



Embedding Mental Wellbeing: Methods and Benefits Collaborative Enhancement Project 2021

Life Tools programme: A psycho-educational programme for all students to manage the transition into university, develop personal, academic and professional skills and resilience

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Life Tools programme – for all students, and embedding in departments

My name is Dr Alicia Peña Bizama, and I work at the University of Reading. I am the Life Tools programme manager. I design and deliver this psycho-educational programme for all students at the University. Its purpose is to develop personal, academic, and professional skills. The aim is to provide support to students both in their academic engagement and build their resilience. I work collaboratively with academics in departments to deliver these resources.

Rationale

We are aiming to provide students with tools to manage the transition into university. The University recognises that students are facing new challenges this academic year due to COVID-19. After the long period of lockdowns and online learning, students find it challenging to get back into academic life due to having missed content during the past 18 months and getting used to a hybrid teaching model (face-to-face and online modalities).

Method

I developed the programme (during the past 15 years) and contacted academics, or they contacted me, to embed the training in their departments. For example, this autumn term, I worked with the Director of Academic Tutoring in Pharmacy. We developed a session on stress and ran it together, including a 4th-year student who contributed with examples from her perspective.

Another example - I delivered a training session for students in the Film, Theatre and Television programme. The Academic Tutor organised the session with a colleague from Careers. My Careers colleague presented on how to apply for jobs and I presented on building confidence for the application process.

I am now running the programme primarily online. I circulate emails with the details of upcoming webinars to all Directors of Academic Tutoring, Student Support Services, Support Centres and RUSU (Student Union). Academics and professional staff promote the programme.

As the examples illustrate, when embedding the training in departments, the content of the presentations is tailored to make it relevant to students.

Evaluation

The training was well received by students (based on their feedback to their academic tutor, and on online webinars). We also focused on making sure the content was relevant to the curriculum and that it provided students with the knowledge and strategies to develop their skills.

We have also run a study with the Psychology department to evaluate students' experience of the programme. The results from the last academic year show that students valued the online modality as it made it accessible and inclusive. Students on campus, from other parts of the country and abroad were able to join. They said they felt connected with the University, and that it helped to manage the transition to their studies and maintain their motivation.

Takeaway message

Embedding training in departments works best when it is organised by the Academic Tutor, the session is timetabled, and it is made optional to students. It provides an equal opportunity to all students and the engagement is higher when supported by academics who also participate in the session.

This document was produced as part of the [Collaborative Enhancement Project - Embedding Mental Wellbeing](#).