

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PLAN FOR

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS



2023/25





USW STRATEGY

As part of the USW Wellbeing Strategy (2023-25), the University is committed to providing a safe and secure environment for all members of its community, including students, colleagues, volunteers, and visitors, with well-being at the forefront of how we work.¹

USW has also aligned itself to the Universities UK Stepchange Framework, who have a shared vision *'for UK universities to be places that promote mental health and wellbeing, enabling all students and all staff to thrive and succeed to their best potential.'*²

THE WELLBEING OF POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Over the last few years, there has been increased concern for the mental health and wellbeing of Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs).

The PGR experience is significantly different to that of undergraduate and taught master's students: for

example, PGR students work on individual projects and report to a supervisor/supervisory team. Some of the most common issues that impact on PGR students' mental health and wellbeing include loneliness and isolation, difficulties with supervisory relationships, in addition to high expectations and workloads.



¹University of South Wales, Well-being Strategy for a Mentally Healthy University 2023-25 (Draft)
²Stepchange: mentally healthy universities (universitiesuk.ac.uk)



PURPOSE AND AIMS

PURPOSE

To enhance our inclusive and supportive community by positively promoting good wellbeing and health (social, physical and mental) as the foundation for academic success and a great student and colleague experience for the PGR community.

AIMS

It is important to recognise that PGR students are a distinct community who have specific needs. Although PGR students can access existing Wellbeing Services at USW, the University should provide appropriate and relevant support that is specifically tailored for the PGR community.

Below is a list of aims that the plan recommends:

Online Resources

To create a platform on the Graduate School website that is specifically for PGRs. As stated above, it is important to signpost to PGR students what support is available to them. A PGR wellbeing website will include information about how and where students can access support, in addition to online resources, such as self-help guides (for example, the 'Wellbeing Thesis' provides information for to improve PGR mental health).

Student Stories

To continue to gather 'student stories' from PGR students which discuss their experiences as research students. These stories discuss how students manage their wellbeing alongside their studies. They also offer tips and advice, and are generally a good way to show students that they are not alone.

Activities and events

To organise more events and activities that are specifically tailored for PGR students, and to run these throughout the year (not just during the teaching semesters). Current events organised by the Graduate School such as the 'Curry and Chat' catch-up could take place more frequently. Moreover, PGR students could link with other parts of the university, particularly the Students Union and Wellbeing Services, for social and wellbeing events exclusively for PGRs. Organising similar events at other campuses should also be explored. Moreover, to ensure that events are accessible, for example: nature walks, volunteering opportunities – this could also involve working with the local community and giving students the chance to meet others outside of their studies.

The USW 2023 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) results have indicated that the events and activities already being organised by the Graduate School are having a positive impact on students' experiences. 81% of USW respondents agreed that the University's support for wellbeing met their needs, which is 18% higher than the overall sector result.

PGR Induction Day

To arrange for a wellbeing information session within the Research Student's Induction Day (which takes place during intake three times a year: October, January, and April). Staff from the Wellbeing Services can speak to students and signpost to them about what support services are available and how they can access them. A representative from the Graduate School can also raise awareness of what PGR specific events and resources are available to students also.

To also organise re-orientation days, to try and ensure that the majority students are able to attend these sessions, and therefore have an understanding of the support services available to them.

Supervisors

To ensure that supervisors are well informed about PGRs' mental health issues and know how to confidently signpost PGRs to appropriate support. The Catalyst Fund recommends that senior academic leaders should ensure that supervisors, in addition to other members of staff with postgraduate responsibilities, are given the time, training and appropriate recognition for supporting PGRs' mental health and well-being.³

Research culture and environment

To continue to work on promoting research culture amongst the PGR community. To also work more closely with the Research and Innovation Groups to ensure PGR students have the opportunity to attend seminars and other networking events in which they can discuss their research ideas with others. The annual Postgraduate Research Conference is a good example of this.

Researcher Wellbeing Cymru Project

USW are collaborators of the HEFCW funded project, led by Cardiff Metropolitan University. The purpose of the project is to create 'a central repository to share resources, develop communities, and promote networks and events.' We are aiming to create a 'toolkit' of resources for PGR students, to help support them with their wellbeing. Project leaders predict that the website will be launched next year.



