



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

### **“Navigating Challenging Times” sessions for students at London South Bank University**

**Nicola Smith, London South Bank University**

#### **Introduction**

The ongoing pandemic, along with a malicious cyber incident at London South Bank University (LSBU) in December 2020 resulting in an IT outage, undoubtedly changed the University experience for our students in 2020/21.

In response to this, in February 2021, Nicola Smith, from the Mental Health and Wellbeing team at London South Bank University, committed to designing and delivering an embedded workshop for students entitled “Navigating Challenging Times – Being a student in 2021”.

#### **Rationale**

The session was designed to give students a space to think about and share how they were feeling and the difficulties they were facing as a result of the pandemic and IT outage and to learn ways to manage and cope during challenging times.

It was intended to reach out to as many students as possible who may have been struggling and to give them a voice and an opportunity to share their experiences and their feelings. We wanted to make sure students felt they were not alone, to remind them of the support that was available to them and to share coping techniques to help empower them to prioritise their wellbeing.

#### **Method**

The session was 1 hour long and delivered online via Microsoft Teams (at that time, the campus was closed due to COVID-19 restrictions so in-person sessions were not possible). To ensure we could reach as many students as possible, Course Directors were invited to embed this session into their students’ timetables. We used an Excel spreadsheet (which could be edited via Microsoft Teams) so that Course Directors could sign their students up to session slots. Session slots were available at different times of the day, including some evenings. Where there were no slots that matched their students’ availabilities, we were also able to offer alternative times.

The session was not mandatory; however, students were encouraged to attend. The session was delivered 35 times to a total of 511 students (across the seven schools at LSBU) between 22 February and 22 April 2021.

The content was as follows:

**1) Questions, via the Mentimeter platform**

- How are you feeling?
- What challenges are you facing?

**2) Coping during challenging times**

- What I can / can't control
- Real versus hypothetical worries
- Problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies
- Mindfulness grounding technique
- Unhelpful thinking styles and how to challenge them
- Noticing the positive
- Progressive muscle relaxation technique

**3) Support available at LSBU**

- Support with studies
- Mental health and wellbeing support
- SilverCloud and other recommended self-help and wellbeing resources
- Breathing exercise

**Examples of slides**

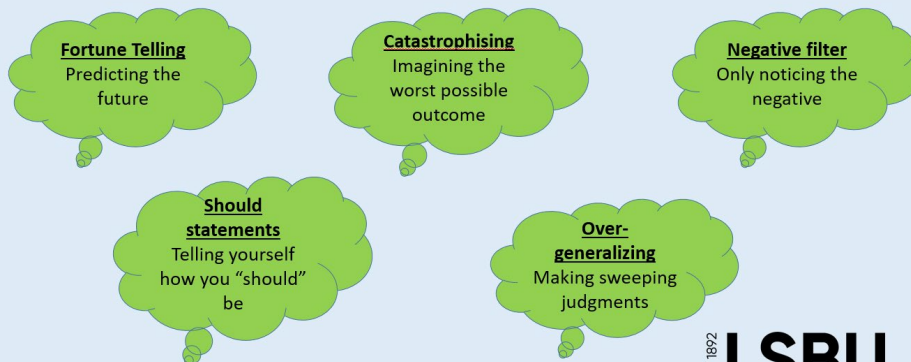


## Emotion Focused Strategies

- ✓Meditation and relaxation
- ✓Set aside "worry time". Write down your worries. Acknowledge your emotions (it's ok to feel what you feel)
- ✓Remember the basic building blocks of mental health (healthy sleep habits, nourishing food, exercise, social connection)
- ✓Challenge "unhelpful thoughts" and reframe them

EST 1892  
**LSBU**

## Unhelpful thinking styles

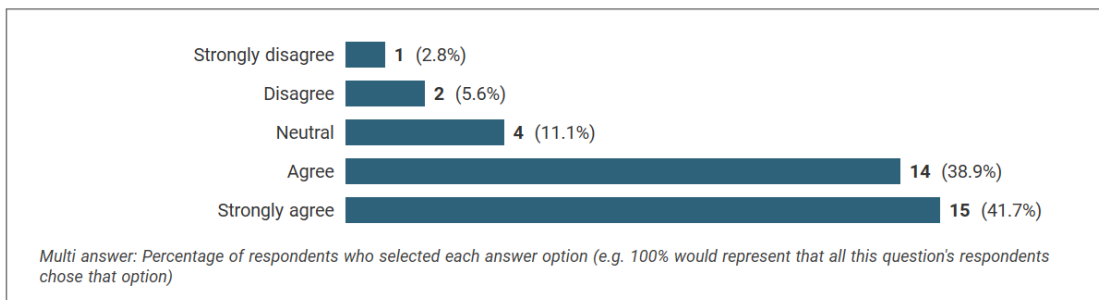


EST 1892  
**LSBU**

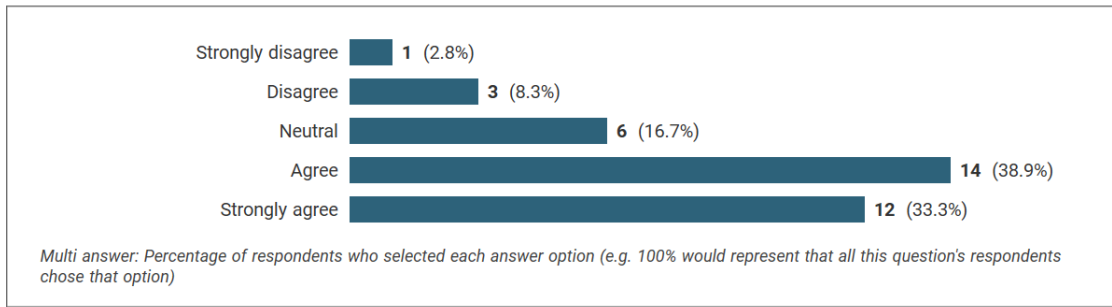
## Evaluation

Students were invited to complete a Feedback Survey via Online Surveys. We received 36 responses (7.4% of attendees), as follows –

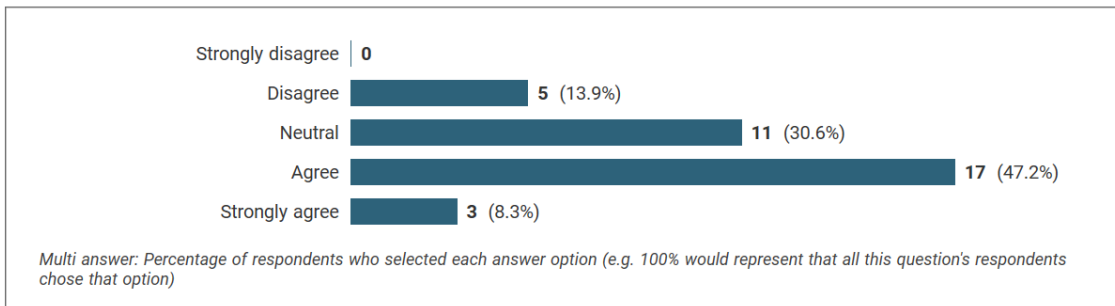
4.1 I have a better understanding of support available at LSBU



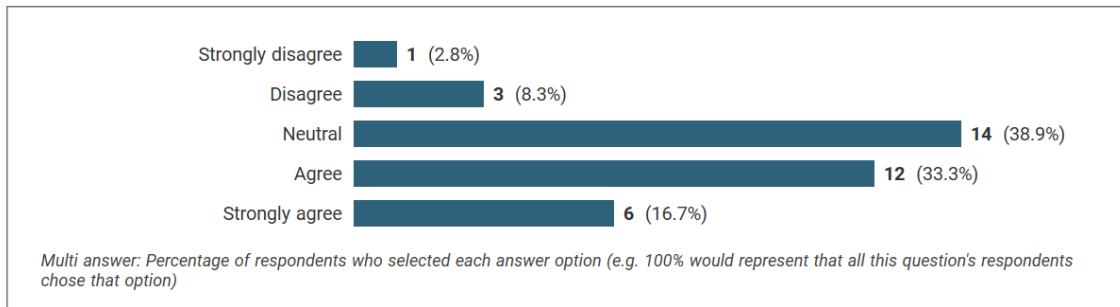
4.2 I have learnt more about ways to cope in challenging times



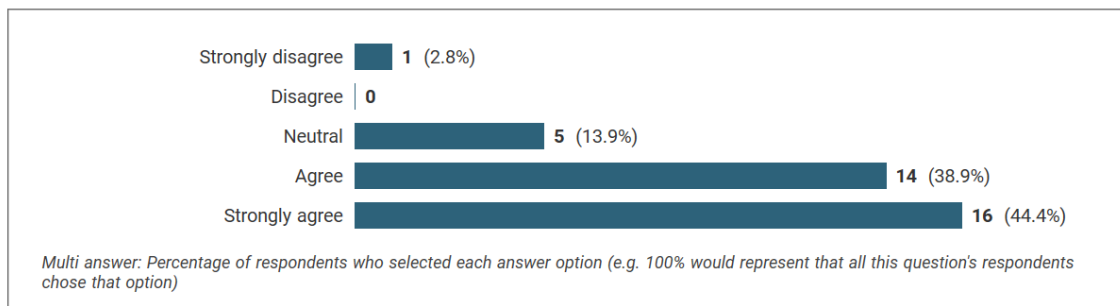
4.3 I feel better prepared to cope with being a student right now



4.4 I feel more confident that I can succeed in my studies



4.5 I would recommend this session to others



The following is an example of some of the comments we received from students when asked what they found most useful about the session:

*“I liked the coping methods and challenging thoughts, seeing other people going through the same thing also”*

*“The different techniques of how to control breathing”*

*“Mindfulness/grounding techniques. Menti polls - good to honestly say how we're feeling”*

*“The websites/resources for meditation/grounding/anxiety release”*

*“Seeing that many people are facing the same struggles. The soothing exercises”*

Some students from the Health and Social Care School fed back that the session did not feel specific enough to their needs (for example, relating to the challenges of being on placements during the pandemic) so since then we have reviewed the content and worked with the school to deliver bespoke sessions.

The benefits from running these sessions were as follows:

- An opportunity to ask students how they were feeling and give them a platform to share this and be heard
- Providing course teams with the opportunity to offer support for their students' wellbeing by signing them up and inviting them directly to this embedded session
- Sharing helpful resources and coping strategies to empower students to focus on their wellbeing
- An opportunity to remind students of the support available to them

### **Takeaway message**

The Navigating Challenging Times session was designed and delivered in response to the pandemic and the disruption caused at LSBU by an IT outage; however, it was clear from the level of engagement and the feedback we received that this was something that our course teams and students might benefit from more regularly. It enabled the course teams to demonstrate to their students that they took their wellbeing seriously and were taking action to address this by booking them directly onto this session and encouraging them to attend. Students were given a voice to share how they were feeling and were provided with practical tips and coping strategies to help them prioritise their wellbeing. It felt very much like a group effort; between Student Services and the schools, between the Mental Health and Wellbeing team and academic colleagues, and was an opportunity to make sure students felt supported, knew they were not alone and were reminded of the support avenues available to them.

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