

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

A panel approach to reducing anxiety and improving confidence in

Panel members:

- x University Muslim Chaplain
- x University Faith Advisor
- x Alumni, with experience in both National Health Service (NHS) and private practice workplaces (as many as can attend)
- x Clinical educators from practice
- x Training leads in the sector
- x University placement team representative

Inclusion of faith leaders allows us to make advice and guidance culturally relevant. The panel offers informal mentorship using the concept of near-peer relationships, and guidance aiming to enhance wellbeing and allay fears in an a culturally appropriate way.

Questions are submitted anonymously, nothing is off limits, and are then themed. Questions are put to the panel for a response from the most appropriate member, depending on the subject matter. Structuring the session in this format allows the group to express worries that often sit under the surface of interactions with academic staff. For example, a student who expresses fear about travel or location for cultural reasons can be reassured and offered advice, informal mentoring and support from others within their community. A student conflicted about placement setting can gain knowledge and support from those who have recent and relevant experience.

Before the session, placement can be a daunting prospect that looms in term 2 of the second year. The group can feel fearful and apprehensive, which can lead to different behaviours, such as drops in university attendance or feeling very upset about the need to move away from home. Placement Panel sees a shift and gear change. E

Online polling software maintains anonymity while obtaining valuable questions. The first questions are set by the teaching team ascertaining overall group confidence using a Likert scale, moving to 'describe how you feel about placements' most often eliciting 'nervous' as a response. This leads us into more specific and direct questions from the group to the panel. One key benefit is that staff can also pose questions with anonymity to support or direct the exercise. Another is that the students can see how "normal" their concerns are as alumni further normalise the experience of feeling anxious before placement commences.

Post-session evaluation forms enable staff to reflect on the session and show key benefits. Groups report increased confidence levels, better knowledge of student welfare support at university and how being yourself with an open mind is key to a good placement experience.

Maintaining good relationships with externals and across university working is key to the success of this work. Alumni enjoy offering their stories, views and informal support. It is useful to be able to meet with them informally too after the session allowing for time to maintain our connections and swap stories.

Take-away message

A proactive approach that includes first-hand alumni lived experience