

**Embedding Mental Wellbeing: Methods and Benefits**  
**Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021**  
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## Definitions

### **Mental wellbeing:**

There are various definitions around mental wellbeing and “no standard definition in use across the sector” (Pollard et al. 2021, p.21). The Embedding Mental Wellbeing project team has selected a few regularly occurring definitions that particularly resonate with the approaches embraced at the contributing providers and encourage you to consider these alongside any definitions that may exist within your own provider.

The mental health charity Mind state “mental wellbeing describes your mental state - how you are feeling and how well you can cope with day-to-day life. Our mental wellbeing is dynamic. It can change from moment to moment, day to day, month to month or year to year” (Mind 2016, p.2).

The University Mental Health Charter recognises that “wellbeing will encompass a wider framework, of which mental health is an integral part, but which also includes physical and social wellbeing”, noting that student engagement with academic learning impacts experience and wellbeing (Hughes & Spanner 2019, p.9).

The 2021 ‘Student mental health and wellbeing: Insights from higher education providers and sector experts’ publication identifies wellbeing as “a much broader concept than mental health, and positive wellbeing is associated with ‘flourishing or thriving’, ‘satisfaction’, having ‘meaning’, and a sense of ‘balance’ and/or ‘equilibrium’; and is individual and personal, as indicated by other definitions used and/or developed by responding institutions. As with mental health, wellbeing is regarded as dynamic and can change from moment to moment and day to day” (Pollard et al. 2021, p.24). This publication goes on to make a differentiation between the services/programmes provided for mental health and mental wellbeing as follows:

“**Mental health** services/programmes designed for a proportion of students with a mental health need (with or without a formal mental health diagnosis).

**Wellbeing** services/programmes designed for all students with or without a mental health need.” (Pollard et al. 2021, p.43).

The seven higher education providers and students’ union contributing to this collaborative enhancement project all recognise the idea that embedding mental wellbeing is for ‘all students’.

Through this project we have explored the concept of how ‘embedded’ embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum could/can/should/might be.

Drawing from this literature, we have identified five core concepts of wellbeing:

- A sense of flourishing or thriving
- Includes a sense of balance
- Is strengthened by community and belonging
- Wellbeing is dynamic; it can change from day to day and over time
- Inclusive, for all students

### **'Embedding' mental wellbeing:**

'Embedding' is a term often used but seldom clearly defined in an educational context. This study draws on literature and findings from a survey with 666 higher education sector professionals in order to identify five core properties of 'embeddedness' in practice. (Please note, 'practice' includes teaching, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment, student support and skills development.)

Mental wellbeing should be:

1. **Modelled** in practice, as well as situated in it; i.e. wellbeing should be inherent in pedagogy and the design of learning, as well as present in curriculum content (Zundans-Fraser and Lancaster, 2012; Green and Meyer, 1991)
2. **Tailored** to students' needs, allowing for different approaches to be adopted in different contexts
3. **Inherent** in the values, ethos and culture of the institution, as well as ubiquitous across it (Moody and White, 2003)
4. Represented in **strategy** and **resourced** appropriately, as well as being ongoing practice (Laud et al., 2015)
5. A **holistic**, partnership effort (Hughes and Spanner, 2019)

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