ESN, 2024).

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

Every year around 246,000 students participate in mobility activities in higher education within the Erasmus programme (European Commission, 2022). Already more than 15 million participants benefited from the programme during the last 35 years (European Commission, 2024).

In the "Mobile Minds in motion" project preparation, students were asked about their mental health status and how it influenced their Erasmus experience. More than 1500 student filled out the survey from all around Europe and responded the following:

- 82.7% considered providing mental health support for mobile students was important or very important.

- Only 17% partook in any kind of consultation or mental health preparation before their mobility, 10% during and only 5.6% after their mobility.

- 44.8% responded that mental health support for mobile students should be provided at an individual level by a student counsellor.

- 72.5% would strongly or very strongly appreciate receiving mental health support related to their mobility experience before, during or after their mobility.

University staff working with Erasmus students responded the following:
- 38% said they had provided support to incoming and outgoing students who dealt with mental health issues before departure, 70.7% during mobility, 27.8% after mobility.

- Only 31,8% felt very or fully prepared to provide mental health support for students.

- 93.3% agreed it is important to support students' mental health before, during or after mobility.

- 95.4% would appreciate it if they could receive comprehensive guidelines or a toolkit on how to support mobile students, both incoming and outgoing, who deal with mental health issues.

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FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENT WELL-BEING WHILE ON ERASMUS

Language Barriers:
Language differences can affect their ability to communicate, participate in classes, and navigate daily life interactions, leading to frustration and isolation.

Cultural Adjustment:
Adjusting to a new culture, social norms, and academic environment can be overwhelming for Erasmus students. In a new destination a student will find themselves face to face with a new education system, different language they might not speak, different climate, unfamiliar food, people or subtleties like communication style, humour, or everyday behaviours. They may experience feelings of confusion, anxiety, frustration, disorientation, loneliness, homesickness, fatigue, isolation, or cultural shock as they adapt to their host country (Maastricht University, n.d; ETH Zurich, n.d).

Academic Challenges:
Erasmus students may face academic challenges such as differences in teaching methods, assessment formats, and course expectations compared to their home institutions. Adjusting to these differences and meeting academic expectations while adjusting to a new environment can be stressful, especially if there is a lack of support or guidance from the host institution.

Integration and Socialisation:
Erasmus students may struggle to integrate into the local community and establish social connections. Building friendships with local students and forming a support network can take time and effort. They may feel lonely, or feelings of exclusion may arise sometimes.

Housing and Accommodation:
Finding suitable and affordable housing in the host country can be a significant source of stress for Erasmus students. Limited availability of accommodation, high rental costs, and unfamiliarity with local housing markets can make securing housing challenging.

Financial and Administrative Concerns:
Financial stress may affect their ability to fully engage in academic and social activities, and quality of life abroad which may affect their well-being. This can include managing their Erasmus grant to cover their living expenses, dealing with currency exchange rates or unexpected expenses.

Dealing with administrative procedures such as visa applications, residence permits, and registration requirements can be complex and time-consuming for Erasmus students.

Health and Wellbeing:
Maintaining physical and mental wellbeing while studying abroad can be challenging for Erasmus students. Accessing healthcare services, managing stress, and coping with homesickness are common concerns that may affect their overall experience.

Additionally, countries can have very different attitudes to mental health support, in some countries mental health is still viewed as a taboo subject meaning there might be a lack of counselling services in institutions or will be very hard to find it externally and that caters to foreigners (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020).

Safety and Security:
Concerns about personal safety, crime rates, or political instability in the host country can affect students' sense of security and wellbeing.

Home Country Relationships:
Maintaining connections with family and friends back home while abroad can be important for students' wellbeing. Feelings of homesickness, loneliness, or missing important events in their home country may impact their overall happiness and satisfaction during their mobility period.

Reverse culture shock:
Students upon their return might deal with reverse culture shock, they might experience change in perceptions, uncertainty over their own identity following the experiences they have gone through while abroad. Also, there might have been changes in their friends and family while abroad which can lead to feelings of frustration, alienation, and mutual misunderstandings. The better integrated a student becomes to the culture of the host country the harder it can be to readjust upon return (Maastricht University, n.d; ETH Zurich, n.d).

Lack of preparation and support by the home institution:
During pre-departure briefings some institutions might not prepare their students to the challenges they might encounter abroad or give them limited information about how to access mental health support services abroad (Lees, D., 2020; Ashenden, A., 2014).

Moreover, counselling services back home might take a long time to reply to students who are struggling, be dismissive of them or might not even be keeping in contact with students which are abroad to see how they are doing even if they are aware of prior mental issues (Ashenden, A., 2014).

Also, students might not have a designated staff member they could turn to at their home institution to contact in case they are struggling during their studies abroad (Ashenden, A., 2014). This is further compounded by staff in charge of exchange programmes who are often not trained to deal with and respond to mental health needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It's important that HEIs take a holistic approach that includes providing comprehensive support services, promoting social integration and cultural exchange opportunities, offering academic guidance, and ensuring access to healthcare and mental health resources for Erasmus students. With adequate support and resources, these students can overcome challenges and have a rewarding experience studying abroad in Europe.

Creating a welcoming and supportive environment for Erasmus students at Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) involves several key strategies. Here are some recommendations:

Dedicated Support Services:
Establish dedicated offices or departments specifically tailored to support Erasmus students. These offices can provide assistance with academic advising, course selection, credit transfers, language support, cultural adjustment, and practical matters such as housing and healthcare.

Comprehensive Orientation Programs:
Develop comprehensive orientation programs specifically designed for Erasmus students to help them acclimate to their new environment. These programs should cover academic expectations, campus resources, cultural norms, language support services, and practical information about living in the host country.

Language Support:
Offer language support services, including language courses, tandem partners, language exchange programs, and language proficiency assessments. These resources can help Erasmus students improve their language skills and feel more confident in their academic and social interactions.

Cultural Integration Initiatives:
Organise a variety of cultural integration initiatives and activities to promote interaction and understanding between Erasmus students, local students, and the broader university community. Encourage participation in cultural exchange programs, international festivals, intercultural workshops, and student clubs or societies.

Buddy/Mentorship Programs:
Implement buddy or mentorship programs pairing Erasmus students with local students or faculty members. Mentors can provide guidance, support, and practical advice to help Erasmus students navigate academic, social, and cultural challenges during their mobility period.

Peer Support Networks:
Peer support networks and mentoring programs connect students with experienced peers who provide guidance, advice, and emotional support. It can include encouraging contact between students already abroad, those who are going abroad to the same location and between both groups (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020). These initiatives help students navigate academic challenges, social integration, and personal development during their time at university.

Regular Check-ins and Support:
Conduct regular check-ins with Erasmus students to assess their needs, address their concerns, and provide ongoing support throughout their mobility period. Establish clear communication channels and support mechanisms, including via email, phone, social media, and in-person consultations.

Health and Well-being Services:
Guarantee access to on campus healthcare services, counselling support, and mental health resources and support groups for Erasmus students. Institutions must ensure that these services are clearly signposted. They must also provide information about local healthcare providers and counselling centres and on how the health system in the host country works.

Additionally, for the sending institution the office in charge of student counselling should be made aware of which students are going on mobility. In order to offer support to any students they may be treating and provide support and counselling after the mobility experience to deal with reverse culture shock if necessary(Terra Dotta, n.d).

Safe and Inclusive Environment:
Foster a safe, inclusive, and welcoming environment for Erasmus students by promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Implement policies and procedures to address discrimination, harassment, and xenophobia, and provide training for staff and students on cultural competence and intercultural communication.

Moreover, Erasmus students should be made aware of safety measures, emergency procedures, and how to access support from university authorities to alleviate any safety concerns they might have.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or suggestion boxes, to gather input from Erasmus students about their experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programmes, and policies for future cohorts of Erasmus participants.

Support Systems:
The availability of support services and resources for Erasmus students, such as academic advisors, counselling services, language assistance, and cultural orientation programs, can greatly impact their wellbeing. Adequate support and guidance can help Erasmus students navigate challenges and thrive during their mobility period.

For this it might also be necessary too to provide IRO officers with mental health training (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020) and it might be useful if IROs should where possible connect with counselling staff in partner universities or be able to signpost students to external support in the host locations by building up a database with this information and contacts (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020; Terra Dotta, n.d).

Physical Wellbeing Initiatives:
Offer sports facilities, fitness classes, and recreational activities to promote physical wellbeing among students. These initiatives encourage regular exercise, healthy lifestyle habits, and stress relief through physical activity.

Financial Support Services:
Institutions can provide additional financial support services, including scholarships, grants, and emergency funds, to assist students facing financial hardship. These initiatives aim to alleviate financial stress and ensure that all students have access to educational opportunities regardless of their financial circumstances.

Organise pre-departure sessions:
- Pre-departure sessions at their home institution can make students aware of the issues they might encounter during their time abroad, particularly those with mental health issues (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020). These sessions can include
- Intercultural awareness sessions to prepare students for cultural shock.
- Raise awareness about how attitudes about mental health differ around the world, that it might be hard for them to obtain certain medications or mental services in other countries and that students must plan accordingly (Husson, A.C. & Hall, D., 2020).
- Present the counselling and support services that will be available for them and who will be their main contact if they have issues. Also make it easy for them to find this information and to contact their advisor if they have questions or problems (Terra Dotta, n.d).
- Establish a dialogue with students about their concerns and how to overcome them. Also, on the responsibility of the institution and the student in terms of safeguarding their wellbeing (Lees, D. 2020).
- Provide a checklist and resources on what students need to prepare before they go on mobility.

Student Wellbeing Apps:
Providing student wellbeing apps or online platforms that provide resources, tools, and self-help guides for managing stress, improving mental health, and enhancing overall wellbeing. These apps may include features such as meditation exercises, relaxation techniques, and mood tracking tools.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Liege University (Belgium) has a buddy program to help mobility students meet local students and discover Liege (Liege Universite, 2023) .

Ghent University (Belgium): the international office organises two intercultural preparation days where students receive information about culture shock, health and safety while travelling (Ghent University, 2024).

UCL (UK) has a 24/7 support line providing free confidential support including practical information, resources, short term counselling or signposting to other services. It is accessible via phone, email or post and is available for students who are studying abroad (UCL, 2024).

The Erasmus Student Network (ESN) has branches across many European universities in Europe. They often organise activities connecting international mobility students with the local community and on health & wellbeing (ESN, 2024). The ESN chapter for Utrecht for instance has a pre-departure mentor programme connecting students with a student based in Utrecht that will answer questions about life in the Netherlands and have a series of confidants, volunteers that can be contacted by students if they need someone to talk when they encounter a problem (ESN Utrecht, 2021).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Definition:
Neurodivergent student refers to individuals whose neurological development and functioning diverge from the typical or "neurotypical" population. This includes students with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences (Develop Diverse, 2024).

It is thought that about 15-20 percent of the population is neurodiverse. This includes up to 10 percent of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia, 6 percent with dyspraxia, 5 percent with ADHD and 1-2 percent with autism (Doyle, N., 2020). In a survey by Unite Students of 2038 higher education university applicants, neurodivergent higher education students responded that:
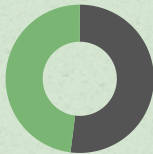
52% experienced depression compared to 30% of the average for all applicants (Unite Students, 2023).

They are also more likely than average to have experienced OCD (Obsessive Compulsive disorder), eating disorders, personality disorders and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) (Unite Students, 2023).
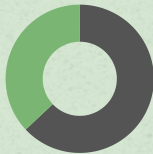
63% experienced anxiety in the last two years compared to around 49% of the average for all applicants (Unite Students, 2023).

Scored the same for life satisfaction and believing their life is worthwhile but lower on happiness and on having low anxiety compared to other students (Unite Students, 2023).

Factors affecting neurodivergent students well-being

- Social interaction challenges.
- Sensory sensitivities.
- Academic stress.
- Navigating social norms.
- Access to support services.
- Stigma and discrimination.
- Transition challenges when moving into higher education.
- Mental health concerns, neurodivergent individuals are at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and mood disorders.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide accessible campus facilities, resources, and services and offer accommodations for their studies.
- Establish specialised support services.
- Provide neurodiversity training for faculty, staff, and students.

- Implement peer mentoring programs where neurodivergent students can connect with peers.
- Offer flexible learning options.
- Incorporate Universal Design for Learning.
- Provide individualised academic support and tutoring service.
- Create sensory-friendly environments on campus that minimise sensory overload.
- Develop transition programs and orientation sessions.
- Collaborate with disability services offices, counselling centres, and other relevant departments.
- Establish feedback mechanisms.
- Encourage students to develop self-advocacy skills.
- Address anxiety which tends to accompany neurodivergence.
- Encourage the development of positive social support networks.

DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Definition:

Neurodivergent students and disabled students are distinct categories, although there can be overlap between the two groups. Here's how they differ:

Neurodivergent students refer to individuals whose neurological development and functioning diverge from the typical or "neurotypical" population. This includes students with conditions such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), dyslexia, dyspraxia, Tourette syndrome, and other neurodevelopmental differences (Develop Diverse, 2024).

Neurodivergent individuals may have unique cognitive styles, sensory sensitivities, communication preferences, and ways of processing information that differ from the majority of their peers. They may experience differences in communication, social interaction, sensory perception, executive functioning, and learning styles, which can impact their academic performance, social integration, and overall well-being in higher education settings.

Disabled students encompass a broader range of individuals, *"those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others"* (European Commission, 2024). Disabilities can include mobility impairments, visual or hearing impairments, chronic health conditions, mental health disorders, learning disabilities, and other impairments (FixSmallArt, 2020) that may require accommodations or support services to ensure equal access and opportunity.

While some neurodivergent individuals **may also identify as disabled**, not all neurodivergent individuals experience disability, and not all disabled individuals are neurodivergent (Luc, K., 2024). Though some students who have neurodivergence might need accommodations (Wiginton, Keri, 2023). It's important to recognize that disability is a social construct that arises from the interaction between an individual's impairment and societal barriers that limit their participation and inclusion (PWDA, 2023).

Both neurodivergent and disabled individuals may face stigma, discrimination, and barriers to access and inclusion in higher education and society, but the specific challenges and experiences may vary based on the individual's unique characteristics and circumstances.

It's important to recognize that neurodivergence is a natural variation in human cognition and behaviour, rather than a deficit or disorder (Develop Diverse, 2024). **Neurodivergent students bring diverse perspectives, talents, and contributions to the university community, and their inclusion enriches the learning environment for all students.**

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

Neurodivergent people are increasingly involved in higher education. However, they continue to face serious barriers and obstacles on college campuses. These obstacles are not only related to disability functional differences and accommodation needs, but also to stigma and prejudice toward neurodivergent people (Dwyer, P., et al, 2023).

Albeit, statistics on the prevalence of neurodiversity in higher education are difficult to obtain as they rely on self-disclosure, are subject to variations in definitions and tend to be condition specific (BPS, 2022). However, prevalence can be extrapolated from general population data.
It is thought that about 15-20 percent of the population is neurodiverse (Doyle, N., 2020). This includes up to 10 percent of people who are diagnosed with dyslexia, 6 percent with dyspraxia, 5 percent with ADHD and 1-2 percent with autism (Doyle, N., 2020).

In a survey by Unite Students of 2038 higher education university applicants, neurodivergent higher education students scored the same for life satisfaction and believing their life is worthwhile, but lower on happiness and had slightly more anxiety compared to other students (Shaw, J. & Selman, F., 2023).

Respondents of this survey also responded that :
- 52% had experienced depression compared to 30% of the average for all applicants
- 63% experienced anxiety in the last two years compared to around 49% of the average for all applicants

They were also more likely than average to have experienced OCD (Obsessive Compulsive disorder), eating disorders, personality disorders and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder).

FACTORS AFFECTING WELL-BEING OF NEURODIVERGENT STUDENTS

Several factors can influence the well-being of neurodivergent students in higher education. These factors may vary depending on the individual's specific neurodivergent condition, personal experiences, and the support available to them. Here are some common factors that can affect the well-being of neurodivergent students:

Social Interaction Challenges:
Neurodivergent students may experience difficulties in social interaction, communication, and forming relationships with peers. Social isolation, loneliness, and feelings of exclusion can impact their emotional well-being and sense of belonging within the university community.

Sensory Sensitivities:
Many neurodivergent individuals have heightened sensory sensitivities to stimuli such as noise, light, touch, and textures. Exposure to sensory overload or sensory discomfort in academic environments can lead to stress, anxiety, and sensory overload, affecting their ability to concentrate and participate in learning activities.

Academic Stress:
Neurodivergent students may face challenges related to executive functioning, organisation, time management, and task initiation, which can impact their academic performance and increase stress levels. Difficulty with planning, prioritising, and completing assignments on time can contribute to feelings of frustration and anxiety.

Navigating Social Norms:
Neurodivergent students may struggle to navigate social norms, expectations, and unwritten rules in academic settings. Misunderstandings, social faux pas, and challenges in interpreting social cues can lead to feelings of alienation, rejection, and self-consciousness, impacting their self-esteem and confidence.

Access to Support Services:
Access to appropriate support services, accommodations, and resources is essential for the well-being of neurodivergent students. Limited access to specialised support, delays in obtaining assessments or accommodations, and gaps in support services can create barriers to academic success and exacerbate stress and anxiety.

Stigma and Discrimination:
Neurodivergent students may face stigma, prejudice, and discrimination based on stereotypes and misconceptions about their condition. Negative attitudes, bullying, and microaggressions from peers, faculty, or staff can contribute to feelings of shame, insecurity, and low self-worth, impacting their mental health and well-being.

Transition Challenges:
Transitioning to higher education can be challenging for neurodivergent students, particularly if they are moving away from home, adjusting to new routines, or facing unfamiliar academic expectations. Changes in environment, social support networks, and independence can cause stress and uncertainty, affecting their emotional well-being.

Mental Health Concerns:
Neurodivergent individuals are at increased risk of experiencing mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and mood disorders. The intersection of neurodivergence and mental health can create complex challenges for students, including difficulty in recognizing and articulating their needs, accessing appropriate support, and managing symptoms effectively.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR NEURODIVERGENT STUDENT

Creating a welcoming and supportive environment for neurodivergent students in HEIs involves implementing a range of initiatives and accommodations. Here are some recommendations for HEIs to consider in caring for neurodivergent students:

Accessibility and Accommodations:
Ensure that campus facilities, resources, and services are accessible to neurodivergent students. This includes providing accommodations such as quiet study areas, being able to take the exam in a smaller quiet room (Fleming, A.R. et al, 2027), sensory-friendly spaces, assistive technologies, and alternative formats for course materials to support students' diverse needs and preferences.

Institutions must also offer individualised support accommodations tailored to the needs and severity of an individual's disability. HEIs should be open minded to the kind of accommodations that can be offered, encourage students to report any problems and changes in their condition and how to best communicate accommodations to teaching staff (Fleming, A.R. et al, 2027; OIAHE, 2017).
Furthermore, staff involved in disability support services and teaching staff should work together to monitor the effectiveness of the accommodations provided (Parpottas, P. et al, 2023).

Specialised Support Services:
Establish specialised support services or offices dedicated to meeting the needs of neurodivergent students. These offices can provide individualised support, academic accommodations, assistive technology, and resources to help students succeed academically and navigate university life effectively.

Neurodiversity Training:
Provide neurodiversity training for faculty, staff, and students to raise awareness about different neurodivergent conditions, dispel myths and misconceptions, and promote understanding and acceptance of neurodiversity. Training should emphasise the strengths, talents, and contributions of neurodivergent individuals to the university community.

Peer Mentoring Programs:
Implement peer mentoring programs where neurodivergent students can connect with peers who provide guidance, support, and practical advice. Peer mentors can share their experiences, offer strategies for academic success, and provide social support to neurodivergent students navigating university life.

Flexible Learning Options:
Offer flexible learning options such as online courses, asynchronous learning modules, and self-paced programs to accommodate the diverse learning styles and preferences of neurodivergent students. Flexibility in course delivery allows students to customise their learning experience and access educational content in ways that suit their needs.

Universal Design for Learning:
Antiquated pedagogical practices can be a big challenge to neurodivergent students because of their difficulty in organising notes, managing time, sticking to schedules and other essential skills, known as executive functions. Teachers must be trained with new approaches. The incorporation of Universal Design for Learning approach in combination with assistive technologies could help increase the participation and inclusion of disabled students (Moriña, A. & Orozco, I., 2020; McNicholl, A. et al, 2019).

Individualised Academic Support:
Provide individualised academic support and tutoring services to help neurodivergent students overcome academic challenges, improve study skills, and achieve their academic goals. Tailor support services to address specific needs related to executive functioning, organisation, time management, and learning strategies.

Sensory-Friendly Environments:
Create sensory-friendly environments on campus that minimise sensory overload and accommodate the sensory sensitivities of neurodivergent students. This may include reducing noise levels, providing calming spaces, using soft lighting, and offering sensory tools and equipment to help students regulate their sensory experiences.

Transition Programs:
Develop transition programs and orientation sessions specifically designed for neurodivergent students to help them adjust to university life, academic expectations, and social norms. Provide information about available support services, accommodations, and resources to empower students to navigate the transition to higher education successfully.

Collaboration with Disability Services:
Collaborate with disability services offices, counselling centres, and other relevant departments to ensure coordinated support for neurodivergent students. Foster partnerships with community organisations, advocacy groups, and healthcare providers to enhance access to specialised services and resources.

Feedback Mechanisms:
Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or advisory committees, to gather input from neurodivergent students about their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programs, and policies for neurodivergent students.

Address anxiety:

Anxiety often accompanies neurodivergence, which experts say can be a barrier to learning. Techniques to reduce anxiety might include mindfulness, like practising deep breathing; encouraging students to take care of themselves physically, such as avoiding caffeine and getting enough sleep; and using simple tools like visual schedules so students know what's coming next.

Self-Advocacy Skills:

Developing self-advocacy skills is crucial for neurodivergent students to communicate their needs, preferences, and accommodation requirements effectively (OIAHE, 2017). Limited self-awareness, assertiveness, and advocacy skills can hinder their ability to access support services, accommodations, and resources essential for their well-being and academic success.

Family and Peer Support:

Support from family members, friends, peers, and mentors plays a significant role in the well-being of neurodivergent students. Positive social support networks, understanding, validation, and encouragement from loved ones can bolster their resilience, confidence, and sense of belonging, acting as a buffer against the impact of stress and adversity.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Dublin City University (Ireland) offers access to sensory pods for students who are or suspect they are autistic, they give these students a chance to reduce sensory overload (DCU, 2023).

University of Exeter (UK): the department of psychology at the institution offers to its neurodivergent students the opportunity to borrow ear defenders to help them with sensory difficulties. It provides versions of the lecture slides with a non-white background, which are uploaded 24 hours in advance to allow time for reading and note taking before the classroom. The university also has an Autism Spectrum Community (ASC) Social Group for students with autism spectrum conditions (University of Exeter, 2024).

Vilnius University (Lithuania): the disability coordinator oversees students with disabilities during their studies using an individualised approach towards accessibility. When a student commences their studies, they can fill out a survey on their support needs. Then in agreement with the student, the disability coordinator develops recommendations to adapt the study process, learning material or assessment methods and coordinates with the relevant departments. This process can be repeated every semester depending on the needs, and the student can also decide to discontinue the measures should there be no need for them anymore (Claeys-Kulik, A.L. et al, 2019).

Canterbury Christ Church University (UK) offers an online module for everyone introducing people to the signs of neurodiversity, educating people on techniques and conditions for learning (Canterbury Christ Church University, 2021).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET
REFUGEE STUDENTS

Definition:
Refugee students "are students in higher education or preparatory programs who have experienced forced international migration" (Berg, J, 2023).

The population of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe is set to rise to 24.9 million in 2024 (UNHCR, 2024).

Refugees have a higher prevalence of mental health conditions, with rates for PTSD being higher compared to the general population. Prevalence amongst refugees is around 31.46% compared to 3.9% in the general population (Mental Health Foundation, 2024).
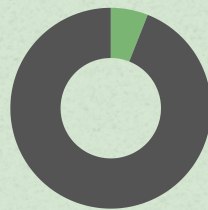
The UNHCR estimates the enrolment rate in higher education for refugees worldwide is 6%.

Refugees often face traumatic events in their home country, in their migration journey and while navigating their new post migration environment.
It can provoke feelings of guilt, despair, grief, and anger and can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbance, anxiety disorders, or even depression (UNHCR, 2024).

Factors affecting refugee students well-being

- Trauma.
- Cultural adjustment.
- Language barriers.
- Educational disruption.
- Financial hardship.
- Discrimination.
- Legal and immigration issues.
- Access to healthcare.
- Uncertainty about the future.
- Stigma against mental health care.
- Lack of trained staff in HEIs able to address the complex and diverse needs of refugee students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish dedicated support services including trauma-informed support services and counselling.
- Offer language support services.
- Provide financial assistance, scholarships, grants, or fee waivers.
- Develop inclusive admission policies, that take into account the unique circumstances and educational backgrounds of refugee students.
- Provide pre-arrival support and orientation programs.
- Provide cultural sensitivity training.
- Establish peer support networks or mentorship programs and access to social Support Networks such as family, friends or community organisations.
- Encourage community engagement and participation in extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, and cultural events.
- Establish feedback mechanisms to gather input from refugee students about their needs, experiences and suggestions for improvement.
- Offer professional development opportunities tailored to them.

WISE
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# DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS

Definition:
Refugee students "are students in higher education or preparatory programs who have experienced forced international migration" (Berg, J, 2023). Refugee students in Europe may come from diverse backgrounds and countries of origin. They may have varying levels of education, language proficiency, and prior academic experiences.

These students may have experienced displacement, trauma, and loss as a result of their refugee status and may face various challenges in accessing education and integrating into the host society.

WELL-BEING FACTS AND FIGURES:

The population of forcibly displaced and stateless people in Europe is set to rise to 24.9 million in 2024. 5.8 million of them are Ukrainian refugees across the region (UNHCR, 2024).

Refugees often face traumatic events in their home country, in their migration journey and while navigating their new post migration environment. Which can provoke feelings of guilt, despair, grief, and anger and can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), sleep disturbance, anxiety disorders, or even depression (UNHCR, 2024).

Research has shown that compared to the host country population refugees have a higher prevalence of mental health conditions, with rates for PTSD being higher compared to the general population. Prevalence amongst refugees is around 31.46% compared to 3.9% in the general population (Mental Health Foundation, 2024; OECD, 2022).

A study on Ukrainian refugees in Germany showed (Buchcik, J. et al, 2023):
More than 60% of the participants reported substantial or severe psychological distress attributed to a loss of sleep.
Nearly 50% reported depressive symptoms, while over 50% reported anxiety symptoms.

A study on adult Syrian refugees showed prevalence rates of (Peconga EK, Høgh Thøgersen M., 2019):
43% for PTSD
40.9% for depression
26.6% for anxiety

The UNHCR estimates the enrolment rate in higher education for refugees worldwide is 6%. Higher education has been described as empowering for refugees. It can support their sense of belonging, psychosocial well-being, self-esteem and help them overcome trauma. Some have also described it as an act of resistance itself which defies stereotypes and other negative attributions (Berg, J, 2023).

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN EUROPE (I)

It's important to note that while refugee students may face unique challenges related to their refugee status, they also possess diverse skills, knowledge, and experiences that contribute to the cultural diversity and enrichment of educational institutions in Europe. Supporting refugee students in accessing and succeeding in education is essential for promoting their integration, empowerment, and long-term well-being in their host countries.

Refugee students face a multitude of challenges that can impact their overall well-being. These challenges stem from their experiences as displaced individuals and the specific circumstances they encounter in their host countries. Here are several factors that can affect the well-being of refugee students:

Trauma and Mental Health:
Many refugee students have experienced traumatic events such as conflict, violence, persecution, displacement, and loss of loved ones. These experiences can lead to mental health issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and other psychological distress, which can impact their overall well-being and ability to engage in academic activities.

Cultural Adjustment:
Refugee students often experience challenges related to cultural adjustment and integration into their host communities. Differences in language, social norms, customs, and educational systems can create feelings of disorientation, isolation, and alienation, affecting their sense of belonging and well-being.
It might also make them reluctant to seek help and speak to professionals they do not know or cannot relate to. Some students perceive there is a lack of cultural and refugee competence within HEI support services, making them sceptical to what extent the service could understand and respond adequately to their needs and background. They may not understand what they have gone through and the cultural norms and attitudes that shape their help seeking behaviours (Jack, O., Chase, E., & Warwick, I., 2019).

Language Barriers:
Language barriers present significant obstacles for refugee students in accessing education, communicating with peers and teachers, and navigating daily life in their host countries. Limited proficiency in the language of instruction can hinder academic progress, social interaction, and integration into the educational system.

Educational Disruption:
Many refugee students have experienced disruptions to their education due to conflict, displacement, and forced migration. Gaps in formal schooling, lack of access to quality education, difficulties with acknowledging their past educational experience or credentials (Berg, J., 2023) and interruptions in learning can affect their academic skills, knowledge acquisition, and educational attainment, leading to feelings of frustration and inadequacy.

Financial Hardship:
Refugee students often face financial challenges, including limited access to resources, employment opportunities, and financial support for education. Economic hardship can impact their ability to afford tuition fees, school supplies, transportation, and other essential expenses, increasing stress and financial insecurity.

Discrimination and Stigma:
Refugee students may encounter discrimination, prejudice, and stigma based on their refugee status, nationality, ethnicity, religion, or cultural background. Discriminatory attitudes and behaviours from peers, teachers, and community members can contribute to feelings of marginalisation, exclusion, and low self-esteem, affecting their mental health and well-being.

FACTORS THAT AFFECT THE WELL-BEING OF REFUGEE STUDENTS IN EUROPE (II)

Legal and Immigration Issues:
Refugee students may experience uncertainty and anxiety related to their legal status, asylum application process, and immigration regulations. Concerns about deportation, family reunification, and access to residency rights can create additional stress and instability, impacting their ability to focus on their studies and plan for the future.

Access to Healthcare:
Refugee students may face barriers in accessing healthcare services, including physical health, mental health, lack of awareness of services on offer and specialised support for trauma and psychological distress. Limited access to healthcare facilities, language barriers, cultural differences, and lack of health insurance coverage can hinder their ability to address health concerns and receive appropriate care.

Uncertainty about the Future:
Many refugee students experience uncertainty about their future, including prospects for resettlement, family reunification, educational and career opportunities, and long-term integration into their host countries. Uncertainty about their legal status, residency rights, and prospects for returning to their home countries can contribute to feelings of anxiety, stress, and hopelessness.

Stigma against mental health care:
In some cultures, and communities, mental health is still seen as a taboo subject precluding people from discussing mental health issues, looking for support or lacking awareness about mental illness. For instance, in the context of Ukrainian refugees they fear that a mental illness diagnosis will result in them being seen negatively by their communities. This stigma persists from the Soviet era from where people who opposed the Soviet regime were often accused of being mentally ill and confined to asylums (Jack, O. et al, 2019; Vitruk, O., 2023).

Lack of trained staff in HEIs:
HEIs face structural challenges such as a lack of trained staff and often struggle to find enough specialists, which may include language teachers, instructors with intercultural training or psychologists that are able to address the complex and diverse needs of refugee students. Additionally, some faculty members may feel insecure about how to best address refugee students or deal with practical questions such as determining whether some documents are valid (Berg, J., 2023).

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FRIENDLY HEI FOR REFUGEE STUDENTS

Addressing these factors requires a holistic approach that involves providing comprehensive support services, culturally sensitive interventions, trauma-informed care, language assistance, educational resources, and opportunities for social integration and community participation. By addressing the unique needs and challenges of refugee students, educational institutions can promote their well-being, academic success, and long-term integration into their host societies.

Below are some recommendations for HEIs to create a welcoming and supportive environment for refugee students in HEIs:

Dedicated Support Services:

Establish dedicated support services or offices specifically tailored to meet the needs of refugee students. These offices can provide assistance with academic advising, counselling, enrollment procedures, financial aid applications, language support, cultural integration, and referrals to external support services.

Further services institutions can offer refugee students to make them feel welcome and integrated may include law clinics, accompaniment during visits to authorities, childcare, translation services, medical care, regular get-togethers, festivals, joint sports, theatre, and music events, help with apartment search, and guided tours of the city (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022).

Holistic Admission Policies:

Develop inclusive admission policies that take into account the unique circumstances and educational backgrounds of refugee students. Consider alternative admission pathways, flexible entry requirements, recognition of prior learning and qualifications obtained in the students' countries of origin. Have a designated person for refugee students to refer to which is easy to identify and contact, if any issues arise within departments or students' services (Slaven, G., 2018).

Pre-arrival Support:

Provide pre-arrival support and orientation programs for refugee students to help them navigate the transition to higher education in a new country. Offer information about educational opportunities, visa requirements, housing options, cultural norms, and available support services.

Additionally institutions can also provide personalised tutoring services for refugee students to better choose their classes, accelerate their learning and performance. These can be in the form of supplementary teaching on a one-to-one basis or in small groups and can be complemented with mentoring services or psychological counselling (UARRM & SVR, 2021; Hajisoteriou, C., 2023).

Language Support:

Offer language support services to help refugee students improve their language proficiency and academic skills. This may include language courses, tutoring sessions, conversation partners, and language exchange programs to facilitate communication and academic success.

Financial Assistance:

Provide financial assistance, scholarships, grants, or fee waivers to support refugee students with the cost of tuition, books, housing, and living expenses. Ensure that financial aid programs are accessible and inclusive, taking into account the financial constraints faced by refugee students.

Cultural Sensitivity Training:

Provide cultural sensitivity training for faculty, staff, student volunteers and even engage in public outreach within the wider community to raise awareness about refugee issues, cultural diversity, effective communication strategies and to fight against harassment and prejudice. Training should emphasise the importance of creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for refugee students.

Peer Support Networks:

Establish peer support networks or mentorship programs where refugee students can connect with peers, faculty mentors, or alumni who provide guidance, support, and practical advice. Peer support networks can help refugee students with combating loneliness, isolation and navigate academic challenges. They can also help with social integration and cultural adjustment by creating social connections with local students. They can even become a source of belonging, resilience and as a buffer against xenophobia and discrimination (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022; Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022).

Social Support Networks:

Access to social support networks, including family, friends, community organisations, and school personnel, plays a crucial role in the well-being of refugee students. Strong social support systems can provide emotional support, practical assistance, and opportunities for social connection and integration, buffering the effects of stress and adversity.

Trauma-Informed Care:

Offer trauma-informed support services and counselling to address the mental health needs of refugee students who may have experienced trauma, violence, or displacement and ensure refugee students are aware of the services available to them. Provide culturally sensitive counselling cognisant of the diverse refugee backgrounds and experiences to be relatable and if possible, in languages relevant to the refugee populations. Also offer therapy sessions, and psychosocial support to help refugee students cope with their experiences and promote healing and resilience. This can be achieved by working with counsellors who are culturally equipped and versed in issues the refugee student population faces (Jack, O., Chase, E., & Warwick, I., 2019; Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022). Therefore, the institution should first reach out to counsellors at their institution and discuss the possibility of providing counselling towards this population (UARRM & SVR, 2021).

Community Engagement:

Encourage community engagement and participation in extracurricular activities, volunteer opportunities, and cultural events. Facilitate partnerships with local refugee support organisations, community groups, local governments and cultural centres, to understand the needs of refugee students and support their transition into higher education (Kalocsányiová, E. et al, 2022), provide opportunities for social interaction, networking, and community involvement. Institutions can also mobilise staff and students to volunteer within the local refugee community through for example language teaching, providing support navigating bureaucracy, organising events (Slaven, G., 2018).

Feedback Mechanisms:

Establish feedback mechanisms, such as surveys, focus groups, or advisory committees, to gather input from refugee students about their needs, experiences and suggestions for improvement. Use this feedback to evaluate and enhance support services, programs, and policies for refugee students.

Offer professional development opportunities:

Institutions can provide professional development opportunities on campus tailored towards refugee students and other underrepresented populations. They can also partner with private businesses that are willing to provide internship opportunities for refugee students (UARRM & SVR, 2021).

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

Multiple universities in the UK: the Universities of Sanctuary are a network of universities that have pledged to make their institutions accessible and welcoming to asylum seekers and refugees (Slaven, G., 2018).

University of Bath (UK): provides a named contact in the Student Services Money Advice and Retention team. This staff member provides personal support to refugee students throughout their entire programme, and works directly with them to ensure they know about the pastoral, academic and employability support offered across the nstitution (Slaven, G., 2018).

De Montford University (UK): programme of outreach activities that shares the skills, expertise, and research of the University with and for the benefit of refugees and migrant communities across the UK. Projects in the De Montford University refugee support programme include free English lessons, teaching IT skills, providing mentoring for young people and offering free legal advice (Slaven, G., 2018).

University of Oslo (Norway): created a project called Academic Network. Where groups of four to eight refugees and an equal number of student guides from matching academic fields, met every two weeks during one semester to exchange academic experiences and learn from each other. The activity provided refugee students with the opportunity to build networks and friendships and learn about the experiences of other students (Martin, M., & Stulgaitis, M., 2022).

Berlin School of Economics and Law (Germany): they hired an Arabic speaker to offer psychological and social support services twice a week for refugees (Streitwieser, B. et al, 2017).

Ghent University (Belgium): organises the "Preparatory higher education programme". It lasts one year and includes additional Dutch language lessons, study skills training, guidance, and counselling, as well as optional modules in English, mathematics, research skills etc. The institution also cooperates with the city services responsible for immigrant integration (In-Gent), which provides scholarships for the university language courses as well as other assistance concerning language training, job opportunities, counselling etc (Jungblut, J. et al, 2018).

Elaborated by the WISE project consortium (2024)

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FACT SHEET

WORKING STUDENTS

Definition:
European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the term "working students" typically refers to individuals who are enrolled in academic programs while also working in some capacity.

According to Eurostat (2023) 25% of young Europeans (aged 15-29) were working and studying.

Research showed that students who work upwards of 21 hours a week have a 160% higher dropout rate than non-working students and are also more exposed to experiencing burnout (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022).

1 in 10 students is a parent and, most likely, a worker (Eurostudent, 2018).

60% of students work to gain experience for the labour market (Eurostudent, 2018).

50% of working students are unable to afford studying without their job (Eurostudent, 2018).

Factors affecting working students' well-being

- Time management.
- Financial stress.
- The demands of employment can impact working students' academic performance.
- Balancing work and study commitments, while managing stress, fatigue, and other health-related issues can take a toll on their physical and mental health.
- Working long hours or irregular shifts can lead to fatigue and burnout.
- Achieving a balance between work, study, and personal life can be challenging.
- Limited social life and social isolation.
- Employment conditions such as working hours, job type, wages.
- Working students may face challenges in gaining relevant work experience, networking with professionals, and pursuing career development opportunities while balancing their academic commitments.
- May have limited access to support services and resources offered by the university.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Offer flexible course scheduling.
- Develop transparent and flexible credit transfer policies, to recognise and award academic credit for prior learning and work experience.
- Provide financial aid programs, scholarships, grants, and tuition waivers.
- Establish work-study programs that integrate academic study with paid work experiences, relevant to students' fields of study.
- Enhance career services offerings to support working students in exploring career options.
- Expand mental health and counselling services to meet their needs.
- Provide time management workshops.
- Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs.
- Solicit feedback from working students on their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement.

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DETAILED INSIGHT ON THE WELL-BEING OF
WORKING STUDENTS

Definition:
In European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), the term "working students" typically refers to individuals who are enrolled in academic programs while also working in some capacity. These students balance their academic responsibilities with work commitments, which may be part-time or full-time employment, internships, apprenticeships, or other forms of work-related activities.

Working students in HEIs may pursue various types of employment to support themselves financially, gain practical experience in their field of study, or enhance their professional skills.
Working students face unique challenges and opportunities in managing the demands of both work and study. They must effectively balance their time, prioritise responsibilities, and develop effective time-management and organisational skills to succeed academically while meeting work obligations.

Considered a non-traditional group of students, they face specific challenges as HEIs are not oriented to their needs (Lowe & Gayle, 2007) and they are "invisible", among students (Thomas et al., 2021). When these students also juggle the role of father/mother, the balance between the three roles can represent a very heavy physical, mental, and psychological burden, facing barriers and not having a full experience of Higher Education (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). Gender differences should also be considered for a comprehensive understanding (Remery & Schippers, 2019).

In the last decades, European HEIs have attracted non-traditional students for two main reasons: for social reasons (focus on equality of opportunities), and for economic reasons (contributing to a knowledge society that leads to innovation) (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). Also, other economic gain can be observed, with the decrease of birth rates and a lower intake of new (and traditional) students. However, the institutional culture of HEIs did not make necessary adaptations to new audiences. This gap creates several obstacles to the daily experience of non-traditional students and asks for changes in the training environment (Marandet & Wainwright, 2010).
Specific challenges faced by working students can be split in three domains: learning-teaching activities, belonging issues, and well-being concerns. Nevertheless, all these factors act in combination with each other, as students should be understood as a whole person, with several roles (Lowe & Gayle, 2007).

FACTS AND FIGURES

According to Eurostat (2023) 25% of young Europeans (aged 15-29) were working and studying. Not all European countries show the same results, northern European countries have higher percentages, as opposed to Eastern European countries (i.e., the Netherlands, 73%, in contrast with Romania, 2%) (Eurostat, 2023).

It is also important to distinguish between students who work (often part-time) and who have not yet formed an independent family from mature students, who work and already have family responsibilities. Data from Eurostudent (2018) points that one in ten students is a parent and, most likely, a worker (Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).

According to Eurostudent, on average 69% of working students do so to cover their living costs, with 50% of working students being unable to afford studying without their job. Also 60% of students work to gain experience for the labour market (Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).

Working while studying can hinder their academic achievements and limit their time devoted to studying. It can lead to them interrupting their studies and can also be an obstacle for pursuing study abroad mobility as they might lose their job if they do so. Research has shown that students who work upwards of 21 hours a week, have a 160% higher dropout rate than non-working students (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022; Masevičiūtė K. et al, 2018).

Working students are more exposed to experiencing burnout because they are in a precarious position where they must combine their job requirements with those of those of the academic environment and are unable to devote all their time to a single objective (Draghici, G. L et al, 2022). Student's work-related problems have been found to affect health, cause constant stress, anxiety, and social integration deficit. This can manifest with an array of symptoms such as lack of sleep, difficulty concentrating, feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness or guilt, lack of energy or even a loss in appetite (Verulava T. et al, 2022).

FACTORS AFFECTING WORKING STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

The well-being of working students in Europe can be influenced by various factors, including their employment status, academic workload, financial situation, and personal circumstances, such as family structure/parental status. Here are several key factors that can affect the well-being of working students in Europe.

Time Management:
Probably, the most demanding challenge for students that work. This group of students practically restricts contact with HEI to academic activities, as the remaining time is spent on work and/or family responsibilities (Zerquera et al., 2016). For this reason, relationships with faculty members is a pivotal one, and issues related to teaching-learning, including methodological, technological, and evaluation aspects, cannot fail to be analysed in conjunction with belonging and well-being matters (idem). Some of these areas depend also on the quality of the relationship with non-academic staff members (librarians, ICT, among others) (Dominguez-Whitehead, 2018). Balancing work hours, class schedules, study time, and personal commitments can be challenging for working students. They must effectively manage their time to meet deadlines, attend classes, complete assignments, and fulfil work obligations.

Financial Stress:
Working students often face financial pressure as they juggle the costs of tuition, textbooks, rent, utilities, and other living expenses. Managing a tight budget, covering expenses with limited income, and dealing with financial uncertainty can lead to stress, anxiety, and financial strain. When working students are also parents, other financial issues are considered, such as childcare related expenses(Remery & Schippers, 2019).

Academic Performance/Demands:
The demands of employment can impact working students' academic performance, as they may have less time and energy to devote to studying, attending classes, and participating in extracurricular activities. Balancing work and study commitments while maintaining academic standards can be challenging. Heavy academic workloads, tight deadlines, and conflicting schedules can increase stress and pressure, affecting their well-being.

Health and well-being:
Balancing work and study commitments while managing stress, fatigue, and other health-related issues can take a toll on the physical and mental health of working students. They may experience sleep disturbances, poor dietary habits, lack of exercise, and neglect of self-care, leading to overall declines in health and well-being.

Stress and Mental Health:
The pressure of balancing work and study commitments, along with financial stressors and academic pressures, can contribute to stress, anxiety, and mental health issues among working students. Coping with multiple responsibilities while managing academic and personal challenges can be emotionally taxing.

Fatigue and Burnout:
Working long hours or irregular shifts can lead to fatigue and burnout among working students. Balancing work and study commitments while trying to maintain a healthy work-life balance can take a toll on their physical and mental health.
Studies on students' burnout correlate it negatively with academic achievement, but also self-esteem or engagement, and academic burnout is higher than work-related burnout (Draghici and Cazan, 2022). Students in this condition have more difficulties with coping strategies (Fiorilli et al., 2022), which affects them physically and mentally. Gender differences were observed to the detriment of the female gender (idem).

Work-Life Balance and Family Responsibilities:
Achieving a balance between work, study, and personal life can be challenging for working students. They may struggle to find time for self-care, relaxation, and leisure activities amidst their busy schedules, leading to feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, and struggling with maintaining a healthy work-life balance. This highlights the importance of distinguishing working students (often part time work, to financially support the costs of studying) from working and caregiving students (mature working students that usually work and are responsible for their descendants or ascendants).

Working students who are also parents or caregivers may face additional challenges in balancing their work and study commitments with family responsibilities. They may struggle to find affordable childcare, manage household duties, and fulfil caregiving obligations, leading to increased stress and pressure.

Limited Social Life and Social Isolation:
The time constraints of work and study commitments may limit working students' opportunities for socialising, participating in campus activities, and building relationships with peers. They may feel isolated or disconnected from the campus community due to their busy schedules, leading to feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

Employment Conditions:
The nature of students' employment, including the type of job, working hours, wages, and work environment, can significantly impact their well-being. Factors such as job insecurity, low wages, long hours, and lack of job satisfaction can contribute to stress, fatigue, and dissatisfaction among working students.

Career Development:
Working students may face challenges in gaining relevant work experience, networking with professionals, and pursuing career development opportunities while balancing their academic commitments. Limited time for internships, networking events, and professional development activities can impact their career prospects after graduation.

Limited Support Services:
Working students may have limited access to support services and resources offered by the university, such as academic advising, tutoring, counselling, and career services. They may face barriers in accessing these services due to conflicting schedules or limited availability, impacting their ability to seek help and support when needed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

HEIs may offer support services and resources tailored to the needs of working students, including flexible course scheduling, online learning options, career counselling, financial aid, and assistance with job placement and internships. By recognizing and accommodating the needs of working students, HEIs can help facilitate their academic success and professional development. Addressing these difficulties requires a multifaceted approach that involves providing support services, resources, and accommodations tailored to the needs of working students.

Below are some recommendations for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Europe to better support working students:

Flexible Course Scheduling:
Offer flexible course scheduling options such as evening classes, weekend courses, and online learning modules to accommodate the diverse schedules of working students. This flexibility allows students to balance work and study commitments more effectively.

Credit Transfer Policies:
Develop transparent and flexible credit transfer policies to recognise and award academic credit for prior learning and work experience. This allows working students to leverage their professional experience and accelerate their progress towards degree completion.

Financial Aid and Scholarships:
Provide financial aid programs, scholarships, grants, and tuition waivers specifically tailored to the needs of working students. Consider offering need-based and merit-based financial assistance to alleviate financial burdens and support students in pursuing their educational goals.

Work-Study Programs:
Establish work-study programs or cooperative education opportunities that integrate academic study with paid work experiences relevant to students' fields of study. These programs provide students with valuable professional experience and networking opportunities while pursuing their degrees.

Career Services:
Enhance career services offerings to support working students in exploring career options, developing job-seeking skills, and advancing their professional goals. Provide career counselling, CV writing assistance, job search workshops, and networking events tailored to the needs of working students.

Mental Health and Counselling Services:
Expand mental health and counselling services to meet the unique needs of working students. Offer flexible appointment scheduling, evening hours, and online counselling options to accommodate students' busy schedules. Provide support groups, workshops, and resources to address stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Time Management Workshops:
Offer time management workshops, seminars, and resources to help working students improve their time management skills, set priorities, and balance competing demands. Provide strategies for effective time management, goal setting, and stress reduction to support students in achieving academic success.

Peer Support Networks:
Facilitate peer support networks and mentoring programs where working students can connect with peers, share experiences, and provide mutual support. Encourage peer-to-peer mentoring, study groups, and informal networking opportunities to foster a sense of community and belonging.

Accessibility and Accommodations:
Provide accommodations such as flexible exam scheduling, assistive technologies, and alternative formats for course materials to support students' academic success and participation.

Feedback and Evaluation - co-creating solutions:
Solicit feedback from working students on their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement. Use surveys, focus groups, and advisory committees to gather input and identify areas for enhancement in support services, programs, and policies for working students.

EXAMPLES OF BEST PRACTICES AT HEI

<u>University of Antwerp (Belgium):</u> established Centrum WeST, a Centre for Work and Studying. It provides information and guidance to students who combine a full or part time job with a degree-oriented study programme. It offers for instance evening sessions and workshops to learn or refresh skills that are required for academic studies for students who have not studied for a long time (Universiteit Antwerpen 2024)

<u>Vrije Universiteit Brussel (Belgium):</u> Offers working students the option to spread their studies tailored to specific individual scenarios, including designing a personalised study plan with a study path counsellor (VUB, 2024).

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