

# Mental Wellbeing in HE Conference 2026

## Wednesday 6 May 2026

### Session abstracts

#### Parallel Session 1, 10:45 – 11:30

##### Session 1.1

##### **Doing it differently: A neurodiversity-informed, inclusive coaching model to strengthen student wellbeing**

Amila de Saram-Larssen, CoachBridge

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 1*

How can universities better support neurodivergent students without expanding clinical services? This interactive workshop shares good practices and real-world tools from CoachBridge, a neurodiversity-informed coaching model co-designed by a neurodivergent AI undergraduate and an ADHD coach. Drawing on early pilot data and lived experience, we explore the executive function barriers young adults face, and the inclusive strategies that meaningfully improve wellbeing, follow-through, and academic participation. Delegates will leave with practical techniques and evidence-informed insights they can apply directly in teaching, student services, and institutional inclusion work.

##### Session 1.2

##### **Stress buckets and student resilience: Co-designing your mental health offer**

Rachael Newman, University of Portsmouth

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 2*

Transform mental health from crisis response to competitive advantage. This energetic 45-minute design clinic uses the stress bucket model (Brabban & Turkington, 2002) to help cross-functional teams co-create joined-up support frameworks students actually need. Through hands-on journey mapping and rapid design sprints, you'll develop data-informed early intervention systems, seamless service handovers, and resilience-building programs—all with student co-design embedded. Leave with editable templates, actionable frameworks, and implementation plans you can use immediately. Perfect for mixed teams spanning wellbeing, careers, marketing, and student services. Maximum engagement, practical outputs, real solutions.

##### Session 1.3

##### **Building belonging through peer-led learning: An inclusive model for supporting student transition and wellbeing**

Louise Ready-Syrat, University of Salford

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 3*

This session explores how Peer Assisted Learning (PALS) initiatives can strengthen students' sense of belonging in Higher Education. Using the BA Television and Radio Production programme at the University of Salford as a case study, it showcases a reimaged peer mentoring model—"Crew Leaders"—designed to support the transition into university, build resilience, and encourage self-directed

learning. In a context of rising mental-health challenges and increasing numbers of commuting students, belonging has become vital to retention and wellbeing. Drawing on qualitative, practice-based research, the session reveals how peer-led communities foster connection, empathy, and shared experience, offering insights for wider HE belonging strategies.

### **Session 1.4**

#### **Your university is neurodiverse: Let's make your culture!**

Hazel Gant, University of Portsmouth

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Albert Suite 4&5*

UK higher education is experiencing rising workload pressures and declining staff wellbeing, with over half of staff showing signs of depression and many more reporting very intensive workloads. At the same time, around 1 in 7 people in the UK is neurodivergent, highlighting the need for more inclusive support. This session shares co-created initiatives from a Business School designed to improve wellbeing and working conditions for neurodiverse academics. Combining UK sector data, lived experience and practical case studies, the session equips delegates with actionable strategies to develop neuroaffirmative, mentally healthy environments within their own institutions.

## **Parallel Session 2, 11:40 – 12:40**

### **Session 2.1a**

#### **The being here project: Crossing role boundaries to embed tailored wellbeing support**

Dr Robin Redhead and Kelly Cawood, Leeds Beckett University

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 1*

Sharing learning from our innovative and award-winning community building project Being Here, we demonstrate that crossing role boundaries creates opportunities within the curriculum to imbed tailored wellbeing support into the pedagogy of the course. Staff and students co-designed and delivered arts-based workshops to co-create an inclusive space for intercultural dialogue and community-building. A pioneering response to growing reports of students feeling isolated. By fostering peer connection, wellbeing, and a sense of belonging, we created an inclusive, non-hierarchical space where students and staff could interact, enabling trust building and understanding – crucial for students who may be hesitant to seek support.

### **Session 2.1b**

#### **Not more but different: Intentional, an inclusive and scalable resilience programme for international students in Higher Education**

Dr Victoria Wilson-Crane and Kate Mishcon, Kaplan International Pathways

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 1*

This TED-style talk explores how an evidence-informed, co-created resilience programme offers a preventative and inclusive approach to student mental wellbeing, designed to work within the practical realities of higher education. Responding to rising student distress and pressure on support services, the session reframes

mental wellbeing as a design challenge rather than an individual deficit. Drawing on a mindfulness and self-compassion programme developed with international students, the talk demonstrates how embedding simple, non-stigmatising micro-practices into everyday learning environments can support emotional regulation, resilience, and self-efficacy. The session offers a compelling case for intentional, sustainable, mental health-informed practice across university life.

### **Session 2.1c**

#### **Beyond compliance: A pan-university approach to harassment**

Dr Talitha Brown and Dr Yunyan Li, University of Leicester

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 1*

This TED talk draws on an ESRC-funded study from the Centre for Hate Studies, A Catalyst for Change: Transforming Responses to Harassment in Higher Education. Examining students' experiences of harassment across five universities in England, alongside perspectives from practitioners and support staff, this talk reveals both helpful and harmful institutional responses. Speaking to the conference's theme 'it's not about doing more, it's about doing things differently', this talk will present evidence-based insights for a pan-university approach that centres student voices and prioritises mental wellbeing through trauma-informed, intersectional practice.

### **Session 2.2a**

#### **Students as architects of change: Unlocking the wellbeing potential of positive education through student-led PALAR**

Sophie Mitchinson, University of Edinburgh

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 2*

Positive education has supported the integration of well-being science within tertiary institutions; however, greater emphasis on practitioner inquiry is needed to ensure its sustainability. This presentation shares findings from a Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) study at the University of Edinburgh, where students were engaged as co-researchers to identify well-being challenges faced by prospective graduates and to strengthen the integration of positive psychology within the final-year curriculum. By shifting from deficit-based support models to intentional, co-created curriculum practices, the session provides a practical blueprint for moving beyond awareness toward inclusive and action-oriented approaches to student well-being.

### **Session 2.2b**

#### **Embedding wellbeing and inclusivity in the curriculum: Reflections from phase one of an institution-wide redesign**

Dr Rachel George, Nevin Mehmet, Shapna Compton and Sodiq Lawal, University of Greenwich

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 2*

This presentation reflects on phase one of embedding wellbeing within a new curriculum framework at the University of Greenwich. We address misconceptions about wellbeing in higher education and outline a collaborative approach aimed at integrating wellbeing into everyday teaching and learning rather than adding additional workload. Through workshops and resources, we supported programme

teams to identify student needs, curriculum pressure points, and strategies for inclusive learning and assessment. The talk will reflect on challenges, successes, and emerging practices, inviting discussion on how wellbeing and inclusivity can be meaningfully embedded to support student success while maintaining academic rigor.

### **Session 2.2c**

#### **Happiness (even) for academics**

Dr Laura Leonardo, Newcastle University

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 2*

Doctoral study is widely recognised as both intellectually demanding and emotionally draining. Current research highlights a growing concern over PhD student wellbeing, with many reporting elevated stress, isolation, and burnout (Evans et al., 2018). Newcastle University has developed a programme of support interventions, specifically designed for PhD students, to support wellbeing, resilience and happiness during the PhD. Most of the sessions are co-created with junior researchers. This presentation will map the design of this programme and offer possible ideas for a way forward.

### **Session 2.3a**

#### **Trucking on thin ice: Functioning without thriving in Higher Education**

Dr Sabrina Fitzsimons, Dublin City University

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 3*

This paper explores rustout—the silent counterpart to burnout—among Higher Education-based Teacher Educators in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Defined by professional underutilisation, stagnation, and unfulfillment, rustout threatens wellbeing and career sustainability. Drawing on survey and interview data from 154 educators, this talk highlights how administrative overload, reduced autonomy, and limited growth opportunities leave staff “functioning but not thriving.” Using the RUST framework, it offers reflective strategies to recognise and address rustout. Participants will gain insight into this underexplored phenomenon and consider practical, sustainable approaches to fostering wellbeing and fulfilment within Higher Education.

### **Session 2.3b**

#### **‘A little jaba’: Rethinking staff wellbeing through peer-led communities in Higher Education**

Dr Nkechi Emenike and Dr Victor Igwe, Robert Gordon University

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 3*

Student-facing staff in UK universities often experience significant emotional labour intensified by ongoing challenges in UK HE sector, yet institutional wellbeing initiatives often overlook their everyday realities. Drawing on a qualitative study conducted across two universities, this paper illustrates how HE student-facing staff actively shape their wellbeing through semi-formal and ad hoc peer led communities of practice and wellbeing groups described by participants as “a little jaba”. The paper proposes a shift from mundane reactive interventions to recognising and

structurally integrating existing staff-led wellbeing practices and co-creating supportive environments that foster a resilient psychologically HE workspace.

### **Session 2.3c**

#### **The quiet impact: Guiding teams through grief**

Fabia Jeddere-Fisher, University of the West of England

*TED talk (10 minutes), Grace Suite 3*

There is a numb shock when we hear that a colleague has passed away, and it brings particular leadership challenges when it is in the middle of a busy academic teaching period. The Quiet Impact speaks to anyone with leadership responsibilities, however big or small, and the wellbeing impact we can make. This session tells a story, weaving through the decision-making process of communicating sensitive, and culturally appropriate, information; providing wellbeing support; managing resources; and setting your own personal boundaries as a compassionate leader. There is no blueprint, but sharing stories like these helps prepare us when the worst happens.

### **Session 2.4a**

#### **Inside the “house of glass”: Negotiating masculinity and sense of belonging among male Psychology students in the UK**

Dr Eden Morley, University of Nottingham

*TED talk (10 minutes), Albert Suite 4&5*

Psychology is now one of the most feminised degrees in the UK - but what happens to the men who study it? Drawing on focus groups with male undergraduates, this talk introduces the House of Glass, a framework that captures the experience of being a gender minority in psychology. Men navigate a glass ceiling of social isolation, a glass escalator of tokenistic visibility, and a glass treadmill of pressure to prove legitimacy. Peer judgement and subtle stigma shape their sense of belonging, offering new insights into male retention, wellbeing, and minority experiences in higher education.

### **Session 2.4b**

#### **Reimagining student advice: Trauma-informed and compassion-focused strategies for inclusive support**

Dr Eileen Laffan, University College London

*TED talk (10 minutes), Albert Suite 4&5*

Student Advisers are often the first point of contact for students experiencing mental health difficulties. This session introduces a practical framework for support and advice work that integrates trauma-informed principles with compassion-focused strategies through an intersectional lens. Delegates will explore how these approaches build psychological safety, trust, and belonging while acknowledging the diverse experiences that shape student wellbeing. Using real examples and actionable insights, the session demonstrates how to embed these methods into everyday advisory practice. Participants will leave with clear strategies and resources to create more inclusive, empowering, and responsive support environments within their own institutions.

## Session 2.4c

### **Beyond stigma: Designing mental health support that reaches the next generation of diverse learners**

Asini Wijewardane, Uwill

*TED talk (10 minutes), Albert Suite 4&5*

As student needs rise, leaders face a critical challenge: not just providing support, but delivering support students will use - particularly for diverse, international, and LGBT+ students, that research shows consistently exhibit lower help-seeking behaviors. This session/poster presents a case study from USA where a research-informed modern solution was implemented across more than 40 universities, built on practices to increase engagement, in particular diverse engagement. Key practices included identity-aligned counsellor choice, culturally affirming care through targeted training, and 24/7/365 online access. Results showed significantly increased engagement, with over 60% first-time users and more than 50% selecting diverse counsellors.

## **Poster Q&A Session, 13:25 – 13:55**

### **Poster P4**

#### **What do paramedic academics find supportive to their wellbeing when transitioning from clinical practice to Higher Education? An appreciative inquiry**

Emma Geis, Keele University

This poster will outline a primary research project which is aiming to develop best practice principles to support early career paramedics in the transition from clinical practice into academia. The poster will present findings from a scoping review, highlighting best practice such as formal and informal support, peer networking and organisational wellbeing strategies.

### **Poster P5**

#### **Compassionate assessment as policy praxis**

Claire Holdcroft, University of Staffordshire

This poster critically explores how assessment cultures in UK higher education influence the mental wellbeing of students and staff. It argues that compassionate assessment is essential for translating wellbeing policy into everyday academic practice. Drawing on policy drivers such as OfS conditions, the national mental health framework, and sector concerns about workload and burnout, the poster highlights the gap between policy intention and lived experience. It presents a practical model of compassionate assessment focused on humane feedback, reflective moderation, and emotionally aware marking. Delegates will gain actionable strategies to reduce stress, support psychological safety, and strengthen inclusive assessment practice.

### **Poster P9**

#### **Stress buckets and student resilience: Co-designing your mental health offer**

Rachael Newman, University of Portsmouth

Transform mental health from crisis response to competitive advantage. This energetic 45-minute design clinic uses the stress bucket model (Brabban & Turkington, 2002) to help cross-functional teams co-create joined-up support frameworks students actually need. Through hands-on journey mapping and rapid design sprints, you'll develop data-informed early intervention systems, seamless service handovers, and resilience-building programs—all with student co-design embedded. Leave with editable templates, actionable frameworks, and implementation plans you can use immediately. Perfect for mixed teams spanning wellbeing, careers, marketing, and student services. Maximum engagement, practical outputs, real solutions.

### **Poster P10**

#### **NeuroWell: Brain science for engagement, wellbeing, and sustainable learning**

Dr Lisa Riegel, Educational Partnerships Institute

Teacher wellbeing is not an add on. It is foundational to inclusive, effective education. This poster introduces the NeuroWell Framework, a neuroscience informed approach to understanding engagement, stress, and sustainability in teaching. Participants will explore how learning and wellbeing are shaped by the interaction between biology and context and gain practical strategies to reduce burnout and build cultures of commitment. This poster is designed for educators and leaders seeking realistic, human centered approaches to wellbeing that can be implemented immediately in schools and organizations.

### **Poster P12**

#### **Supporting the wellbeing of students with ADHD in Higher Education: A systematic review**

Hannah Griffin, University of the West of Scotland

Students with ADHD are an increasingly visible yet persistently underserved group within higher education. This poster presents findings from a systematic literature review examining the academic, well-being, and social experiences of students with ADHD in HE. Through the synthesis of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods research, it highlights how inattention, daily functional impairment, and experiences of inclusion or stigma shape student well-being and success. The poster also highlights gaps in the current evidence base, including limited attention to staff perspectives and a lack of research across diverse global contexts, encouraging reflection on how inclusive institutional cultures can better support neurodivergent students.

### **Poster P15**

#### **Curriculum design for wellbeing in content-heavy subjects**

Laura Cardy, BPP University

Content-heavy subjects can overwhelm even motivated students, increasing anxiety and eroding confidence. This poster invites delegates to rethink how curriculum design can become a powerful, preventative wellbeing strategy. Using a Universal Design for Learning–informed redesign of an undergraduate nursing bioscience module, the session reveals how small, realistic design shifts improve clarity, accessibility and learner agency without adding workload. Participants will redesign a

high-stress element from their own teaching using practical UDL tools, discuss impact with peers, and leave with implementable action. The poster offers an engaging, design-led approach to wellbeing, transferable across disciplines and sustainable for staff practice.

### **Poster P17**

#### **Developing non-cognitive skills for improved wellbeing in foundation year Psychology students**

Dr Amuda Agneswaran and Dr Jennifer McGahan, Manchester Metropolitan University

Non-cognitive skills are a set of attitudes, behaviours and strategies including self-regulation, motivation, and creativity. Better non-cognitive skills are linked to increased psychological well-being and positively predict educational and occupational outcomes. Despite their importance, formal teaching of non-cognitive skills is largely absent from universities. VESPA is a research-driven framework that develops essential non-cognitive skills by developing students' academic skills and mindsets to increase engagement and academic attainment. This poster will outline the integration of VESPA into a Psychology Foundation year module and explore the positive behavioural changes made by students by empirically analyse their experiences of learning about these skills.

### **Poster P19**

#### **Compassionate boundaries in practice: Sustainable student mental health support and staff wellbeing**

Dr Lynne Lawrance, Emma Shepherd and Wendy Colvin, University of the West of England

Student mental wellbeing is everyone's responsibility. Whether you are an academic, part of the student support infrastructure of your HEI or a leader looking to refine your student support we welcome you to our interactive session. We will introduce to the work we have been doing at UWE to mainstream support for the 98% of students (reducing the risk of them reaching crisis point) and protecting stretched resources to have capacity to deal with the 2% who are nearer crisis point.

### **Poster P20**

#### **You can't unknow what you know: A personal reflection on the emotional burden of supporting student wellbeing**

Dr Lynne Lawrance, University of the West of England

Drawing on 20+ years experience as a programme leader I will share stories of how I have evolved in the role to provide the best academic experience I can for my students. I will present some of the burden that you carry for ever from working with students, and give ideas for how to better manage the burden. I hope academic staff will pick up tips to make their lives easier, and that those who can affect the support given to staff will get a sense of the hidden burden that many academics carry.

### **Poster P23**

#### **Giving emotionally intelligent feedback: What we say matters**

Sarah Volpe, BPP

This poster explores how emotionally intelligent communication can transform learners' experiences of assessment feedback. Through a blend of presentation, scenario discussion, and reflective dialogue, participants examine how language choice, authenticity, and accountability influence the emotional impact of feedback. Aimed at educators involved in assessment, the session encourages small but powerful shifts in feedback practice to enhance learner wellbeing, motivation, and engagement.

### **Poster P24**

#### **Compassion has limits: Why sustainable mental wellbeing in Higher Education depends on boundaries, not burnout**

Lavinia Dowling, The M Word (Emotional Problem Solving) CIC

In this poster, The M Word challenges the idea that being mental health-informed means doing more. Drawing on lived experience and sector practice, the poster reframes boundaries as a form of care rather than a failure of it. It explores how clarity, limits, and realistic resourcing enable sustainable, inclusive learning environments, and why compassion without boundaries helps no one.

### **Poster P25**

#### **Supporting mental health in every nursing conversation: A psychologically informed approach**

Jane Killough, Queens University Belfast

Mental health and emotional distress are common across all areas of nursing, yet many nurses lack confidence in recognising and responding to these needs, particularly outside mental health services. This poster shares a four-part Nursing Times educational series designed to increase nurses' confidence in supporting patients experiencing emotional distress or requiring behaviour/lifestyle change, while enhancing nurse wellbeing through more confident, meaningful interactions. The series begins with effective communication frameworks and introduces three core psychological approaches—motivational interviewing (MI), cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), and solution-focused brief therapy (SBFT)—translating theory into practical techniques for holistic, evidence-based nursing practice.

### **Poster P26**

#### **Promoting rural health: A nursing education initiative**

Pauline Rankin, Queens University Belfast

This poster explores the work of the Rural Health Committee at Queen's University Belfast in addressing health inequalities within rural and farming communities, with a focus on mental and physical health and wellbeing. It highlights innovative, partnership-based approaches involving students, educators, and key rural stakeholders to promote inclusive, person-centred care. The poster demonstrates how collaborative, interprofessional engagement can enhance mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and improve access to support for farmers and rural populations, while also developing future healthcare professionals' leadership, communication, and advocacy skills.

### Poster P27

#### **Measuring what matters / what matters when you measure : Principles of high quality EDI research and evaluation in HE**

Professor Helena Gillespie, University of East Anglia

This poster invites participants to reflect on the principles of research and evaluation and how project design, methods, data, collaboration and co-creation play out in institutional research and evaluation. Using experience from a range of EDI focused projects, there will be an opportunity to consider how underpinning principles impact the outcomes of projects as well as create barriers to success.

### Poster P28

#### **Resourcing and boundaries in student mental health work: Aligning policy expectations with bibliometric evidence in chinese Higher Education**

Xiaoyan Miao, Chian National Academy of Educational Sciences

Resourcing and boundaries are hard to negotiate when policy expectations and research evidence are discussed separately. This poster brings them together in Chinese higher education. It pairs a post-2011 national policy timeline with CiteSpace bibliometric mapping of 4,161 Chinese core-journal articles (2011-2025). A simple policy-evidence 2x2 framework helps clarify where provision can be scaled and standardised, where minimum standards and learning agendas are needed, and where emerging topics call for careful piloting.

## **Parallel Session 3, 14:05 – 14:50**

### **Session 3.1**

#### **The web of belonging: Creative approaches to inclusive community building**

Dr Ruth Johnson, Dr Amber Ruigrok, Dr Doron Cohen and Dr Stacey McKnight, University of Manchester

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 1*

Belonging beyond the icebreaker: this interactive workshop showcases an innovative approach to building inclusive learning communities through intentional design, developed for a first-year psychology unit at the University of Manchester in a diverse cohort of 300+ students. Using a “wicked problem” lens, authentic tasks that celebrated diversity and collaborative learning, students created handwritten posters creatively showcasing their proposed solutions for fostering connection and psychological safety in their cohort. Join us to experience one of these activities and be inspired with practical ideas to foster student-led belonging in your own contexts.

### **Session 3.2**

#### **Empowering mental wellbeing through peer-to-peer support**

Dr Lisa Simmons and Jake Harding, Manchester Metropolitan University, Stephen Andrews, St John Ambulance

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 2*

Manchester Met has launched a sector-leading partnership with St John Ambulance to transform how universities support student mental health and suicide prevention. This innovative initiative delivers certified, developmentally sequenced wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention training to students, equipping them with the skills, confidence and language to support themselves and their peers. Following a successful pilot with 700 participants, over 2,000 students have now completed accredited training. This session showcases the programme's design, interactive peer-to-peer approach, and insights from large-scale implementation—offering practical guidance for institutions seeking impactful, student-centred solutions to enhance wellbeing and strengthen preventative support.

### **Session 3.3**

#### **Doing it differently: What HE can learn from high- and low-resource inclusive education systems — A student perspective on neurodivergent support, capacity limits, and low-cost wellbeing solutions**

Cole Jacobes, University of St Andrews

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Grace Suite 3*

What matters more: the resources you have or how you use them? This interactive workshop draws urgent lessons from high-resource Singapore and low-resource Bali to challenge how we support neurodivergent students in UK higher education. We'll move beyond protocol-driven outputs to method-driven innovation, proving that changing how we support can be more impactful than what we produce. Through a collaborative "capacity crunch" scenario, you'll design no-cost interventions and define compassionate boundaries. Leave with an actionable framework to audit and transform your support systems under pressure.

### **Session 3.4**

#### **Developing clinical competence and compassion: Creative educational approaches to working with people with intellectual disabilities**

Dr Melanie Hodgkinson, The University of Southampton

*Interactive Workshop session (45 minutes), Albert Suite 4&5*

This session showcases an innovative, co-produced assessment developed at the University of Southampton to enhance clinical psychology students' skills in working compassionately and confidently with people with learning disabilities. Created in partnership with a local theatre company, the OSCE uses simulation, lived experience expertise, and reflective discussion to create authentic, inclusive learning opportunities. Delegates will explore the pedagogical model, view video reflections from actors with learning disabilities, and consider how co-produced simulation can be embedded within their own programmes. The session offers practical ideas, creative insights, and a replicable approach to developing inclusive, values-led teaching and assessment.

### **From Insight to Implementation: A Collaborative Reflection Lab, 15:05 – 16:05**

*Grace Suite*

This capstone session provides a professionally facilitated space to pause, reflect, and think collectively. Delegates will work across roles and institutions to synthesise conference themes, interrogate emerging patterns, and explore their implications for future practice. Through structured reflection and dialogue, participants will generate shared insights, deepen understanding, and articulate priorities for action in their own professional contexts.