

**June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023, School of Biological Science University of Edinburgh**

Happy Staff, Happy Students: Mental Wellbeing for the Whole University Community.

The HUBS/HUCBMS workshop on staff and student wellbeing was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of June 2023 and hosted by Dr Alison Cullinane and Prof Patrick Walsh. Those who registered for the event were from Life science and Biology departments from across the UK including University of Edinburgh, Manchester Metropolitan University, Kingston University London, University of Warwick, University of Sheffield, University of York, University of Liverpool. Those present at the event held roles and responsibilities for student and staff wellbeing.

Sponsors

The event was jointly sponsored by HUBS and HUCBMS.

Aims

The aim of the event was to inform best practice across institutions by bringing together educators, practitioners, and students from HEIs. Invited speakers were encouraged to speak about activities in their institutions that help support mental health of both staff and student and included opportunities for interaction. Delegates were encouraged to share ideas during discussion sessions that were supported by reflective questions. The event also aimed to facilitate networking opportunities for attendees.

Summary of the day.

The workshop was open by the Director of Teaching Prof Patrick Walsh, School of Biological Sciences University of Edinburgh where he welcomed everyone to the event and outline the aims for the day. The morning plenaries were focused on student wellbeing.



The first plenary – Wellbeing in the new curriculum – was presented by Prof Heather McQueen, Dr Elise Darmon and two of their students, Jessica O'Loughlin and Eleanor Edwards, who were co-creators of the health and well-being pathways used in the curriculum. They presented how the well-being pathway was embedded into weekly activities that the first-year students engaged with during workshops and observed ideas of well-being, resilience, community building exercises, dealing with negative thoughts, and understanding learning at university. They presented some results from student surveys that indicated that these activities had a positive impact on

students' well-being. They finished with "The balloon game", a game that allows students to develop their self-awareness of their feelings and emotions, particularly times that are likely to be stressful.

The second plenary was presented by Dr Alison Cullinane entitled "Well-being and portfolios in the new curriculum". As the portfolio director at the School of Biological Sciences (University of Edinburgh) she presented the reflective portfolio designed for first-year students, which is a compulsory component of the curriculum that

**SKILLS MATRIX**

Applied abilities	Work/life balance	Coding	Communication	
Knowledge	Commercial awareness	Safety and conduct in a laboratory		
	Emerging	Developing	Proficient	Mastery

encourages reflection on their academic, personal and professional development. She presented an interactive activity designed for the students that demonstrated how the students were developing their self-awareness of their skills and able to self-evaluate the strengths of their own skills. She presented some results from students' surveys that indicated students were supported in their well-being by these portfolios.



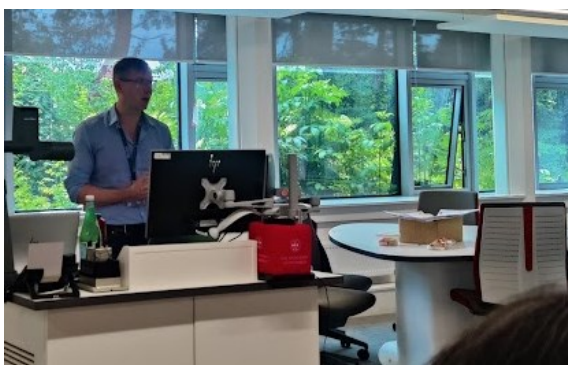
The third plenary on student well-being was presented by Dr Nigel Page from Kingston University London. His talk "Well-being in personal development activities: peer support and general engagement", examined how well-being is multi-dimensional and consists of many different interplaying actors on student support and well-being. He found that the factors and pressures most impacting student well-being at KUL included extensive commuting pressures, academic pressures, relationship and social pressures, a lack of a sense of belonging at university and the cost a living crisis. He implemented a peer support network which

aligned peers, tutors and a personal development/support curriculum in the courses at KUL. Students were required to meet with fellow peers and tutors to develop posters as part of this course. He showed how this peer support network, when implemented within the curriculum in KUL, had increased student engagement and attendance.

The morning plenaries were followed by the first workshop group discussion session which allowed the attendees to reflect on the presentations and what they do in their own institutions, providing an opportunity to learn from best practise. These discussion groups were supported by reflective questions. Some of the barriers to supporting student well-being were time and workload, and lack of training for student facing staff.



The fourth plenary focused on staff wellbeing was present by Mr Iain Kennedy. He discussed his



background, defined mental health, and discussed ideas around duty of care relating to physical and mental safety in work and study. Throughout he invited the audience to reflect on their own perceptions about mental health and the responsibility they have for their students and the University for staff and students. He outlined how mental health has a significant financial impact and is not just statistical scores about mental health but can have large workplace impact on productivity.

He described mental health first aiders, where staff are provided training to support their peers in the workplace by being visible and available to listen, and the programme's history.

Following the plenary, group discussion session two took place, which was focused on staff wellbeing, and was supported by reflective questions. Some outcomes of the discussion included the importance of good line management to support staff in their work and mental health. Barriers included concerns from staff about



discussion of their mental health might limit their promotion prospects. Once again, the theme of the need for training to support staff wellbeing was raised as a barrier.

### Outcomes

The final plenary activity combined discussions on staff and student wellbeing and how we could implement ideas within our own institutions, supported by a third set of reflective questions. Some institutional achievements include “no meeting Fridays”, inclusion of meeting timetables to help with those who have childcare needs and supporting staff in taking annual leave. Interestingly line management was seen as both a barrier and facilitator to good mental health, where staff mental health could be improved through positive line management, both in supporting staff and acting as good role models for discussing and maintaining good mental health. A key barrier that was seen to both staff and student wellbeing was related to training. Further events of this nature could offer training to those in such roles. The event has now initiated a network of people so that further meetings can happen in the future.



### Evaluation

The evaluation asked the attendees what they thought was most useful, satisfaction of activities, and how satisfied they were with the networking opportunities.

#### **1. What was most useful**

*“Amazing sharing of good practices from all involved and great conversations on wellbeing for staff and students, active participation.”*

*“Wide discussion with a variety of practice shared from multiple universities.”*

*“Talks were insightful, workshops well-constructed and scaffolded throughout the day.”*

#### **2. Workshop activities**

*“Yes, a good balance of interactive and teaching styles.”*

*“Most definitely, great workshop.”*

*“Yes, just the right amount not too rushed.”*

#### **3. Networking opportunities**

*“There was a good opportunity to meet other people and have discussions outside the workshops.”*

*“Very good to meet and hear experiences from some new people.”*

*“Very satisfying, lovely day of networking and engagement for all at the workshop.”*