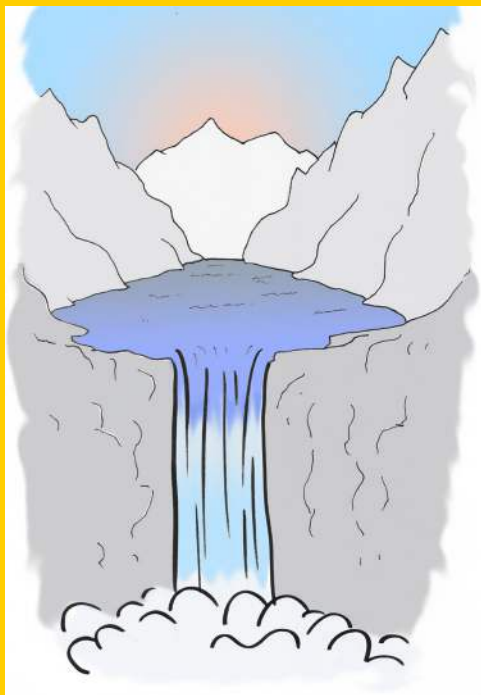


# The Positive and Mindful University

Anthony Seldon and Alan Martin



Occasional Paper 18

## **About the Authors**

**Sir Anthony Seldon** is the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Buckingham. He is the author and editor of over 40 books and co-founder of Action for Happiness ([www.actionforhappiness.org](http://www.actionforhappiness.org)). He is also the President of the International Positive Education Network (IPEN).

**Dr Alan Martin** is a Chartered Psychologist and Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society. He has been the head of the psychology department at the University of Buckingham for over 10 years.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following for their help and guidance:

- Professor Martin Seligman for his support throughout
- Professor Lyle Ungar for help on big data
- Hamish Elvidge for support from the Matthew Elvidge Trust
- Professor Steve West and John de Pury at Universities UK (UUK) for the lead they have given universities on mental health
- Nick Hillman of HEPI for commenting on the text
- Emma Ma of HEPI for editing and proofreading
- Dr Matthew White for information about Australia
- Pinny Lamoure for her work on the first chapter
- Emma Gleadhill for writing chapter 3
- Mark Williamson, Chief Executive of Action for Happiness
- Emily Larson, Chief Executive of the International Positive Education Network
- Rosie Tressler, Chief Executive of Student Minds
- Dr Shelly Kemp of the University of Buckingham
- Purnima Anhal, Sarah Rush and Jenny Carter for help in the office and in producing this booklet

- Dee Bunker, Head of Welfare at Buckingham for useful ideas
- Julie Cakebread at Buckingham for typing several versions
- Rebecca Crane at Bangor University for help on mindfulness in higher education
- Helen Thorne, Director External Relations at UCAS
- Felicia Huppert, Australian Catholic University, Sydney
- Ruth Caleb, Head of Counselling, Brunel University and Chair of UUK Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education Working Group
- Jules Evans, Policy Director, Centre for the History of Emotions, Queen Mary, University of London
- Millie and Darcy, the University dogs here, for their calming influence

*We are grateful to the Matthew Elvidge Trust for a donation towards the costs of distributing this report.*

# Contents

Preface	7
1. A Positive Approach	9
2. Positive Not Reactive Education	13
3. Models Abroad – The United States, Australia and Mexico	23
4. Good Practice in UK Higher Education	33
5. The Positive University I: Managing Transitions	41
6. The Positive University II: Staff	47
7. The Positive University III: Students	55
8. The Mindful University and Medical School	61
Endnotes	65



## Preface

This report proposes a new way forward for higher education in addressing the problems of mental health among students as well as staff, and helping them achieve higher levels of fulfilment. More than 400,000 staff and 2.2 million students are engaged in higher education in the United Kingdom. The pamphlet celebrates the diverse and remarkable work that is taking place at British universities. Much of this work is tilted towards offering support once problems have begun to manifest themselves. The approach in this report, while fully recognising the need for more to be done to help those afflicted by problems, is to create a culture in which students and staff can develop capacities to meet adversities so that problems are less likely to manifest themselves in the first place. This approach is called 'positive psychology' and, as the booklet explains, draws inspiration from the pioneering work at the University of Pennsylvania and elsewhere from the 1990s onwards. The other principal influence is 'mindfulness', introduced in to higher education in the United States from 1979 and in to Britain from 1994.

The analogy that this paper uses is that of a waterfall. The traditional approach in mental, as in physical health, is to be reactive. In contrast, the approach described here is *proactive*. The traditional approach is to wait for sufferers to become ill, and then to offer support once they hit the bottom of the waterfall. This pamphlet describes work that can take place along the river at the *top* of the waterfall, which will help reduce the prospect of the individual ever reaching the edge, and falling over.



## 1. A Positive Approach

Reports indicate that a significant proportion of students experience some form of mental health problem during their studies at universities and other higher education institutions (henceforth all referred to as universities for simplicity's sake). The estimates vary widely between 20 per cent to 80 per cent, depending upon the source. Some sources may have a vested interest in presenting these rates as artificially high (for example to advocate for more investment) or artificially low (in order to limit the demand for resources). Some other sources conflate issues such as stress, which is to be expected on a degree programme as in life in general, while others include only significant mental health difficulties such as depression.

A YouGov survey in 2016 reported that just over one-quarter of students (27 per cent) reported suffering from a mental health problem.<sup>1</sup> It showed a disparity between male and female students with males reporting a lower rate (19 per cent) than females (34 per cent). Of the students who mentioned experiencing these problems, the largest proportions reported depression (77 per cent) and anxiety (74 per cent), with around three-quarters of those suffering from the latter also experiencing the former. The next most frequently reported difficulty was an eating disorder (15 per cent). In 2017, Universities UK (UUK) said that one-in-four students and staff will experience a mental health problem in any given year.

A larger survey carried out jointly by HEPI and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in 2016 compares student sample wellbeing data with data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).<sup>2</sup> This shows students doing less well than 20 to 24-

year olds from the general population on four measures – life satisfaction; whether life feels worthwhile; happiness; and anxiety.

Counselling and psychotherapy research concludes that 92 per cent of students who attend counselling sessions report having difficulties with academic work.<sup>3</sup> Many stresses are inevitable and the Positive University approach will not remove workload, deadlines and exams worries from students. But it will equip students with the skills necessary to tackle them better.

Adapting to a new social environment at university can be testing. Many students move away from home and face new responsibilities in living independently.<sup>4</sup> This removes them from their family support networks and friendship groups and necessitates that they form new relationships as well as learning how to adapt to new ways of studying. For some, this may lead to choices that include alcohol and substance use, which can exacerbate financial difficulties, as well as being detrimental to health and wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Health and lifestyle factors of drinking, smoking and substance abuse have been correlated with instances of mental illness.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, some students decline to take part in social activities due to worries about the time away from study. The resulting lack of social involvement and isolation may play a part in the negative emotional wellbeing of these students. In addition, mature students, or those who live off campus, may not integrate themselves into the university environment due to other commitments, such as family, and can lose out as a result.

The lack of absolute certainty in the figures on mental illnesses and suicide among students and staff at university should not be a reason for inaction. Half of mental health problems manifest by the age of 14, and 75 per cent by the age of 24.<sup>7</sup> Universities are often left to pick up the pieces, which is why this report calls for more joined-up thinking with schools. Whatever the true scale of the problem, there is too much mental illness and too many suicides at university. Some cases may be beyond the power of any university to ameliorate. But some could be by the right interventions. Some misery, some illness and some suicides are preventable and that is why we have written this book.



## 2. Positive Not Reactive Education

Jules Evans of Queen Mary University of London highlights that it is important to understand that universities' focus on wellbeing is not an entirely new thing. If you look back over universities' 2500-year history, they have always seen their mission as at least partly to discipline the mind and build the character of students. It is only in the last five decades or so that this sense of mission has declined. The purpose of higher education gradually changed and secularised in the second half of the 19th century. Universities in the USA and UK began to follow German counterparts in focusing more on research and PhDs at the expense of character building.

Positive psychology is an evidence-based approach that seeks to understand and develop human character strengths which allow people to cope better with adversity and in turn to flourish. Positive education is simply the application of positive psychology to all levels of education and can be used to refocus universities on their traditional mission of character building as well as intellectual development. Positive education is not an alternative to an academic education: but it may well enhance it, by allowing students and staff to perform at their best: physically, emotionally and mentally. It complements and supports traditional academic education and allows it to achieve its objectives more successfully.

Positive education has 10 distinctive features.

- i **Proactive not reactive:** The traditional approach to mental health problems, as found in the NHS, in universities and schools, is to wait for students to develop

problems, and then for medical and welfare authorities to intervene, offering a mix of talking therapies and medication. Students and staff will often self-medicate, turning to alcohol and drugs, legal and illegal, at times of difficulty. A positive education provides the opportunity for students and staff to develop natural capacities to cope with the difficulties that life will inevitably present. The analogy of a waterfall is the *leitmotif* of this book. The traditional approach, to wait for problems to manifest themselves once students or staff have hit the bottom of the waterfall, and then to intervene is no longer adequate. There are several problems with this approach, including the difficulty of putting people back together once they have hit the bottom. Once problems occur they are more likely to recur; this is called 'kindling'. Positive psychology can be understood as an activity at the top of the waterfall. Information is provided which helps students and staff combat the currents and exigencies of life propelling them towards the precipice, thereby keeping them from the edge of the waterfall by helping them manage their difficulties rather than succumbing to them.

- ii. **The majority, not the minority:** The traditional approach deals with those who report difficulties to medical and welfare authorities, who are in fact the minority. In contrast, the positive education approach deals with the majority, if not all students, by helping them develop the skills and approaches to handle difficulties in their own lives and to maximise their own wellbeing. At school, pupils have little choice but to participate if the school adopts positive education practices, though the extent

to which they choose to adopt them in their own lives is voluntary. But at university, where students are older and traditions of autonomy more embedded, positive education is likely to be much more an opt-in system, chosen perhaps by the majority once the personal benefit is understood, but not by everyone.

- iii. **Staff and students:** Positive education does not work fully unless it applies to staff and students. No figures are more important in this process than the leaders, for their endorsement (or not) of the approach, and because of the modelling of the behaviour of positive education (or not) in their day-to-day conduct. While it can be easier to embed good habits when people are younger, and thus positive education can be more beneficial for younger students, staff and students of all ages can learn to adapt their behaviour as they find the approaches of positive education meaningful and helpful.
- iv. **Control over the physical and mental state:** Positive psychology says we do not have to be victims, the passive recipients of misfortune. We do have a choice in life. It aims to go with the grain of the body, the emotions and the mind. It sees difficulties as inevitable, especially in the short-term, but it aims to allow individuals to develop natural practices to allow them to cope optimally with their lives, and to make the most of them. Learning to breathe slowly and deeply, for example, is a natural and simple way to manage anxiety.
- v. **Seeing students as human beings not data:** Schools worldwide are measured on the performance

of students in tests, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Performance of undergraduates at universities is typically measured by the success of students in their final examinations and by their course completion. Positive education seeks to educate not just the intellect but the emotions and the body and to give individuals lifelong approaches to help make the most of their lives. If universities take this role seriously, they will develop more capable human beings, as well as ones more likely to perform to their best in exams and complete their studies.

- vi. **Concerned with the long-term not just the short-term:** Schools, and universities, tend to be interested only in students during their time at the institution. Judgements about schools and universities are based on performance in league tables. Positive education takes a more individual approach. It is concerned with the long-term and the development of human beings who will be able to adapt to change, for example, in the workplace, and to live more in harmony with others, and to enjoy life to the full. If done properly, positive education has lifelong benefits.
- vii. **Flourishing, not just pain amelioration:** Traditional approaches to mental health problems in schools and universities involve interventions which allow the individual to cope and get through the period of difficulty. Its concern is to help the individual *manage*. Positive psychology is also concerned to help ameliorate unhappiness, anxiety, anger and other afflictions. But it is crucially concerned equally to develop human

'flourishing', to allow individuals to move beyond the minimisation of pain into the maximisation of happiness and fulfilment. On an unhappiness / happiness scale from minus five to plus five, the traditional approach aims to get the individual up to zero: positive education seeks to move them up to plus five.

viii. **Building human capacity, not creating dependency:**

Traditional approaches to dealing with mental health problems can leave the individual dependent upon drugs or talking therapies. Positive psychology aims to develop human capacity, to strengthen human character, to develop resilience or grit, and to allow the individual to be the best possible version of themselves. It has been attacked in the media for diminishing individuality: it does the opposite. It allows individuality and character to blossom, and for limitations and life-restricting conditions which stunt human fulfilment to be navigated better.

ix. **Need not be time or money dependent:**

Positive education is about cultural change. Modules at universities and schools can certainly be helpful. But the core approach depends on a cultural change within institutions through a commitment from the top to responsibility for the personal development of all the students and staff. If leaders, for example, are irritable and exude an atmosphere of anxiety and mistrust, the quality of life in the whole institution will suffer. If leaders instead are reflective, inclusive and affirming of others, these attitudes can percolate down through the entire institution to the benefit of all.

- x. **Difficulties are seen as inevitable, not aberrations or necessarily bad:** Positive education sees difficulties in life as inevitable and it helps prepare students and staff to meet more capably the challenges they will face. It believes in a growth mindset, where our ability to adapt is recognised, as opposed to a fixed mindset, where the dominant belief is that we cannot change. It emphasises the ability of individuals to adapt and grow, and to change their thinking and their actions when difficulties arise. It allows individuals to see difficulties less as problems and more as opportunities, without which change for the better might not occur.

*Positive Education in Schools Today by Emma Gleadhill*

Positive education in schools goes beyond the traditional Personal Social Health and Citizenship Education (PSHCE) agenda. PSHCE tends to be a stand-alone part of the curriculum, delivered by specialists and often also by class teachers who may have variable levels of training, expertise and comfort with the social and emotional elements of the subject.

Positive education programmes are differentiated by their whole-school approach. At best, they are scientifically-informed, strategic and all-embracing. Another difference is the active teaching and exercise of strategies to build mature defences against low self-esteem, depression and anxiety. These approaches aim to be pre-emptive. Learning from positive psychology, the challenge for a 21<sup>st</sup> century school is empowering individuals to understand their strengths, identify negative habits of mind and adopt strategies to help them thrive.

In 2014, Professor Richard Layard published a study that challenged the long-held assumption by education policymakers that academic performance is paramount in laying the foundations for a successful future. Rather, investing in the emotional wellbeing of children at school and intervening to nurture and sustain positive mental health is the key to flourishing:

*By far the most important predictor of adult life-satisfaction is emotional health, both in childhood and subsequently. We find that the intellectual performance of a child is the least important childhood predictor of life-satisfaction as an adult.<sup>8</sup>*

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) now accepts schools that include wellbeing will perform better academically too, and produce more capable people better able to perform well in the job market. The challenge now is to find ways of measuring wellbeing of children in schools and holding schools to account for monitoring, evaluating and delivering on wellbeing. National league tables that benchmark wellbeing could ensure this emphasis becomes mainstream and on a par with academic delivery, rather than peripheral.

### *Wellington College*

Wellington College was the first UK school to launch a course on happiness and wellbeing in 2006. Under the headship of Anthony Seldon and Ian Morris (Head of Philosophy and Religion) led the programme Head of Philosophy and Religion, led the programme and championed wellbeing as a philosophy of education.<sup>9</sup> The Wellington approach is based upon research into the protective features of optimistic mind-sets and the

fact that both happiness and optimism can be nurtured. This evolved into a programme teaching these scientific theories and strategies as well as mindfulness in day-to-day practice. The fact that Wellington's A-Level results improved so dramatically (from 256<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> in *The Sunday Times* league table) helped show naysayers that positive education can boost, rather than undermine, academic performance.

*Charles Dickens Primary School, Southwark*

This inner-city London school has developed mindfulness and emotional intelligence strategies from nursery onwards (aged 2 to 11). Charles Dickens is the first primary to work extensively with the University of Cambridge on its investigation into the impact of mindfulness on child development, work that is still going on.<sup>10</sup> A significant change has occurred in parent interest and engagement, where teachers, children, and their carers are developing a shared language around working with emotions. Dealing with sadness, frustration and anxiety has become less solitary or shameful. This is beneficial to all – especially vulnerable children and families under strain in an exceedingly diverse demographic. The school has gone from struggling via secure parental engagement to having to repeat parenting sessions. A culture of constructive contact between teachers and parents is growing and extending even for harder-to-reach parents.

### *Conclusion*

Schools need to be accountable for delivering on wellbeing if we are to stop young people's mental health deteriorating. We need to go further and act to empower future generations to live their lives and flourish to the full.

The next steps involve tracking wellbeing and targeting action to strengthen character and build resilience. Positive education in schools implies that leading professionals should not just be managing behaviour or teaching their academic subjects. They are nurturing relationships between the individual and others: with friends, family, work and the wider world. Positive education in schools involves building character, and encouraging the next generation to thrive personally, socially and emotionally.



### 3. Models Abroad – The United States, Australia and Mexico

#### *The United States*

Martin Seligman, an American psychologist, educator and author, is justifiably seen as the founder of positive psychology. He argues academic psychology and psychological practitioners should focus more on the positive aspects of human experience, such as happiness and flourishing, and less on the negative aspects. This means realigning research programmes and psychological interventions towards investigating the ways in which people can experience happier and more fulfilling lives, rather than just mitigating harm and suffering.

After a decade expounding his thinking, Seligman proposed a five-component model which he believes accommodates the key factors that help people feel happy and fulfilled.<sup>11</sup> The acronym for this model is PERMA:

**P**ositive emotions – being able to focus upon emotions that make us feel good and taking an optimistic and positive view of life events and challenges.

**E**ngagement – finding activities that absorb our attention and enable us to feel a sense of immersion in our work.

**R**elationships – providing experiences of love and joy as well as support networks when necessary.

**M**eaning – belonging to and serving something larger than the self, deriving a greater purpose in life and understanding our impact upon others around us.

**Accomplishments** – fulfilling goals, having had the ambition to set goals in the first place.

Seligman has overseen an extensive research programme into human flourishing. He created a Master's in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) at the University of Pennsylvania in order to disseminate the research findings from positive psychology. The Penn MAPP programme is now the leading postgraduate programme for the study of positive psychology in the world. Focused upon the application of positive psychology, its approach has been popular in areas that require a focus on performance and flourishing, such as coaching and education. It is now feeding through into other domains such as organisational and health psychology.

The PERMA model can be employed by individuals as well as institutions to enact positive changes. It provides a framework against which individual practice and institutional policy can be compared to assess positive impact. It allows institutions to investigate what they do well for stakeholders and to identify areas in which they can improve. An institution may focus upon enabling their staff to experience a sense of engagement, but any benefits would be limited if they were at the expense of staff feeling a sense of accomplishment in their work. A balance between the factors is important. It is important to note too that there are likely to be individual differences in the ways people value each component of the PERMA model. Some may value relationships more than accomplishments within any institutional grouping, for example, so care is needed to ensure a good fit between the individual and the institution.

The business world is an obvious area for the application of positive psychology. It is not surprising, therefore, that some business schools have incorporated positive psychology theory and its applications into their programmes.

- One notable example is David Cooperrider at Case Western Reserve in Cleveland, Ohio, who has developed a process for organisational change called 'Appreciative Inquiry'. This method uses the principles of positive psychology to ensure that the process of change is driven by members of the institution, focusing on what they do well and how it can be enhanced. Cooperrider has used this method to instigate change in a wide range of institutions, including multi-national corporations and large governmental organisations.
- The Englehard project for connecting life and learning at Georgetown University in Washington DC is an example of the way in which universities can integrate wellbeing into course content. The project is intended to create connections between all of the stakeholders at the University. Georgetown may not refer explicitly to positive psychology in the literature for the project, but its focus upon personal development, wellbeing, relationships and engagement fits well within the PERMA model. There are many routes to embedding wellbeing within universities and the values and culture of each institution will find common ground within the PERMA framework if they are student focused and looking to create a rounded experience.

## *Australia*

The majority of institutions that have incorporated positive psychology in Australia have done so in dedicated centres within specialised faculties and schools. They are not usually located in psychology departments, in part because psychology is not recognised as a standalone discipline in all jurisdictions and because traditional academic psychology has not always been open to positive psychology. Many research and practitioner centres of positive psychology can, therefore, be found in schools of education and business.

The Centre for Positive Psychology in the Melbourne Graduate School of Education at the University of Melbourne is one of the world's leading centres of positive psychology. It is run by Professor Lea Waters who holds the Gerry Higgins Chair in Positive Psychology. The Centre's vision is to advance the science and practice of wellbeing for students, teachers and education systems at primary, secondary and higher levels, and it has adopted a broad approach: positive students, positive schools and positive systems.<sup>12</sup> Two of its projects focus on:

- Enhancing adolescent mental health through positive education, focusing on longitudinal assessments which include online surveys, psychophysiological and biological, experience sampling and focus group data; and
- The development of The Well-being Profiler, an online measurement tool that is a student-report questionnaire which is inexpensive, straightforward to administer and interpret, and written in adolescent-friendly language, for use in schools.

Professor Peggy Kern's research for the Centre has focused on developing psychometric measures of Seligman's PERMA model. These are designed to enable researchers to take snapshot measures of respondents' happiness within the five PERMA domains.

She has developed her own five-factor model for assessing flourishing in adolescents called EPOCH.<sup>13</sup>

**Engagement** – linked to the work of one of positive psychology's key figures, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Distinguished Professor of Psychology and Management at Claremont Graduate University, whose concept of 'flow' is where we become completely absorbed with an activity.<sup>14</sup>

**Perseverance** – the ability to pursue a goal to completion even when faced with hurdles. It is related to 'grit', an area of research interest most recently promoted by another of positive psychology's leading figures, Angela Duckworth, Professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>15</sup>

**Optimism** – characterised by a positive outlook and a perspective that favours hope and confidence.

**Connectedness** – enjoying worthwhile relationships with others and feeling loved and valued in return.

**Happiness** – feeling consistently positive and contented with life.

The primary benefit of the research centre approach is to enable researchers to focus within a specific domain. But the downside is that the research and applications are unlikely to have wide-

scale impact within the university unless the research centre is promoted within the institution or more broadly as a centre of excellence outside the confines of the school in which it is based. The research findings and interventions could be considered parochial if they compete with traditional disciplines that are considered to have higher impact.

It is notable that Australian education centres are more likely to have significant impact outside a university than within it as many traditional universities consider their primary purpose to be the production of research output rather than teaching students. It is, therefore, not surprising that the positive psychology research centres are located in schools of education and business which are required to reach out into the non-academic world as part of their strategic function.

### *Mexico*

TecMilenio University is a leading private, not-for-profit, university with 29 sites across Mexico (and an online only 'campus', also based in Monterrey). The teaching model is based upon recruiting temporary staff (adjunct professors) to deliver course content, who are professionals working within the sectors they teach. The content is designed and created for the whole operation at the headquarters in Monterrey. TecMilenio has 4,500 staff and around 52,000 students across its sites.

It is not unusual for universities in Mexico to have an associated high school and even for the school to be on the same site as the university and this is the case with most of the TecMilenio sites across Mexico. The high school takes children from the age of 15 for a three-year programme leading to a university

course lasting four years. A student can thus be based within the institution for seven years of their education.

In 2013, the President of TecMilenio, Hector Escamilla, attended a meeting at Wellington College on positive psychology in education, which also saw the launch of the International Positive Education Network (IPEN). The meeting had representatives from around 20 education institutions all of whom had an interest in introducing happiness, mindfulness and wellbeing into their institutions and curricula. Escamilla was entranced by what he heard and decided to embark on a strategy that involved embedding happiness and wellbeing at the centre of TecMilenio's culture and transforming it into the world's first positive university. The primary focus is to help students identify a purpose in their life and then to develop the skills and competencies to achieve their goals, which includes a significant element of training in positive psychology alongside relevant academic domains.

TecMilenio assembled an advisory board including leading figures in positive psychology, positive education and positive organisations. In addition, they founded an Institute of Well-Being and Happiness (*Instituto de Ciencias de la Felicidad*) and recruited Enrique Tames, a professor of philosophy and Dean of Humanities at Tecnológico de Monterrey, to lead it. TecMilenio was created as a lean and flexible institution so the implementation of the positive university was seen as a test of its ability to make the changes necessary to deliver three strategic aims: a customised student experience, 'learning by doing' and positive psychology. TecMilenio, it should be noted, had the advantage of institutional youth (being around 10

years old when this change began), an expectation of flexibility and dynamic exceptional leadership.

A strategic aim of the TecMilenio approach is for their students to find their purpose in life (*propósito en la vida*). Drawing on the best advice and research they devised a wellbeing and happiness ecosystem incorporating Seligman's PERMA model but moving beyond it. They decided to add 'Health' and 'Mindfulness' to their version, to make a 'PERMA+2'. Further, it incorporates a strengths-based model of achievement and incorporates the 'Values In Action' (VIA) 'character strengths' system of measurement.<sup>16</sup> Degree programmes are designed to ensure that students must take mandatory positive psychology modules. In addition, all teaching staff are required to undergo training in positive psychology within the overall context of the TecMilenio wellbeing and happiness ecosystem.

The Institute of Well-Being and Happiness at TecMilenio is responsible for creating training material for all the staff, which is delivered using blended learning, with the content standardised across all 29 campuses of TecMilenio. Training is delivered in digital form with weekly exercises across 12 weeks requiring around 80 hours of total study. In addition, Escamilla and his colleagues have created a course in 'positive leadership' for those in middle-to-high level leadership positions at TecMilenio. As head of the institute, he is also responsible for stress testing all new policy and procedures against the positive ecosystem model and can veto any proposal that cannot be justified within the model. Consider what would happen in British higher education institutions if senior lecturers were forced to justify policy and procedure for its positive impact upon staff and students as a primary objective.

The TecMilenio approach is data driven and evidence based. From inception of the positive university programme, it has been collecting data on staff and student happiness and wellbeing using, among other measures, Kern's PERMA scales.<sup>17</sup> TecMilenio has thus collected measures of PERMA, wellbeing and character strengths from staff and students dating back to the earliest days. Given the programme has also been rolled out to the associated high schools at TecMilenio, the team are only now beginning to obtain information from a full cohort of high school students making the transition to university. The quantity of data collected and the measures taken mean that forms of linear modelling and other such techniques can be used to identify relevant patterns in the data. Their aim is that data be analysed and fed back into the happiness and wellbeing eco system in order to modify the model where required.

For all the good work in British universities on mental health, to which we now turn, the country lags behind others abroad, from whom there is much to learn.



## 4. Good Practice in the UK

The UK higher education sector has some excellent initiatives designed to enhance student wellbeing, albeit initiatives that until recently have been too often reactive, lacking in co-ordination and in need of more evidence.

A growing focus upon student mental health stems in part from the link to student progression and retention. With league tables and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) including metrics on completion rates, the Government has become more concerned about mental health issues among students. In January 2017, the Prime Minister announced a green paper on children and young people's mental health services. The Health and Education Select Committees' inquiry has now concluded and has published its report on the role of education in promoting emotional wellbeing in children and young people and preventing the development of mental health problems.<sup>18</sup>

Universities UK is now developing a programme on mental health in higher education to help prioritise wellbeing as a strategic goal for universities, and to bring the evident pockets of good practice together under a unifying framework.<sup>19</sup> Two core principles to this strategy are:

1. everyone possesses their own mental health, which can be defined as well or unwell; and
2. a whole-university approach to wellbeing is required.

The Universities UK initiative is conducted in collaboration with Public Health England, the Higher Education Funding

Council for England and charities, including Student Minds. The whole-university approach to mental wellbeing, which will be launched later in 2017, will focus more on institutional leadership and organisational change. This will go beyond the traditional reactive intervention and draw on the same principles and have the same ends as the 'positive university'.

Hamish Elvidge, Chair of the Matthew Elvidge Trust, is a powerful advocate for positive intervention in education. Like the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust, and a number of other similar bodies, it was set up in response to a family mental health tragedy. Elvidge says that we all have a level of wellbeing and mental health and need to invest in keeping ourselves healthy. Using an elegant health continuum model, he highlights that we are always located somewhere between flourishing, managing in the middle and needing help. The model is designed to cover the education period from arriving at school to leaving university, a period of time during which we experience the most fundamental social, emotional and developmental changes.

Elvidge recommends the language of wellbeing and good mental health should be embedded into the culture and ethos of every educational institution. He stresses that all staff (including cleaners, catering staff and administrative support workers) should be able to talk confidently about wellbeing and mental health in every aspect of their work and their engagement with students. This whole-institution approach highlights the need for carrying out research and collecting evidence of the impact of wellbeing in good mental health interventions, while keeping abreast of research into neuroscience and the ways the brain is affected by life events and different situations.

He advocates that appropriate policies and their associated implementation plans should be developed by, and made transparent to, all stakeholders. It is not enough to assume that children and young people will simply learn by observation and association, so students should be taught about how to keep healthy. This teaching is based upon the five principles of:

- connecting with people;
- being active;
- taking notice of the world around you;
- learning new things; and
- giving to others.

Age-appropriate education covering specific topics should also be delivered to students at university level. This could include topics such as self-harm, anxiety and depression (and how to spot the signs of these), eating disorders, relationships, financial literacy, bullying and cyberbullying, healthy eating, sexuality and safe sex practices, drugs and alcohol and the pressures of social media. All these issues have consumed a great deal of discussion within the national debate, but in order to address these effectively a great deal of action needs to take place.

A unified framework should also include a wide range of strategies and devices on how to cope with life's challenges, including tools such as meditation and mindfulness and knowledge about how to build resilience, problem-solving, relationship formation and resolving conflict. As stated above, the concern is not just for the student at university. These skills

and knowledge will be of benefit long after the student has finished their educational career and progressed into the world of work, a period which is likely to consist of two-thirds of their life.

These conclusions also align with those of Poppy Brown, a student of the University of Oxford, who points out in her pioneering HEPI report the disparity between the general assumptions of student experience and the reality.<sup>20</sup> The long-term data indicate that strong social networks and good employment prospects are benefits of university education: however, as seen already, the student population experiences lower levels of wellbeing than their age matched peers. Brown notes that robust data on mental illness in higher education is scarce but agrees that students report mental health difficulties at higher than expected rates. The key recommendations of her report are firmly in the traditional reactive domain, but are nonetheless important for that: she argues that the communication between service providers needs to be improved in order to help the transition into university; and universities need to improve the support provided to students by increasing funding for counselling services.

In 2016, the Higher Education Academy produced the framework for student success in higher education. It is aligned to the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) which it presents as essential for enhancing student success. The six frameworks are:

- i. assessment;
- ii. employability;

- iii. access, retention, attainment and progression;
- iv. engagement;
- v. internationalisation; and
- vi. flexible learning.

A series framework incorporates these six elements into a coherent approach. The Higher Education Academy must be commended for helping to unify a set of related concerns so they can be addressed in consistent ways across the higher education sector. The framework effectively blends a focus on student wellbeing with other strands of higher education policy.

The Higher Education Academy 'Teach-well' initiative for embedding mental wellbeing into the curriculum further consists of five components as developed by Ann-Marie Houghton, Teaching Fellow at the University of Lancaster.<sup>21</sup> These all have a distinctively positive education ring to them:

- i. connect by engendering a sense of belonging;
- ii. be active in both the physical and mental domains;
- iii. take notice of the learning community to better understand individual and group learning processes;
- iv. give back to the wider community so that the impact of academic work is given social value; and
- v. keep learning by providing graduates the tools to engage in lifelong learning.

Universities and student unions prompted by the national campaign Step Up To Serve (see #iwill) have recognised that providing opportunities for volunteering for students can enhance students' education as well as their CVs. Volunteering indeed provides excellent positive experiences under all aspects of Seligman's five-part PERMA model. In this way, volunteering can provide a double benefit to the student of enhancing both their CV and their feelings of happiness and wellbeing.

Students' unions have been in the lead in encouraging social action. At Middlesex University, student volunteers are creating a coalition with local faith groups to assist with the resettling of Syrian refugees in Barnet. Bucks New University's Students' Union offer free sports and societies to increase the number of students who engage. At Winchester, there is a profound commitment to student social action, as well as consistent advocacy internally and across the sector from their Vice-Chancellor, Joy Carter. Similarly, at the University of Manchester, a commitment to supporting social action is evident across the Students' Union, the University leadership and academic departments. Kingston University take a targeted approach, based on giving students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities and low-income backgrounds opportunities to take part in social action, often for the first time. This approach is well integrated into the student services team, careers and academic departments.

Many individual universities have taken a strong lead on mental health, and not just in the reactive sense, though overall the work of Seligman, Cooperrider, Csikszentmihalyi and Duckworth is largely unknown in the UK. (The big exception is the proactive mental health work done with mindfulness,

as discussed in chapter 8.) Three excellent examples of vibrant work are:

- i. **Wolverhampton University**, which won the *Times Higher Education* award in 2016 for Outstanding Student Support for their radical approach to suicide prevention, 'Three minutes to save a life'.<sup>22</sup> Informed by the ground-breaking work of Alys Cole-King's 'Connecting with People', this insists that people in distress need compassion not medicalisation.<sup>23</sup> Clare Dickens, the Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator, and her team aim to help students talk about mental health and distress without stigma, for skilled, competent and compassionate staff to address distress and mitigate suicide risk. Their work has received strong support from Professor Geoff Layer, Wolverhampton's Vice-Chancellor.
- ii. **Cardiff University**, which takes an active management approach to mental health and wellbeing, brings together the 'Cardiff Model' of stepped care for students who may need clinical or social interventions with wellbeing provision for the wider student community.<sup>24</sup> Ben Lewis, who leads the student services team, emphasises how the design of physical and virtual environments underpins their work. The planned 'Centre for Student Life' at the physical heart of the University signals a comprehensive service redesign, with new online enquiry, case management, and referral processes to transform access for students on campus and at distance.

- iii. **King's College London**, with a population of 28,900 students in central and south London, has two exemplary aspects of its mental health provision: research and peer support. King's Wellbeing Team partners with the King's Students' Union to co-produce student-led wellbeing initiatives, including peer-outreach programmes and a dynamic community of peer supporters.<sup>25</sup> Their world-class Society and Mental Health Research Group explores how social contexts, interactions, and experiences shape the occurrence, outcome, and management of mental health problems in higher education.<sup>26</sup>

## 5. The Positive University: Managing Transitions

Transitions into and between the phases of education can have a significant negative impact upon students' health and wellbeing. The *UPP Annual Student Experience Survey* in 2016 showed 87 per cent of respondents experienced difficulty coping with transition to university, including isolation, financial difficulties and work stress, when moving away from home.<sup>27</sup> Other studies suggest difficulties are particularly acute for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) students or those from low socio-economic groups.<sup>28</sup>

Transitions are inevitable in education, occurring when children enter school from home, then secondary school, further education and university. Then comes the transition from the education system into the workplace. None of these arguably is as major as school to university, and it is still under-acknowledged, by schools as well as by universities. Nothing miraculous happens to a young person in the 10 or so weeks between finishing the last A-Level paper and starting at university. They do not suddenly become more mature or wiser because they are 10 weeks older.

We propose 10 ways of improving the current transition arrangements. Those who take 'gap years' can find the transition to university easier. They are a year older and they have spent time working, travelling, volunteering or a mixture of all of these, and have had numerous opportunities to enhance their self-reliance.

The 10 steps we propose are as follows.

**i. Opt-out disclosure of mental health conditions**

The law prevents or restricts schools and medical authorities passing on to universities details of mental and emotional problems that the young person might have experienced. We advocate all students be more strongly encouraged to provide information about any difficulties that they may have experienced, with a clear understanding that this is a voluntary process, and that the information will be treated strictly confidentially. Moving to an opt-out system would allow universities and other stakeholders to prepare better for any students who are facing particular difficulties. One 2017 survey shows that of the 13 per cent of university applicants who admitted to a mental health condition, only 37 per cent said they intended to disclose it to their university.<sup>29</sup>

Monitoring individual students' wellbeing in real time using big data methods including Facebook and Twitter would be of great benefit to identifying problems and opportunities as they occur. This potentially life-saving technique has been pioneered by the University of Pennsylvania, but it does of course require voluntary consent of participating students and students would need to be assured of anonymity.<sup>30</sup>

**ii. Schools and sixth form colleges need to do far more to prepare students for university**

The best schools and colleges do this already, but all should be encouraged to provide core information within the two years spent at sixth form, on what students need to know after they leave school or college. Components could include managing

finances, information about a balanced diet, the value of exercise, rest and sleeping well, and handling other difficulties students typically face and how they can be ameliorated. The great benefit of schools and colleges doing preparation is that the learning will be incremental and it will be delivered by experienced and familiar teachers as an integral part of the education.

### **iii. Contacts before the students arrive**

There may be only a brief window before confirmation of offers after A-Level results are communicated in mid-August and arrival of students in late-September, but these opportunities should be seized in full. Students could be contacted by a 'personal mentor', who are undergraduates at the university one year ahead who will act as a contact for an incoming student on an opt-out basis. Incoming students could receive communication from their personal staff tutors introducing themselves, and a booklet about managing the transition to university reprising the information that should have been explained to them in their sixth forms. University staff could spend more time visiting schools and understanding how students are taught, how they learn, and how they are looked after pastorally. Students could also be connected with each other so they arrive knowing some people.

### **iv. The mentor system**

Every single first-year student should be mentored by a second-year student. This arrangement is beneficial not just to the incomer but to the experienced student too. During the course of the first year, incoming students will be taught about how to act as mentors to incomers the following September, and how

to look out for warning signs that the student is struggling. The friendship between the new and one year older student can be extremely beneficial in acclimatising the incomer to the world of university. Student Minds set great store by buddy systems for a reason: students will tell fellow students things they will never tell university authorities.

#### **v. Staff tutors**

Whereas most universities have personal tutors for students, the arrangement can in truth often be very casual. The positive university advocates mandatory regular meetings between the tutor and the student in their first term, with the tutor trained to look out for worrying signs in the student. For the following two terms, while regular meetings will be encouraged, especially where there are signs of difficulties, meetings should be arranged at the discretion of the tutor and student.

#### **vi. Matriculation**

The positive university advocates all students participate in a formal matriculation ceremony, which is the mirror image of graduation at the conclusion of their course. At matriculation, they are formally inducted to the norms and ethos of the university, and are spoken to about the importance of wellbeing and positive mental health.

#### **vii. Induction**

The norm for many fresher students involves heavy drinking sessions in bars, which is inappropriate for many students. Positive universities ensure this is balanced by providing alternatives for students who do not wish to participate in such

events. Many universities turn a blind eye to excessive drinking, believing that what students choose to do with alcohol, and indeed drugs, is none of their business. The positive university says it is. Excessive alcohol has led to avoidable accidents, assaults, and physical and mental problems. All universities, positive or otherwise, should no longer be allowed to continue with this permissive approach. Just because a student can legally drink does not mean they have learned self-control and discernment. Studies on the extent of student drinking are inconclusive, with some reporting the rate falling. But whatever the extent of abuse of drink and drugs, it is still too high.

### **viii. A standing school:university transition body**

Mental health issues often first manifest when students are at school. Many universities are not aware of the work done at schools on mental health. A standing school:university body should be established to develop co-ordinated strategies for enhancing positive mental health between both levels of education.

### **ix. A Pro-Vice-Chancellor for transitions**

Universities should establish a Pro-Vice-Chancellor for transitions, or appoint another senior figure with the responsibility for ensuring that transitions are given senior priority.<sup>31</sup> Each university needs its own bespoke and comprehensive transition system.

### **x. Parental involvement**

In general, universities have become more welcoming of parents over the last 25 years. Parents have an important

and active role in helping to smooth transitions. Schools can provide them with more information on how their children can best flourish in higher education, and universities can keep the parents better informed on how their children can learn to manage better the transition to independent living. There should be a partnership, not an impersonal wall, between universities and parents.

In these ways, the difficulties of transition will be improved, and first-year students will have a more successful time academically, socially and personally, and their student experience will be enhanced. A secure and happy first year will underpin what happens to the student subsequently.

## **6. The Positive University II: Staff**

Many of the most effective positive interventions in universities are intended for, and targeted at, students. However, the typical member of staff will work at the university for longer than the three years the typical undergraduate is present at the institution. A positive environment for students should not be at the expense of staff. It is a false economy if an improved student environment comes at the expense of staff health and wellbeing. It is, therefore, essential when embedding positive psychology within the culture of a university, that staff are considered in the design of the framework.

For cultural change to be effective, the whole institution must be involved in designing its positive psychology approach. Human resource departments are obviously critical. Those that favour a strengths-based approach to recruitment and personal development will have an advantage. If the management and HR teams consider remuneration the only significant reward offered by the institution, a positive strategy is unlikely to be successful. We utilise Seligman's PERMA model for the first five suggestions for staff.

### **i. Positive emotions**

Universities need to provide supportive environments for professional relationships to develop, not only between departments but within them. Departmental away days, social events and reading parties can all be encouraged. Support staff who can feel excluded and undervalued should be invited too. Harmonious departments are often productive ones too.

## **ii. Engagement**

The increasing attention paid to teaching, including the Teaching Excellence Framework, makes it all the more important for staff to be properly engaged with the teaching element of their jobs. It can be valuable to recall the qualities of the lecturers we had as undergraduates ourselves who left a lasting impact upon us. We can learn much from their example. Investigating the factors that enable staff to be more engaged with their teaching can lead to a virtuous feedback where students also become better engaged with what they are expected to learn. Contrary to some popular perception, we believe that most staff genuinely do not want to be disengaged from their students, though some need encouragement, guidance and practical help to learn how to teach better. Almost all students come to university wanting to learn, and if they are well taught, positive student:staff relations will follow. No academic enjoys the bad relations that follow when their teaching is poor, and the introduction of Teaching Excellence Framework at best might lead to much more thoughtful teaching and enhanced relations.<sup>32</sup>

## **iii. Relations**

Traditional ways in which academic staff interact with students do not encourage the formation of personal relationships, which can be so mutually rewarding. Again, it is unlikely to be accidental that those universities with teaching models which encourage and foster contact between staff and students tend to be rated higher in student satisfaction surveys. This need not involve labour-intensive tutorials or other formal teaching sessions. It can include clubs and staff student discussion

groups. Many academics do not appreciate that the subjects that their students most enjoyed at school and thrived at were the ones where they had the best relations with their staff.

#### **iv. Meaning**

In order to foster 'meaning' within the PERMA model, it will be important for academic staff to recognise the impact of their teaching and research is more than a bureaucratic exercise relating to the Teaching Excellence Framework or Research Excellence Framework. They need to be helped to show they can have an impact, no matter how narrow, within their disciplines. For academic staff to gain meaning from their teaching, it is important for them to be able to identify the impact that their teaching has upon their students. Universities should find innovative ways of breaking down the barriers between students and staff such that they can have rewarding conversations with each other – not one-way conversations based upon student feedback in one direction and lecture content in the other. Support staff need to be equally helped to find meaning in their university, which is hard if all the Vice-Chancellor communicates is about research and academic success. They contribute to these too, and can be helped to see that, and wider measures of university success from the top can help support staff feel they contribute too.

#### **v. Accomplishments**

A human resources policy which is focused on strengths and accomplishments helps staff flourish. If staff feel they are able to align their personal accomplishments with that of their programme, department, school and university, then they are

more likely to feel that their personal accomplishments are important to the university as a whole. The positive university encourages all staff to discover their 'signature strengths', which can be discovered from taking the University of Pennsylvania free strengths questionnaire. Learning to utilise our strengths enhances our accomplishments.

Staff development policies that seek to enhance the five factors of the PERMA model are more likely to result in staff being more productive. If staff feel they are able to foster better work relations, engage better with students and their work, derive greater meaning from their work and have their accomplishments recognised, then the university will be a happier and more successful community.

It is unrealistic to think all staff in all disciplines will be open to the introduction of positive psychology into their working environment and practice. There will always be significant resistance to any institutional change. When the changes are perceived to be based upon something seemingly vague and internal like 'happiness', resistance from academics can be stiff. It is important to move incrementally, to have awareness-raising sessions and to identify champions within departments who are open to these ideas. Methods such as David Cooperrider's 'Appreciative Inquiry' outlined above can enable all staff to make a contribution to institutional change. The method encourages those undergoing the inquiry to focus upon those things that are done well. One may well find that staff, who have so much to gain from the positive university, will be the most active agents for change.

## **vi. Volunteering**

Volunteering offers staff and students benefits including friendship, a sense of belonging and accomplishment, and an enhancement of students' skills as future employees. Volunteering fills one of the basic tenets of wellbeing, which is that if one wants to feel good, do good to others. It is important that each university's leadership teams participate in volunteering, and are seen to be doing so.

## **vii. Shared values, character and resilience building**

Staff and students should all participate in selecting which values they wish to see embodied in their university, or sub-unit of it. They might choose kindness, responsibility, honesty, courage or any other of the virtues. Living with people who share your values contributes to a sense of security and belonging. Courses at a positive university should highlight the different forms of character, all of which, as the University of Birmingham's Centre of Character and Virtues argues, enhance human flourishing, potential and fulfilment.<sup>33</sup> It argues that four virtues need to be developed for us to optimise our flourishing:

1. Moral virtues, such as self-discipline;
2. Intellectual virtues, such as honesty;
3. Civic virtues, such as volunteering; and
4. Performance virtues, such as resilience.

## **viii. Natural environment and quiet rooms**

Efforts should be made to ensure that the university offers staff and students tranquil natural spaces, with an abundance of trees, water and plants, where they can relax. Buildings internally should where possible have plants and natural materials including wood. Buildings and halls of residence should have quiet rooms for students to pause, reflect in, pray or meditate. Opportunities for growing vegetables and plants could be made available, and dogs could be present in welfare areas for those who are soothed by being in contact with them. Universities like Abertay, Manchester and Staffordshire are pioneering the development of 'sticky' campuses, where the provision of attractive spaces facilitate social interaction and learning.

## **ix. Discussion groups**

Action for Happiness, a charity set up in 2011, encourages the formation of discussion groups at universities as elsewhere. The eight-week course is known as 'Exploring What Matters', with each session usually lasting for two hours, following a common format including discussion, expert views and practical advice. At universities, these sessions are increasingly bringing together staff and students to discuss how they can make their individual lives, and the university as a whole, happier and more productive, drawing inspiration from the work of Martin Seligman.<sup>34</sup> The 'ten steps' on the Action for Happiness website, GREAT DREAM, provide the framework.

## **x. Growth mindset**

This approach is associated with the work of Carol Dweck of Stanford University, and can be applied with benefit across the university.<sup>35</sup> The approach is the *sine qua non* for the positive university. Dweck argues everyone possesses either a predominantly 'fixed mindset', where people believe their intelligence, traits and outlook are immutable, or a 'growth mindset', where people believe they can be developed or improved with effort and persistence. Those who resist change have a fixed mindset. Students who think their grades cannot improve, or that their mental difficulties will never be improved, have a fixed mindset. Developing a growth mindset, which can be learned, makes us more flexible, more open to embrace fresh thinking, more successful and happier.



## **7. The Positive University III: Students**

This chapter offers ten ideas to consider when creating the positive university for students.

### **i. Tutors**

As we have seen, tutors in the positive university are in the front line of engagement with students. The position of tutor is a responsible one and they are required to be trained in the techniques of coaching, where they learn how to draw responses out of their students and to develop their tutees' capacity for making good and appropriate decisions. Tutors will be trained to identify a range of difficulties that students experience and to learn when it is appropriate to refer their student to the appropriate university department. The quality of their work can make all the difference to retaining vulnerable students and fulfilling their potential. The positive university believes that any academic who claims their business is purely academic and has nothing to do with the moral or personal development of the students with whom they engage is in error.

### **ii. Targets and records of achievements**

Purpose and accomplishment are ingredients of leading happier lives. All students might fill in a form at the start of each academic year outlining what they hope to achieve, both academically and in terms of wider education and activity. The tutor will then go through the student's targets with them and, at the end of each year, discuss how far they have been achieved, whether the targets were realistic and what can be

done in the following year to make the experience at university a more fulfilling and rewarding one for each student.

We know that those who join in activities, try out new experiences, and are more engaged have happier and more enriched lives. At present the only validation that a student usually receives from his or her university is their final degree certificate, given at the graduation ceremony. The Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR) is an excellent model: to date, over 4,000 students have received their HEARs. Students at the positive university can be presented with 'a record of achievement', listing all their contributions and successes during the entire course of their undergraduate career.

### **iii. Mindfulness**

All students, including medical students, should be offered mindfulness classes, drawing inspiration from the work of international figures, including Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Craig Hassed at Monash University, Mark Williams, formerly of the University of Oxford and Felicia Huppert, founder of the Well-being Institute at the University of Cambridge. Mindfulness has moved into the mainstream. It can bring considerable benefits to students while at university and after.

### **iv. First year taught programme in positive psychology**

Every student in their first year will take a series of modules in wellbeing. The modules should be drawn up by each individual university, but could be based around the Action for Happiness 10 point 'GREAT DREAM' or Seligman's PERMA model.<sup>36</sup> The module should be practical and coursework based and focus

on applying the material in their lives. Positive psychology elements might follow the University of Pennsylvania's Resilience Programme's six elements:

- **self-awareness** – learning to notice thoughts, emotions and reactions;
- **self-regulation** – how to change our thoughts and behaviours, and avoid 'thinking traps' and 'catastrophising';
- **mental-agility** – learning how to think more flexibly and creatively;
- **character strengths** – how to identify and utilise our signature strengths, and to align our lives better with our values;
- **connections** – how to build and maintain strong relationships; and
- **optimism** – how to focus on what we can control and to be purposeful.

Classes will also be given on financial management, entrepreneurship, finding jobs, and respecting diversity and developing tolerance.

## **v. Student mentor system**

During their first year at the positive university, undergraduates will be mentored by a year two student. During year one, students receive instruction on how they are to take over the role when they enter the second year. The experience of a year

being mentored by another student and, in turn mentoring a student themselves, lies at the heart of the approach. Properly organised, this arrangement is straightforward to deliver and can be remarkably effective.

## **vi. Belonging**

Student 'belonging' can be strongly fostered at the positive university, in accommodation as well as academic departments. Surveys show that students who feel a sense of identification, belonging and pride in their home base, their department and university are happier. Students can be assigned a 'house' in their hall of residence, as in many schools, from which much can be gained, and to which they continue to belong even after moving out of student accommodation, or if they live at home. Belonging is vital to mental health and reducing loneliness. Every house should have an experienced member of staff who oversees the students within the group. These groups can form the basis for social events and competitive events within the university, across a wide range of sporting and cultural activities. Academic departments can enhance belonging by support and academic staff taking trouble to get to know each student individually and valuing them.

## **vii. Using students as leaders**

Students are often capable of far greater responsibility than many universities realise. Why? Could it be because university staff rarely go into schools beyond university fairs, so they do not see how much students contribute to running their schools? In a positive university, students will be fully involved in setting the rules, policing social events and halls of residence

and in contributing thoughtfully to teacher appraisal. Students should be treated as responsible adult partners, not as grown-up children who are prone to misbehave, or even as mere numbers.

### **viii. Relaxation classes**

Positive universities should provide spaces for relaxation across the campus. Every student should be taught how to breathe deeply and to control the breath to manage stress. Students who learn how to relax deeply and practise yoga, tai chi, pilates or other relaxation approaches develop growing resilience and confidence for life.

### **ix. Exercise and diet**

Every positive university actively encourages students to engage in regular exercise. The ideal is three periods of exercise a week of no less than 20 minutes, in which the exerciser breaks out into a sweat. Students learn through exercise that they can overcome anxiety, combat depression, and manage their anger better. Students are taught to recognise what foods and drink nourish and sustain them best, and about the benefits of adequate sleep.

### **x. Strengths and self-acceptance**

Positive psychology is based on the development of individual strengths. At present, students in school and university are rarely taught to identify their own signature strengths. Students should be taught how to identify those, while developing strengths in areas where they are less strong. Every student should take the strengths test designed by the University of

Pennsylvania.<sup>37</sup> Students experiencing problems with self-esteem can be reassured to discover that they have significant strengths and that by utilising them more day-to-day, their sense of personal efficacy and command will grow. Students will learn how to become more accepting of themselves and, by doing so, more accepting of others.

## **Measurement**

Measurements of wellbeing are still in their relative infancy. The positive university will nevertheless measure the wellbeing of students, through individual surveys, which can yield important information for the student and their tutor. The university can also adopt the approach pioneered by the University of Pennsylvania, which entails the voluntary opt-in system of examining the social media that the students create, to discover whether the general level of wellbeing in the university is increasing or declining over time, and whether particular interventions are seen as particularly beneficial or damaging. It is based upon the identification of some 50,000 key words and phrases, which are particularly associated with PERMA or its absence.<sup>38</sup>

## 8. The Mindful University and Medical School

Mindfulness is still a relatively new concept to many working in universities and medical schools, but the case for it is old. William James in *Principles of Psychology* in 1890 offered this explanation:

*the faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgement, character and will. No one is compos sui if he have it not. An education which should improve this faculty would be the education par excellence.*<sup>39</sup>

The study of mindfulness in higher education in Britain can be dated to work at Bangor University where Clinical Psychologist Mark Williams, in collaboration with John Teasdale from the Medical Research Council, Cambridge and Zindel Segal from the University of Toronto, led the development of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy. This integrates Jon Kabat-Zinn's Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction programme with Cognitive Therapy, and is an evidence based approach to preventing depression relapse in those who are vulnerable to repeat episodes.

In 2002, Williams, Segal and Teasdale published the Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy manual.<sup>40</sup> Other early leaders in the field were Oxford University, where Williams moved, and Exeter where work was led by Willem Kuyken, who is now Director of the Oxford Mindfulness Centre.

Felicia Huppert, Founder and Director of the Well-being Institute at Cambridge, was another significant pioneer. A particular interest for her is the link between mindfulness

and compassion.<sup>41</sup> The randomised control trial conducted at Cambridge in 2002, and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence's recommendation of Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy in 2004, were significant milestones on the path to integrating mindfulness into mainstream contexts. In 2002, Bangor started a Master's programme for teacher trainers, followed by Exeter and Oxford in 2006.

Jon Kabat-Zinn is the leading figure internationally on the development of mindfulness in the last 40 years. Influenced by Buddhist teachers including the global spiritual leader, Thich Nhat Hanh, he founded a stress reduction clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in 1979, and led the development and implementation of an 8-week course – Mindfulness-based STRESS Reduction (MBSR). Two books followed in the 1990s and MBSR spread across the United States and beyond.<sup>42</sup>

One other figure of influence, above all on the application of mindfulness to Medicine and medical education, is Craig Hassed, a GP and Senior Lecturer at Monash University in Australia. He is the founding President of the Australian Teachers of Meditation Association, and has written a number of books, including *New Frontiers in Medicine* and *Mindfulness for Life*, published in 2012. Monash is perhaps the leading university in the world in the application of mindfulness for students and staff, training some 5,000 of the former and 900 of the latter in 2016. Monash was ahead even of the UK, with the medical faculty offering mindfulness and meditation classes from 1989. In 1991, two-hour stress management workshops were offered in the core curriculum. A series of positive evaluations led to the course being expanded across the university.<sup>43</sup>

In the last two years, mindfulness has expanded considerably across British universities. In July 2016, the University of Buckingham Medical School, in association with the University of Leicester Medical School, brought Hassed to the UK to be the lead speaker at a conference 'Mindfulness and Medicine'. In June 2017, Sarah Stewart-Brown, Professor of Public Health at Warwick Medical School, organised a two-day conference, 'Mindfulness in Health and Higher Education' and in the same month, Universities UK held a one-day conference on 'Mindfulness in Higher Education', with Jon Kabat-Zinn giving the keynote address.

Mindfulness-based approaches have been found to help students and staff manage their fear of failure, depression, sleep problems, anxieties over money, perfectionism and low morale. It works by helping the practitioner to pay attention with greater focus, and combat habitual or default states of mind, where it is preoccupied with daydreaming about the future and recalling the past, and where thinking and imagination are taken to be real as opposed to merely thoughts, to combat being on automatic pilot. In short, mindfulness helps students and staff cope with the problems they encounter in their lives, as well as in enhancing their performance at work. With medics, it leads to greater effectiveness of work and fewer mistakes (medical errors are said to be the third highest cause of death in hospitals). It improves the focus of medics on their patients and engagement with them, and it enhances their own ability to cope with their own demanding, stressful and often lonely lifestyles.

Universities should make mindfulness courses far more widely available for staff and students, with senior teams

demonstrating themselves the qualities of reflective, open and compassionate leadership. Medical Schools should prioritise the incorporation of mindfulness and self-calming modules should be offered to students studying all aspects of Medicine, to help implant good habits for life.

The University of Bristol have developed an excellent model of integrating mindfulness into Medical School education, while the University of Leeds have developed a very effective model for the delivery of mindfulness to staff. Bangor University continues to be a leading beacon in the field where Rebecca Crane directs the Centre for Mindfulness Research and Practice. So it can be done.

## Endnotes

- 1 <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/09/quarter-britains-students-are-afflicted-mental-hea/>
- 2 Jonathan Neves and Nick Hillman, 2016 *HEPI / HEA Student Academic Experience Survey*, 2016
- 3 Karen McKenzie et al, 'The effectiveness of university counselling for students with academic issues', *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 15(4), 2015, pp.284-288 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/capr.12034/full>
- 4 Nick Hillman, 'Why do students study so far from home?', *Times Higher Education*, 23 July 2015
- 5 Thomas Richardson et al, 'A Longitudinal Study of Financial Difficulties and Mental Health in a National Sample of British Undergraduate Students', *Community Mental Health Journal*, 53(3), 2016, pp.344-352 <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10597-016-0052-0.pdf>
- 6 Rachel Jenkins et al, 'The British Mental Health Survey Programme: achievements and latest findings', *Social Psychiatry and Epidemiology*, 44, 2009, pp.899-904 <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs00127-009-0112-7.pdf>
- 7 Peter B. Jones, 'Adult Mental Health Disorders and their Age at Onset', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 202(s54), 2013, pp.s5-s10 <http://bjprcpsych.org/content/bjprcpsych/202/s54/s5.full.pdf>
- 8 Richard Layard et al, 'What Predicts a Successful Life? A Life-course Model of Well-being', *The Economic Journal*, 124, 2014, pp.F720-F738 <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/eoj.12170/full>
- 9 Ian Morris, *Teaching Happiness and Wellbeing in Schools: Learning To Ride Elephants*, second edition, 2015;

Mathew White and Simon Murray (eds), *Evidence-based Approaches in Positive Education: Implementing a Strategic Framework for Well-being in Schools*, 2015;

Mathew White, Gavin R. Slemp and Simon A. Murray (eds), *Future Directions in Wellbeing: Education, Organizations and Policy*, 2017;

Giles Ambler, Matthew P. Anstey, Theo D. McCall and Mathew A. White (eds), *Flourishing in Faith: Theology Encountering Positive Psychology*, 2017;

Jacolyn M. Norrish, *Positive Education: The Geelong Grammar School Journey*, 2015;

Mathew White and Lea E. Waters, 'A case study of "The Good School": Examples of the use of Peterson's strengths-based approach with students', *Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(1), 2015, pp.69-76 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17439760.2014.920408?needAccess=true>;

Lea E. Waters and Mathew White, 'Case study of a school wellbeing initiative: Using appreciative inquiry to support positive change', *International Journal of Wellbeing*, 5(1), 2015, pp. 19-32 <https://internationaljournalofwellbeing.org/index.php/ijow/article/viewFile/328/441>;

Margaret L. Kern et al, 'A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(3), 2015, pp.262-271 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17439760.2014.936962>;

Margaret L. Kern et al, 'Assessing Employee Wellbeing in Schools Using a Multifaceted Approach: Associations with Physical Health, Life Satisfaction, and Professional Thriving', *Psychology*, 5(6), 2014, pp.500-513 [http://file.scirp.org/pdf/PSYCH\\_2014042413542013.pdf](http://file.scirp.org/pdf/PSYCH_2014042413542013.pdf)

- 10 G. McHale, *A case study exploring the effectiveness of mindfulness sessions in a primary school classroom* (MED thesis), CamStar project (Cambridge school teachers and research), The Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge, 2016

- 11 Martin P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being*, 2011; Jane E. Gillham et al, 'Resilience Education', in *Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, Susan David et al (eds), 2014, pp. 609-630
- 12 Centre for Positive Psychology <http://education.unimelb.edu.au/cpp>
- 13 Margaret L. Kern, 'The EPOCH Measure of Adolescent Well-Being', *Psychological Assessment*, 28(5), 2016, pp. 586-597 [http://www.peggykern.org/uploads/5/6/6/7/56678211/kern\\_et\\_al\\_2016\\_-\\_epoch\\_measure\\_of\\_adolescent\\_wellbeing.pdf](http://www.peggykern.org/uploads/5/6/6/7/56678211/kern_et_al_2016_-_epoch_measure_of_adolescent_wellbeing.pdf)
- 14 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*, 1997
- 15 Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, 2016
- 16 Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, 2004
- 17 Margaret L. Kern et al, 'A multidimensional approach to measuring well-being in students: Application of the PERMA framework', *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 10(3), 2015, pp.262-271 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/17439760.2014.936962?needAccess=true>
- 18 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/health-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/children-young-people-mental-health-education-inquiry-16-17/>
- 19 <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/Pages/Student-and-staff-health-and-wellbeing.aspx>
- 20 Poppy Brown, *The invisible problem? Improving students' mental health*, HEPI, 2016 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/STRICTLY-EMBARGOED-UNTIL-22-SEPT-HePi-Report-88-FINAL.pdf>
- 21 Anne-Marie Houghton and Jill Anderson, *Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum: maximising success in higher education*, Higher Education Academy, (forthcoming)

- 22 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2AugsI9fizA>
- 23 <http://www.connectingwithpeople.org/>
- 24 [http://bacpuc.org.uk/\\_sitedata/1430485622%20akPtNy4vs/Articles/07%20-%20Dec.pdf](http://bacpuc.org.uk/_sitedata/1430485622%20akPtNy4vs/Articles/07%20-%20Dec.pdf)
- 25 <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/campuslife/services/health-new/Wellbeing/Kings-Wellbeing.aspx>
- 26 <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/ioppn/depts/hspr/research/CEPH/Socandmentalhealth/index.aspx>. With thanks to John de Pury and the team at UUK for background research.
- 27 UPP, *Annual Student Experience Study*, 2016
- 28 HEPI / Unite Students, *Reality Check: A report on university applicants' attitudes and perceptions*, July 2017 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Reality-Check-Report-Online1.pdf>
- 29 HEPI / Unite Students, *Reality Check: A report on university applicants' attitudes and perceptions*, July 2017
- 30 H. Andrew Schwartz et al, 'Predicting individual well-being through the language of social media', *Pacific Symposium on Biocomputing*, 21, 2016, pp.516-527 [http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789814749411\\_0047](http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789814749411_0047);
- H. Andrew Schwartz et al, 'Extracting Human Temporal Orientation in Facebook Language', *Proceedings of the 2015 Conference of the North American Chapter of the Association for Computational Linguistics - Human Language Technologies*, 2015, pp.409-419 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282020825\\_Extracting\\_Human\\_Temporal\\_Orientation\\_in\\_Facebook\\_Language](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282020825_Extracting_Human_Temporal_Orientation_in_Facebook_Language);
- Gregory Park et al, 'Automatic Personality Assessment Through Social Media Language', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108, 2015, pp.934-952 [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267753920\\_Automatic\\_Personality\\_Assessment\\_Through\\_Social\\_Media\\_Language](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/267753920_Automatic_Personality_Assessment_Through_Social_Media_Language)

- 31 Jon Wakeford, 'How do you create a university for students?'; HEPI Blog, 14 July 2017 <http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2017/07/14/4429/>
- 32 Anthony Seldon, *Solving the Conundrum: Teaching and learning at British universities*, Social Market Foundation, 2016 <http://www.smf.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Social-Market-Foundation-Teaching-and-learning-at-British-universities-Embargoed-0001-030516.pdf>
- 33 Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues, *A Framework for Character Education in Schools*, 2017 <http://jubileecentre.ac.uk/userfiles/jubileecentre/pdf/character-education/Framework%20for%20Character%20Education.pdf>
- 34 <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/>
- 35 Carol Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, 2006
- 36 Action for Happiness: 10 Keys to Happier Living <http://www.actionforhappiness.org/10-keys-to-happier-living>
- 37 [www.authentic happiness.com](http://www.authentic happiness.com)
- 38 H. Andrew Schwartz et al, 'Predicting individual well-being through the language of social media', *Pacific Symposium on Biocomputing*, 21, 2016, pp.516-527 [http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789814749411\\_0047](http://www.worldscientific.com/doi/pdf/10.1142/9789814749411_0047)
- 39 William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (in two volumes), 1890
- 40 Zindel V. Segal et al, *Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy for Depression: A New Approach to Preventing Relapse*, 2001
- 41 Felicia A. Huppert, 'Mindfulness and Compassion as Foundations for Well-Being', in *Future Directions in Well-Being: Education, Organizations and Policy*, Matthew White et al (eds), 2017
- 42 Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*, 1990; Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life*, 1994

43 Craig Hassad et al, 'Enhancing the health of medical students: outcomes of an integrated mindfulness and lifestyle program', *Advances in Health Sciences Education*, 14(3), 2009, pp.387-398 <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2Fs10459-008-9125-3.pdf>

## **Trustees**

Professor Sir Ivor Crewe (Chair)  
Sir David Bell  
Dame Sandra Burslem  
Professor Sir Peter Scott  
Professor Dame Helen Wallace

## **Advisory Board**

Professor Janet Beer  
Professor Sir David Eastwood  
Professor Dame Julia Goodfellow  
Professor Carl Lygo  
Professor David Maguire  
Professor Sally Mapstone

## **Partners**

BPP University  
Ellucian  
Elsevier  
Higher Education Academy  
Jisc  
Kaplan  
Mills & Reeve LLP  
Pearson  
PwC  
Times Higher Education  
Unite Students  
UPP Group Limited

## **President**

Bahram Bekhradnia

In this HEPI Occasional Paper, Sir Anthony Seldon and Dr Alan Martin explore the concept of a 'positive university' by looking at the approaches used by positive psychology and mindfulness.

With increasing concern about the health of students and staff, this report considers the importance of a proactive approach to mental wellbeing.

Exploring best practice from the United States, Australia and Mexico, as well as celebrating the work already being done in UK higher education institutions, the pamphlet makes practical recommendations for students and staff as well as highlighting ways to improve students' transition between school and university.

HEPI was established in 2002 to influence the higher education debate with evidence.

We are UK-wide, independent and non-partisan.

September 2017 ISBN: 978-1-908240-30-9

Higher Education Policy Institute  
99 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6JX  
Tel: 01865 284450 [www.hepi.ac.uk](http://www.hepi.ac.uk)

Printed in the UK by Oxuniprint, Oxford

Typesetting: Steve Billington, [www.jarmanassociates.co.uk](http://www.jarmanassociates.co.uk)