

WELLBEING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A GUILDHE RESEARCH REPORT





**ROYAL CENTRAL SCHOOL OF SPEECH AND DRAMA
- CASE STUDY CONTRIBUTOR**

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FOREWORD

The conversations emerging around student wellbeing are topical and timely. Student mental health and wider questions of student wellbeing have dominated the media, caught the attention of government, and are well established on the sector's agenda. Because of this, how we talk about wellbeing and mental health in society has changed, and has ensured students are more proactive about asking for help to ensure their own positive mental health.

Whilst many aspects of the student experience may have changed over time, student life has always been pressurised. The raised national profile of speaking openly about our mental health has meant students are now better able to raise concerns to their institution. Consequently, providers are seeing growing waiting lists for their counselling and support services and having to react to increasing numbers of student concerns. HE providers therefore need to proactively respond to this increasing demand with different approaches that both support students in times of crisis, and proactively through providing students with positive wellbeing strategies.

Our members occupy a really important space in this conversation. Smaller student numbers can result in students being able to get to know each other better, develop meaningful relationships across the campus and create an inclusive sense of community, supporting both personal and professional development.

But there are also challenges. This GuildHE report addresses ten key areas which will be of use when reflecting on student wellbeing. It makes recommendations to higher education providers, as well as the sector and government.

One of the key strengths of this report is that it draws directly on the student experience. Students were consulted throughout, and it is vital, when having conversations around student wellbeing, that their voice is heard first and foremost.

The report also looks at the role of our staff. Staff in GuildHE providers are often seen as role models to students and are world-leading in their field. Whilst it is really positive that staff can develop a close working relationship with their students, the fact that many staff are also practitioners in their industry can also result in competing priorities on their time.

In order to thrive in higher education, students need to feel able to cope with the stresses of study. We hope that this report will be a useful tool in promoting wellbeing practices on your campus and in your student communities.

I would like to thank all that were involved in producing this publication, in particular, Cat Turhan for undertaking the research and writing this report.



Professor Joy Carter
Chair, GuildHE

Vice Chancellor
University of
Winchester

INTRODUCTION

This report aims to give a holistic view of the issues that may affect student wellbeing in small and specialist higher education providers (HEPs).

Students with good mental wellbeing will thrive in higher education. They are more likely to stay in a provider, academically succeed and enjoy themselves.

However, there has been a sharp increase in focus on support services working with students when they are at a critical stage of mental health, and not on preventative strategies which promote positive student wellbeing.

As set out in the response to the 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper', GuildHE support robust, integrated and joined-up mental health provision for students.

However, it is not enough to support students when they are in crisis. Preventative strategies are crucial to maintaining healthy and happy student populations. Preventative strategies are likely to be better for the students and less burdensome for mental health services. This is why we have chosen to focus our work in this area on 'wellbeing' as opposed to mental health.

The report has identified ten key areas of student life which providers can address to improve wellbeing. These areas were explored with both staff and students from GuildHE member institutions.

It offers providers some reflective questions for improving practices, which may lead to students feeling that they are better able to cope with their daily stresses in higher education.

It is important to note that this project found examples across the student lifecycle and academic and pastoral services that can better support positive student wellbeing. It should not be left to the student services team to develop and implement a wellbeing strategy, but activities should be owned and enacted in every part of institutional life, from security and estates to the academic curriculum.

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on research conducted by GuildHE, using both a survey of members and detailed interviews with a number of institutions.

We asked our members to complete a survey outlining their current approach to developing and maintaining a positive culture of wellbeing. There were 28 complete provider responses to the survey which accounts for over ¾ of our members at the time of writing. The GuildHE Student Support Network and the GuildHE Students' Union Network supported the team in developing the scope and questions of the research.

In addition to the survey, ten deep-dive interviews took place with GuildHE members from the breadth of our membership including with senior managers, student support practitioners and student representatives. Students were also able to submit additional evidence to the research team.

KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of providers do not have a formalised definition of wellbeing, which is a vital component to a coherent strategy on student support. Members felt the World Health Organisation definition was helpful in the formulation of local definitions developed in partnership with student bodies.
- Wellbeing strategies range from being at a whole institution level, to academic departmental level. GuildHE believes that to achieve the best outcomes for student wellbeing, activities should be embedded across the provider, and all along the student lifecycle - from application to graduation and beyond.
- Cultivating environments and communities that are supportive of positive mental health are vital steps for providers of all sizes to have successful proactive wellbeing strategies. Whilst counselling services have traditionally been seen as the conduit for supporting students wellbeing, there are many other activities which are important to foster a supportive environment including training for academic and professional staff, specific wellbeing events and teaching students key skills to support them through university life and beyond.
- Student expectations of university life are often inaccurate and can lead to issues of poor mental health. Students are sometimes overwhelmed by the workload (this is especially true if they are mature, part-time, commuters or carers), and their previous academic experiences may not have fully prepared them for independent study. Instilling good academic skills right from the start is vital for student success and their wellbeing.
- Training staff and students to recognise the signs of a student who is struggling with their mental health is vital. This includes cleaners, estates teams and security staff as they are likely to be working 'out of hours' and may witness students in particularly vulnerable moments.
- GuildHE members support students to undertake professionally rooted education, and prepare graduates with the skills they need to succeed in their chosen profession. HE providers should be mindful that students' skills should also include tools for positive wellbeing which can be used throughout their life.
- The importance of developing a community where every student feels valued cannot be overstated. Clubs, societies, social events and academic groups all support students' feeling of belonging, which is vital in them seeking help when they need it most.
- There needs to be better coordinated working between HEPs and external support services such as mental health charities, the NHS and police and community safety officers. GuildHE providers told us they are struggling to build sustainable relationships with the NHS. Staff suggested that this was owing to lack of resource, constant changes in NHS staff, and limited capacity within the provider to invest in these relationships. Many students also cited problems with waiting lists for external support, such as counselling.
- Where students live can be just as important to their wellbeing as their academic commitments. Some GuildHE members own their own accommodation, but many do not, which makes it challenging to create the right living environment for students. Institutionally appointed safety and wellbeing officers can support students whilst living in halls, but all providers can do more to support those who live in the local areas (including those still living at home).

Providers must be mindful that the student experience is not homogenous. Students will come to university with a background or characteristics which can influence how they are able to succeed in their studies. As well as LGBT, BAME, Disabled and Women student voices - student carers, commuters, first in the family, and a whole range of other 'non-traditional' learners will have a distinctive student experience and their views should be captured by the students' union and the provider.

- A key part of the World Health Organisation's definition of wellbeing is a person's ability to 'contribute to their community', and research has shown that community participation can have a positive effect of students' mental health and wellbeing. In 2016, GuildHE and NUS jointly published a report on the role of higher education in developing students into active citizens. The recommendations in that report should be used in the development of wellbeing strategies.

A NOTE ON THE DEFINITION OF WELLBEING

Wellbeing is a highly complex and challenging concept to define, with many recognised definitions.

We have framed the research around the World Health Organisation (WHO) **definition of wellbeing** as a 'state of mind in which an individual is able to realise their own abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to their community'. This has formed the basis for exploring the different aspects of provision at GuildHE providers.

It is also important to remember that all of us can experience poor mental health and wellbeing at some point in our lives. University can be a very stressful time for students and providers have a duty to support students through their experience. Support should, therefore, be targeted at both short-term and sustained periods of need.

Whilst this report focuses predominantly on students access to wellbeing provision, it is of great benefit to providers to encourage participation in these activities by staff. Creating a supportive and positive community is the backbone of many of our members successes, and if staff are able to undertake positive wellbeing activities then our communities can only grow stronger.

1. WELLBEING STRATEGIES AND DEFINITIONS

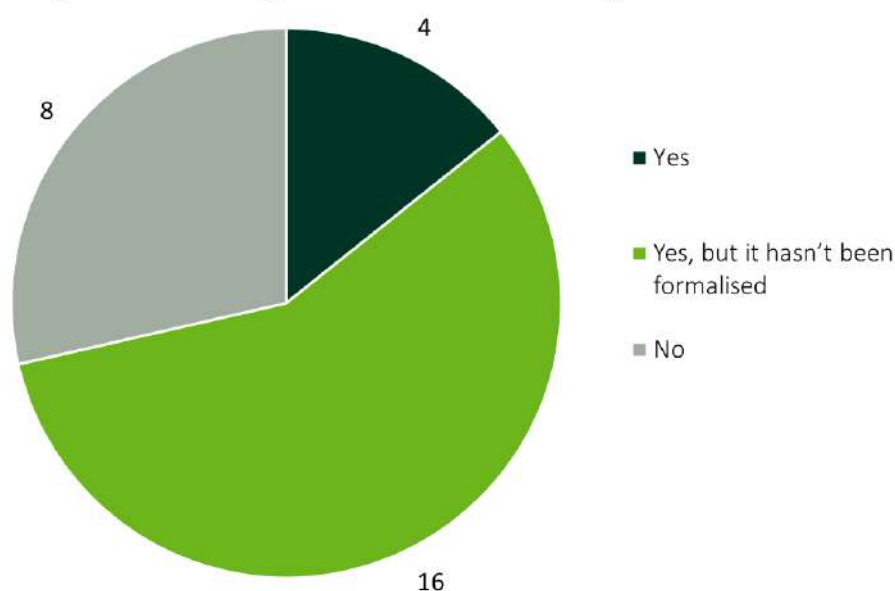
Why define wellbeing?

Wellbeing is a term that is widely used, but is not an easy concept to define. As the term has become more commonly used, there have been concerns that the term has become “**blurred and overly broad**”. However, with the rise of wellbeing initiatives on university campuses, it is important that providers are reflecting on what the definition of wellbeing is, so that they can create relevant and necessary wellbeing strategies, tailored to the student need.

Definitions

Over half of the providers which responded to the survey said that they had a definition of wellbeing. However, the majority of those respondents said that this definition had not been formalised. Over a quarter of respondents did not have, or know, their provider definition of wellbeing.

Has your institution got a definition of wellbeing?



Those which did have a definition of wellbeing were asked to list their definitions. Other key phrases from HEI definitions included:

'the subjective state of being healthy, happy, contented, comfortable and satisfied with one's quality of life'

'student should be viewed holistically and each individual's well-being is an interconnected sum of the parts of the learning experience'

'being mentally and physically well'

'equipping our students with a resilient and confident mindset, freeing them to develop and apply their own creativity, and... skill set'

'embracing the holistic notion of educating the whole person'

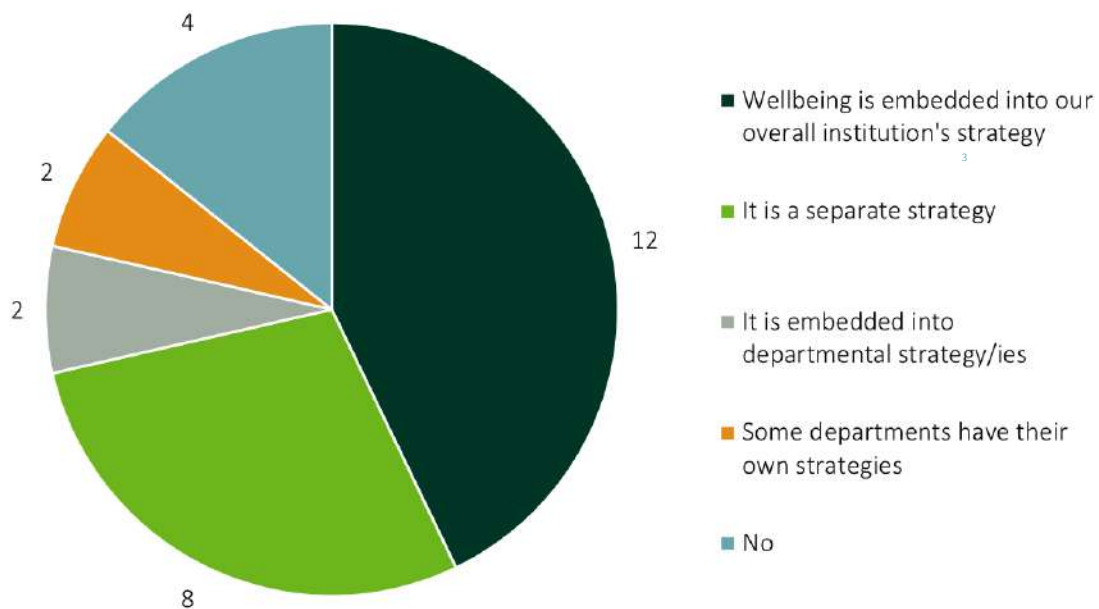
Interviews also highlighted the lack of clear definitions in providers and most interviewees agreed that the WHO definition was suitable on a 'high level', and a good basis for developing a more complex and relevant definition for their provider. However, there was concern from one interviewee that formally defining wellbeing could be restrictive.

Both student leaders and senior managers said that they would want students to help formalise their definition of wellbeing. In providers where a definition had been formalised (or was in the process of being formalised) the provider had engaged students, and this involvement had continued beyond the initial development of the definition.

Strategy

Twelve providers (approximately 43% of respondents) embedded student wellbeing into their overall strategy. Eight HEPs said that they had their own (separate) strategy, two said wellbeing was embedded into their departmental strategies and two said that some departments had their own strategies. Four providers said that they did not yet have a wellbeing strategy.

Do you have a wellbeing strategy at your institution?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Has your institution developed a mutually agreed upon definition of wellbeing with students and student representatives?
2. Has your institution developed an institution-wide wellbeing strategy?
3. Is this strategy regularly reviewed with the student body to reflect the changing nature of student bodies?

GuildHE have been working with Universities UK on a series of sector guidance documents, particularly surrounding mental wellbeing. We believe that effective change requires a 'whole-university' approach to mental health and wellbeing - and requires a strategy that is embedded across the provider, from management to applicant. Furthermore, these strategies need to be co-developed with the student body, and regularly reviewed to reflect the fact that the student body is changing every year.

2. CREATING A CULTURE OF STUDENT WELLBEING

What is a culture of wellbeing?

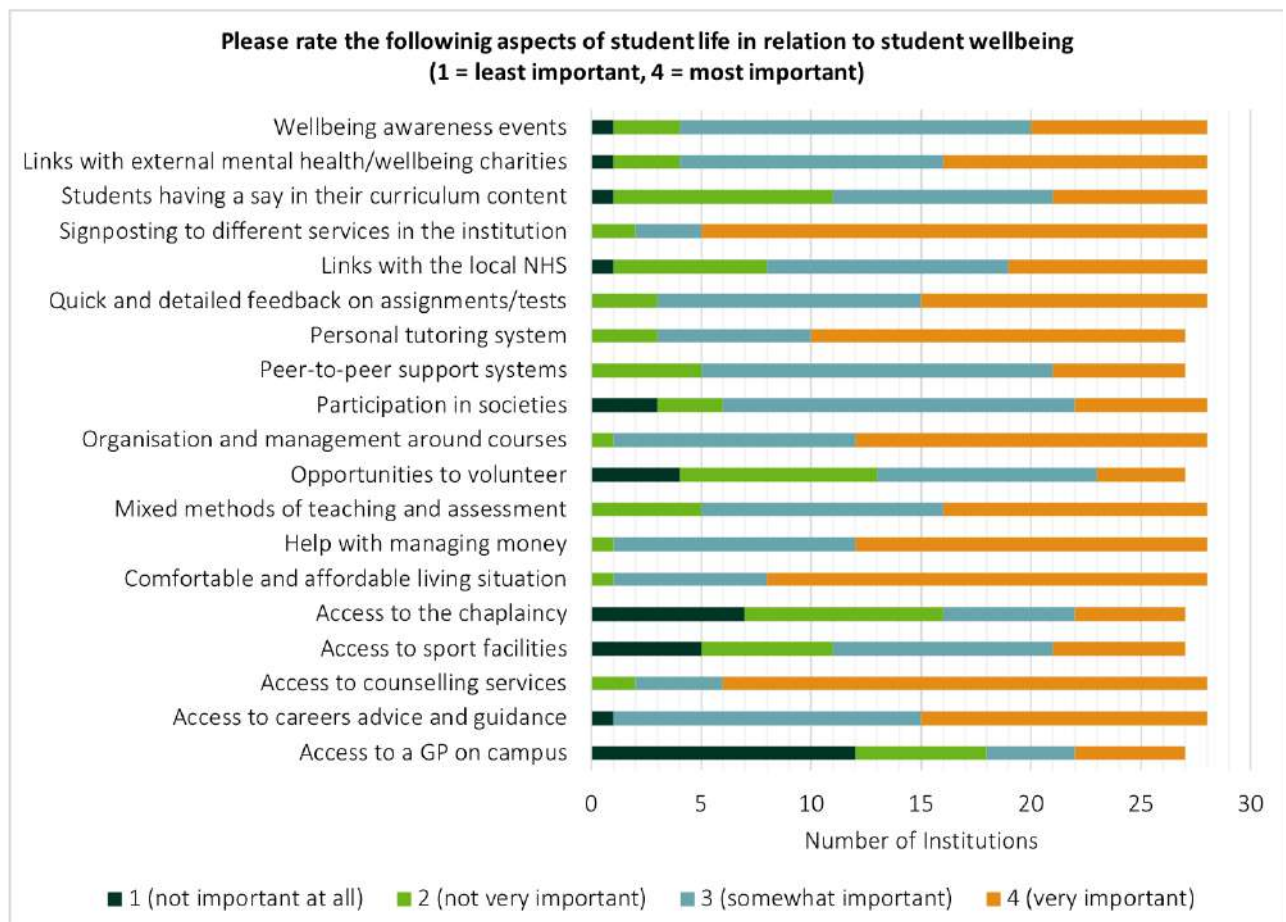
A culture of wellbeing, in a higher education context, is where a higher education provider not only prioritises wellbeing, but makes it part of the everyday life for student and staff. Great Place to Work, an organisation dedicated to building 'great' workplaces, suggests that there are three components to creating a **culture of wellbeing** in the workplace:

- a values-driven culture;
- the physical work environment;
- wellness 'programmes'.

GuildHE providers are distinctive for having strong values and unique work environments. However, unlike bigger providers, they do not necessarily have the ability to create large-scale wellness 'programmes'. Where they can succeed is through 'cultivating environments and communities that are supportive of mental health' - which was a principle of good practice outlined in the **joint report** from Student Minds and the UPP foundation on student living.

Creating the culture

In order to ascertain how providers felt they could create a culture of wellbeing, we asked them to rate how important different aspects of student life were in relation to wellbeing on a scale of one to four (four being extremely important, one being not very important)

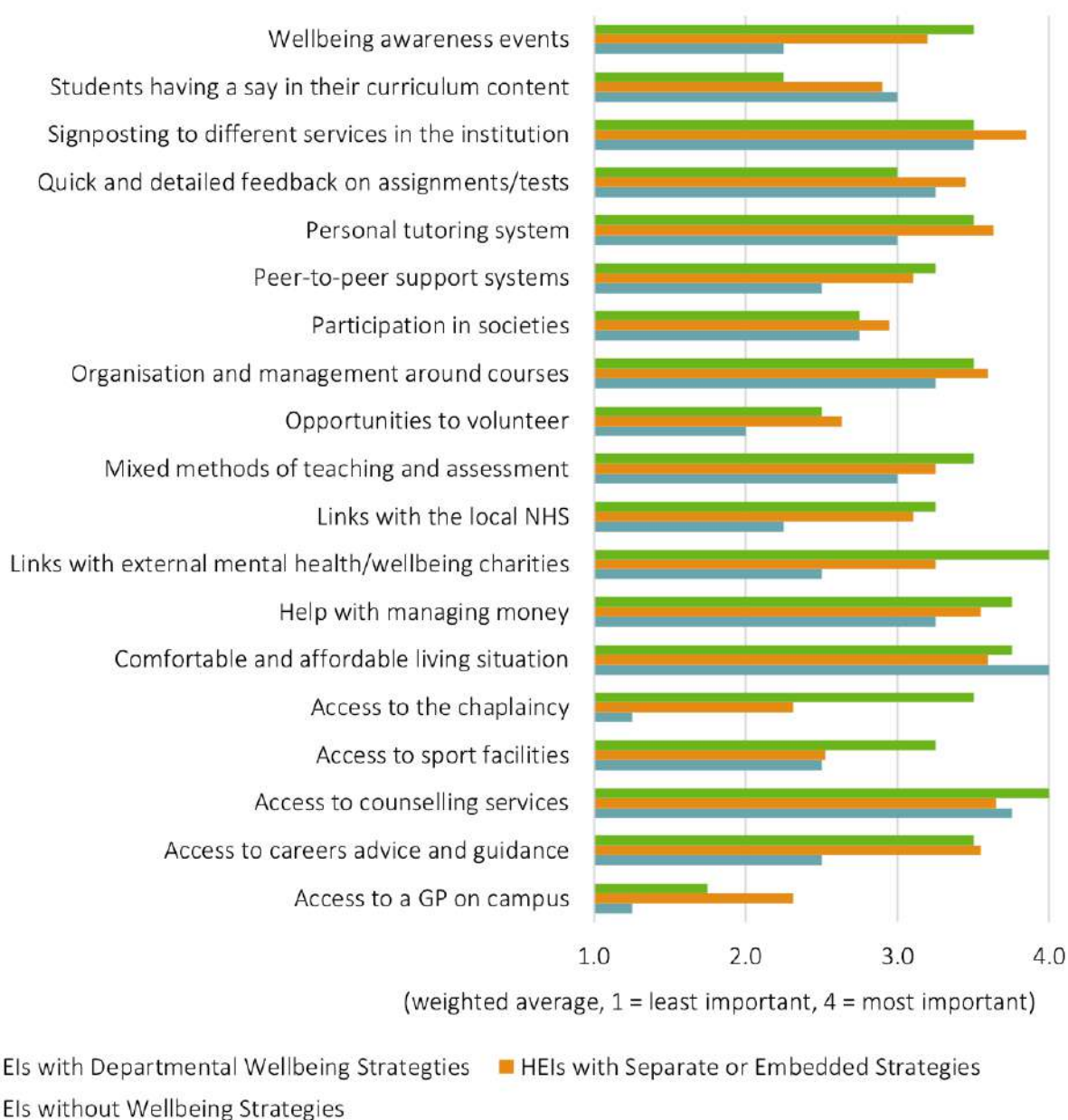


Providers saw 'Signposting to Services' and 'Access to Counselling' as the most important aspect in relation to wellbeing. 'Comfortable and Affordable Living Situation', 'Organisation and Management around courses (e.g. Timetabling)', 'Personal Tutoring Systems', and 'Help with Managing Money' were also rated very highly.

In contrast, 'Access to a GP on Campus', 'Access to the Chaplaincy', 'Access to Sports Facilities' and 'Opportunities to Volunteer' were more likely to be rated as 'not very important'.

There are no discernible correlations between provider type and what they considered to be the most important aspect of wellbeing. However, opinions between providers did vary depending on how they delivered their wellbeing strategies.

Importance of various aspects of student life in relation to student wellbeing



Staff training

One provider mentioned staff training as contributing to creating a culture of wellbeing. In the survey, providers were asked to list any additional training they provide for staff with regards to wellbeing (e.g. mental health first aid, mindfulness, etc.), and who receives that training.

Fourteen providers offered mental health first aid training to staff, and a number of providers offered training related to sexual violence/assault, suicide prevention or mindfulness. Other training included:

- Fitness to study
- Time management
- Charlie Waller Memorial Trust [Online Training](#)
- Gender and equality
- Managing stress
- Sexual health
- Bystander initiative
- Eating disorder training

Training was generally offered to all staff, but some was only offered to academic staff, or support staff. Some training was also offered to students (particularly older students who lived in halls of residences whilst assuming a pastoral role). In small providers, it is important that all staff are trained to recognise symptoms of poor mental health, as providers operate in small communities. After all, as one student representative said - 'you might see your tutor once a month, but you could see your cleaner five times in a week'.

In particular, student support leaders identified the importance of training staff in security and estates teams in student mental health and wellbeing. These staff are likely to be working in 'out of hours' periods, and may witness students in particularly vulnerable moments. It is unlikely that these staff would be delivering the help, but they might fulfill a useful role in being able to spot the signs and signpost students to relevant services. Student support practitioners also advocated for this to be a part of the recruitment process for these roles, to ensure that those teams recognise the importance of understanding student mental health.

Wellbeing initiatives

Wellbeing awareness initiatives are crucial for raising awareness of the importance of looking after mental health, and how to do that effectively. Most of the people interviewed mentioned that their provider had introduced initiatives such as a mental health awareness week/day, which are often jointly or solely organised with/by the students' union. However, these were often isolated or annual events. As one student said: 'I think there should be mental health awareness all the time, not just mental health awareness week.'

There were also some strong examples of initiatives which have a more sustained impact on their community. For example, one provider has recruited student wellbeing ambassadors, who champion wellbeing across the campus. Another provider noticed the vicious cycle resulting from the impact of junk food on students wellbeing and worked with their students' union to introduce healthier food options in their cafeteria.

While raising the awareness of students needing to protect their mental health is important, systems which positively impact wellbeing both directly and indirectly are also crucial to students wellbeing. Many of our providers celebrated the work of dedicated and visible student support teams and on- and off-campus counselling services. In some responses, there was also mention of peer-to-peer support systems, which have **proven very effective** in helping students to develop coping strategies, and developing a supportive environment for study.

One respondent mentioned that wellbeing has to be introduced pre-arrival, by introducing the values of student wellbeing held by the provider and presenting an inclusive environment. This is particularly important, as 88% of those surveyed believed that their students applied to their provider because of the strong sense of community.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your institution reflect on how students' positive wellbeing could be embedded across the whole student lifecycle - from pre-arrival to graduation and beyond?
2. Does your institution provide training for all staff - including non-academic staff - to identify the signs of poor mental health, so that they are able to pick up on students who may be having wellbeing issues?
3. Are your wellbeing initiatives jointly run with the students' union or developed with student input?

3. ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Student wellbeing and academia

According to the **British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy**, 92% of students who are in receipt of counselling are experiencing academic issues. Many of the courses delivered in GuildHE providers are vocational, practice-based, and require different kinds of assessment methods from other kinds of academic courses. They also encourage students to have autonomy over what they learn and how they learn it.

Preparation for academic rigour

Interviewees were asked whether students were prepared for the rigour of academic life. The response was mixed; some felt that they managed to embed a sense of the rigour in pre-arrival communications and on open days. One provider cited good retention figures in the first year as an indicator for student preparedness.

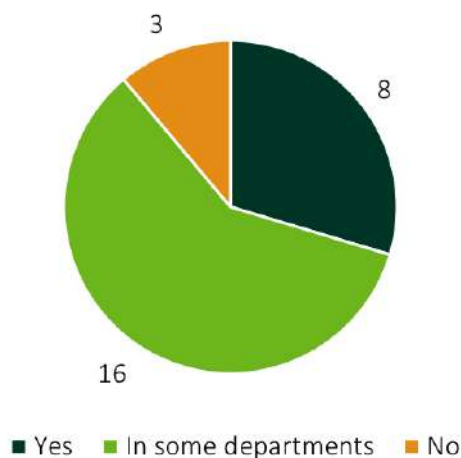
Others felt that students were not prepared for the practical nature of the courses and the step between FE and HE. However, at a different provider, there were concerns that students had not appreciated that they were studying for a degree qualification and not just coming to perform their practice. This is a key issue that could have an effect on many students who come to study at GuildHE providers.

Another interviewee said that mature learners are 'shocked' by the workload. There is an assumption that mature learners have information as readily as younger students, but this is often not the case. Mature learners **do not have access** to the same level of advice and guidance as applicants from schools or FE colleges. Furthermore, **research has shown** that they feel anxious about returning to study and adjusting to new styles of learning - in particular, group work with younger students can feel particularly daunting.

The impact learning has on wellbeing

According to Seligman, wellbeing is a prerequisite for effective learning. Most providers believe that wellbeing is considered in the development of a course, either in the whole provider or in some departments.

Do you think student wellbeing is considered in the development of courses?



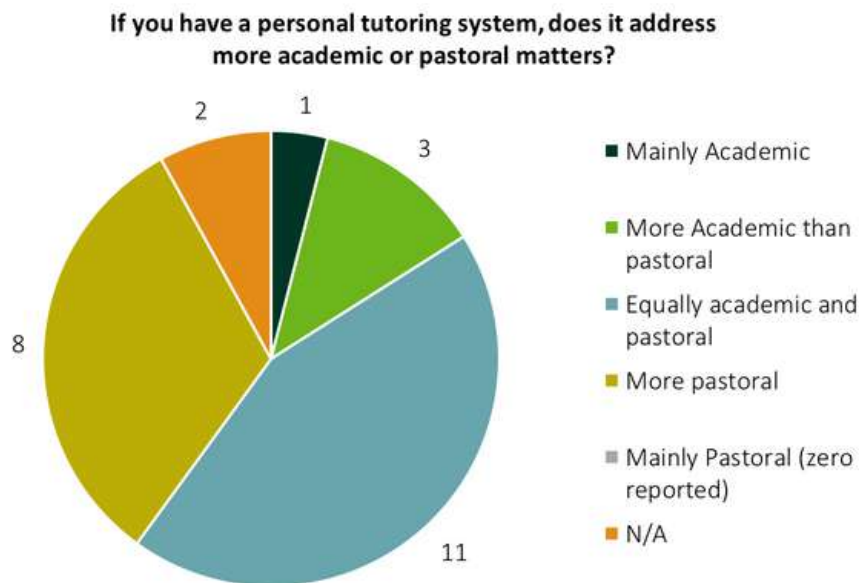
The different ways our respondents offered support were:

- 1:1 appointments with students and personal tutorials;
- Signposting to the support available via online communication;
- Stress and time management workshops;
- Publicising mitigating circumstances information;
- Avoiding the bunching of assessments;
- Specific activities (such as dog therapy) during assessment time.

Providers and students must work together to co-develop the support that is offered to students, to ensure that it is relevant to the student.

Personal tutoring system

Approximately 80% of the respondents have a personal tutoring system. The majority of those who had personal tutoring systems said that they were either there to offer mainly academic support or there for academic and pastoral support equally.



In providers which have a personal tutoring system, they are often the first point of contact for students. In a **recent study** examining the role of academics with regards to student mental health, a key issue was ambiguity around the word 'pastoral', and how this can lead to misunderstandings around the role of the personal tutor, which can have negative consequences for both the staff member and the student.

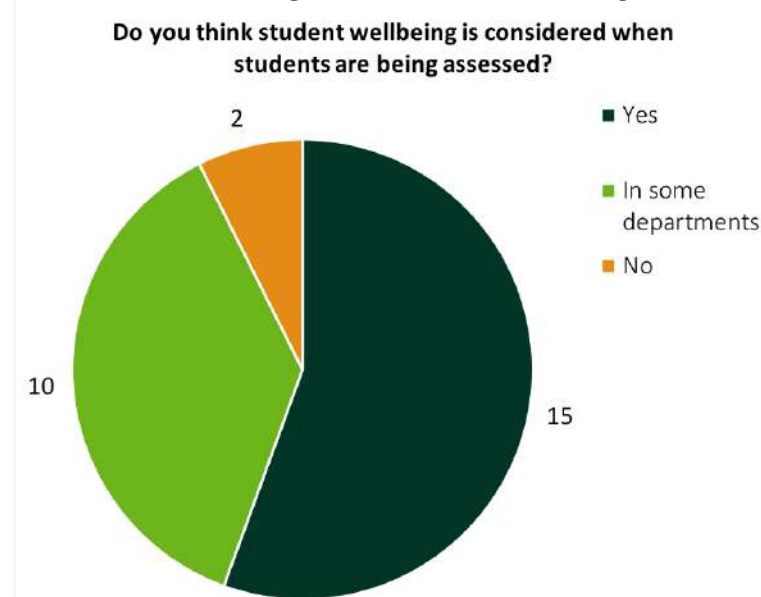
In GuildHE providers, personal tutors are not only academics, but leaders in their profession. This can have an impact on how much time they have to offer pastoral support, because they are expected to teach but also be engaged in their professional practice; such staff include lawyers, health practitioners and artists.

As highlighted in the previous section, 'Signposting to services' was considered an important method of delivering support when creating a culture of wellbeing - and this is particularly crucial when thinking about the responsibilities of the tutor. If personal tutors are correctly trained to understand signs of poor mental health and wellbeing, they might be able to prevent students reaching a point of crisis by guiding them to appropriate services.

“*Our personal tutor system is excellent, the open door policy genuinely means students can speak to their tutors whenever they need.*” - University of Law student

Assessment

Exams can 'create feelings of worry or under pressure' (sic). The majority of the surveyed providers considered student wellbeing when the students are being assessed.

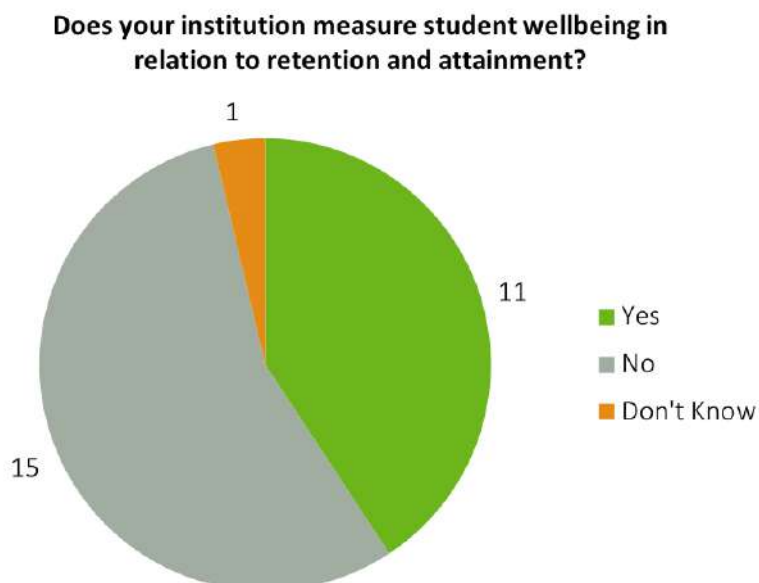


One of the key challenges raised in the interviews was that students often required support services that were specific to the assessment method of their course. For example, one performance-based provider described students who were experiencing performance-related anxiety, and therefore would not complete their assessments. In order to try and mitigate this, the provider works with counsellors who specialise in performance anxiety.

Wellbeing and retention/attainment

Retention and attainment are currently key metrics in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). The TEF is a way of assessing the quality of the student academic experience in higher education, and aims to improve student/applicant choice. Student wellbeing has a significant impact on students staying and achieving in higher education, and GuildHE believes wellbeing should be measured against retention and attainment in order to highlight it as an important measure of teaching quality.

Providers were asked if they measured wellbeing in relation to retention and attainment. The majority said that they did not do so, or did not know if they did this.



However, providers which said they did not currently measure this were interested in ways to do so.

The providers which do currently measure this, do so in the following ways:

- measuring student attendance with student support;
- online questionnaires and psychometric tests;
- learning analytics;
- tutorials set up according to initial categorisation of students who are likely to drop out;
- comparing mitigating circumstances and equality data;
- 'exit surveys' to ascertain why a student left their course.

When discussing measuring wellbeing in interviews, most participants broadly agreed that this would be a useful thing. However, they said that retention figures were often very high anyway in GuildHE providers, so these should not be seen as the only measure of student wellbeing.

Supporting student retention and wellbeing through alignment with attendance monitoring: Falmouth University

Student Services at Falmouth University provides support and intervention for students who are disengaging. At each stage of the monitoring process, the Living Support Team in Student Services make contact with the student offering support, guidance and options.

Student Services have noted a significant connection between disengagement and wellbeing concern, and have been able to assertively re-engage students who have often not known where to turn. This proactive intervention has supported students to get back on track before the situation has become detrimental (both for their wellbeing and academic progression), with a less formal and support-led approach.

Course design

Evidence suggests that when students are given flexibility and autonomy over their learning, they are more likely to experience good wellbeing whilst studying. The survey suggests that this is an area of strength for GuildHE providers. Almost 75% of providers said that students were involved in course design in at least one department.

Key ways of practising this were:

- student representatives on panels to help decide new module choices;
- different elective modules (including opportunities for work experience);
- student participation on national boards to influence how the qualification was accredited.

Beyond that, the students felt that the curriculum was broad enough to explore the diversity of their interests.

For practical subjects, students needed to develop skills and a knowledge base in order to have autonomy over their subject. This was achieved through teaching the practical skills in the first year, so that they could undertake more exploratory work in subsequent years.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does your institution prepare students for academic study? Does it work with schools to start preparing students for the rigour of academic life before university, particularly with applicants from widening participation backgrounds?
2. Does your institution consider how the wellbeing of students across all course and assessment development - including timetabling, and personal tutoring systems?
3. How does your institution measure student wellbeing?

4. STUDENT WORK/LIFE BALANCE: GAINING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

Why worry about a work/life balance?

One of the GuildHE memberships' key strengths is preparing graduates for the workplace. Members excel at getting students ready for their working life by giving them the skills and work experience beyond the academic environment. They also recruit students who already have a vested interest in their vocation and want to study it at degree level.

In the context of student wellbeing, this focus on vocational and professional learning can provide an opportunity. Students can develop the skills needed to cope with the stresses of everyday life in their profession in a more supportive academic environment. It will, however, be important for students to recognise that they will be getting a dual set of skills, both academic and professional. Institutions will need to support students to develop these wider professional skills, such as how to manage work-related pressure and competing priorities, beyond simply their academic work.

An unhealthy work/life balance can lead to physical and mental health issues, a lack of productivity, an impact on the home life, and resentment between employee and employer. For many students who become self-employed after graduation, there is a risk of isolation and loneliness. GuildHE providers are in a strong position to encourage a healthy work/life balance to reduce such risks for their graduates.

Challenges to a work/life balance

Many of the students and staff who were interviewed did not feel that students had a healthy work/life balance. This was both owing to the intensity of specialist courses, and their competitive nature, as all students were studying for similar qualifications. Students, particularly from creative providers, suggested that it was very difficult to be seen to show 'signs of weakness'.

One provider highlighted that the limited subject provision had both a positive and negative impact on their community. On one hand, there was a cohesive culture in the provider - where students could meet others with similar interests. On the other, there was a lack of exposure to other interests and diversity of opinions or talents. Given the vocational nature of these courses, there is a concern that students do not socialise much outside of their future profession, and that this lack of exposure could continue in later life.

Students also discussed how staff were seen as role models for students in their communities. As staff are frequently practitioners in their field, when students see them working long hours it can create an expectation that they should act in the same way.



“people can confuse passion with
exhaustion”

- Creative arts student

There is also a challenge for providers at the point of recruitment. One provider said that they accepted applications from students who demonstrated a passion for their subject. There is a tricky balance to support such passion whilst also highlighting the importance of balance in their life to support their wellbeing. One provider said that they managed this by 'bending the rules', and viewing the value of student success beyond attendance in class.

One creative arts provider described a successful initiative of having a graduate 'buddy scheme', where current students are paired up with alumni in their chosen field. This allowed them to gain first-hand industry knowledge prior to graduation. The same provider have also piloted a 'What Next' week - where students can find out useful information on how to access careers, and practical advice such as filling in tax returns.

Worcester: Where wellbeing works well

The University of Worcester demonstrated a really good understanding of the work/life balance, and demonstrated that it was a joint priority of both staff and the students' union. The university and students' union run joint campaigns encouraging students to look after their mental and physical health during the year and in assessment periods. Students are also encouraged to seek interests outside of their degree, as it is considered a crucial part of their development as students and future employees.

There is a campus-wide approach to wellbeing, with managers acting as positive role models to students by taking walks across the campus in the 'Worcester Mile'. Students are encouraged to take regular screen breaks in the library, and key wellbeing messages are even placed where students are likely to see them - in the campus bathrooms.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your institution actively encourage staff to maintain a healthy work/life balance to set a good example to students?
2. Does your institution support students to reflect on their work/life balance?

5. SPORTS, SOCIETIES AND SOCIAL SPACE

The importance of friendship

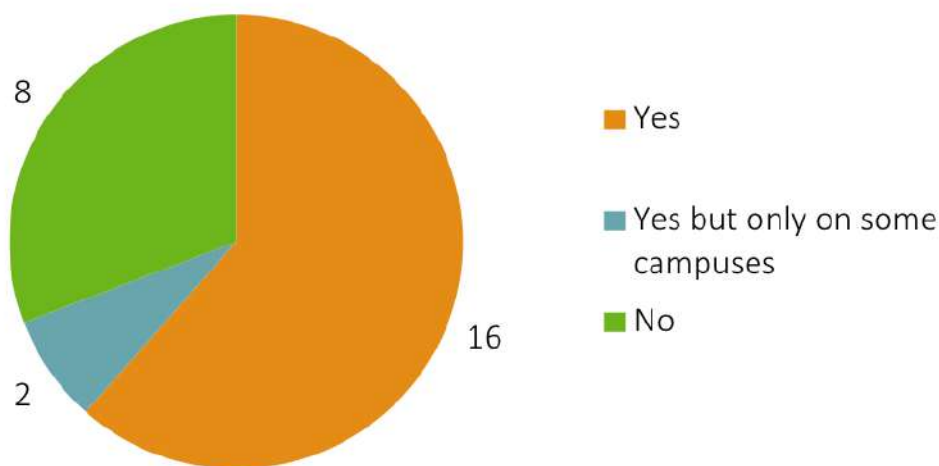
One of the ways to achieve long-lasting wellbeing is through developing and enjoying positive relationships with friends. Not only has **research** proven that friendship is key to students staying in education and their success, but a lack of friendship can lead to isolation and more detrimental mental health outcomes.

Many GuildHE institutions have very small formal students' unions, where opportunities for friendship are often traditionally found. Whilst the small numbers of students in our institutions produce an organic community, there are fewer resources to develop large-scale student-led activities and social events. This was highlighted by both students and providers as a barrier to students forming friendships based on interests outside their practice.

Sports and social spaces

Roughly 60% of providers said that they have access to sports facilities. It is well known that sport not only has a positive impact on physical health, but also on mental wellbeing. Team sports also enable students to develop friendships, and facilitate interaction with others. For students who are at risk of isolation, this can be really important.

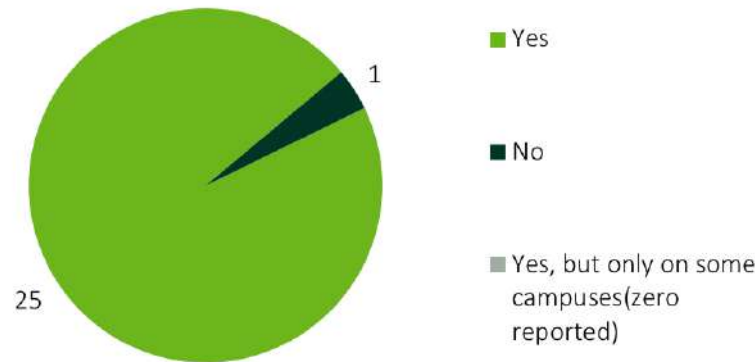
Does your institution have access to sports facilities?



Whilst not all students had access to sports clubs within their institution, 96% of those surveyed said that they had the opportunity to join special interest societies which grew their friendship base beyond their course.

Being a member of a society was seen as particularly important by students' union officers, as students who were engaged in societies were more likely to be a part of the campus community, and therefore less vulnerable to being 'lost in the system'. In order to ensure that this is effective, students' unions and providers can work jointly to track student participation in these activities and the impact this may have on their wellbeing and academic progress.

Do your students have the opportunity to join societies?



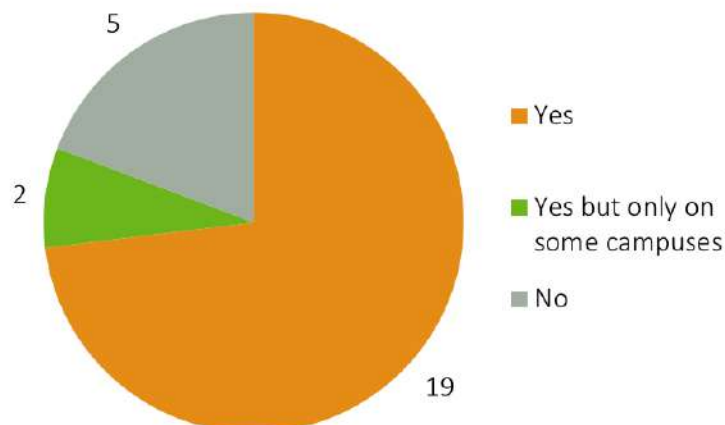
Almost all providers (25%) reported that they had designated spaces for students to socialise with each other across their campus. Some campuses had joint facilities with other local HE providers, so that students were able to meet people from institutions across the local area. This is particularly important for students at small providers - if they are struggling to make close connections with people from their institution meeting students elsewhere can provide them with additional opportunities to develop friendships.

Prayer and quiet spaces

For some students, having the opportunity to practice their faith is important for their wellbeing. Almost 75% of providers said that they provide prayer facilities or meditative spaces. Only one provider said that they provided space for some religions only.

Three quarters (73%) of providers surveyed said that they had designated quiet spaces across the provider. One in five (19%) said they did not, and the remaining 8% said this was only available on some campuses. Having a quiet space on the campus, where people are able to reflect, meditate and practice mindfulness, has been shown to improve abilities to cope with everyday stresses associated with work.

Does your institution have designated quiet spaces?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your institution provide opportunities for students to socialise with other students?
2. Does your institution provide quiet spaces on campus for students?
3. Does your institution, or students' union, track participation in clubs and societies?

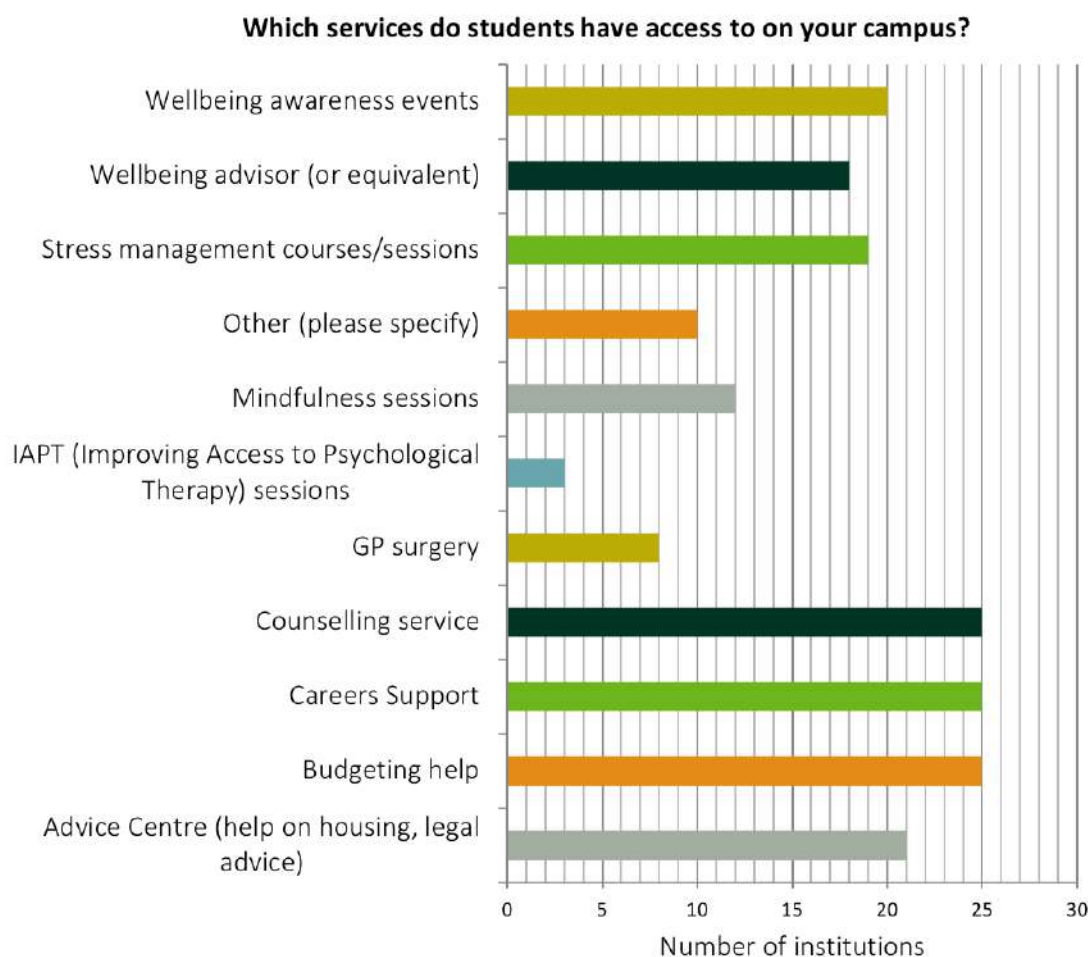
6. STUDENT WELLBEING AND SERVICES

A key part of creating a culture of wellbeing is good signposting to services. Making students aware of the services that are available to them not only enables them to access appropriate support, but also de-stigmatises poor mental health.

Providers are seeing an increasing amount of burden placed on internal mental health services. This is forcing practitioners within providers into 'crisis mode', as opposed to being able to focus on preventative work.

Providers were asked to list the services that students could access on their campus. The most available services were: 'Counselling service', 'Careers support' and 'Budgeting help'.

The least available services were: 'Improving Access to Psychological Therapy (IAPT) sessions', 'General Practitioner (GP) Surgery' and 'Mindfulness sessions'.



Providers were also asked to list external wellbeing-related services that they had a relationship with. The most popular services were: the NHS, Mind, and Student Minds. Other services mentioned were: Time to Talk, Papyrus, Nightline, Samaritans, duty psychiatrists, community mental health teams, Police Community Support Officers, eating disorder services (such as B-Eat), children and young peoples mental health forum, Cruse, local clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), and a chaplaincy.

Alongside these services, students' unions talked about the importance of sexual health clinics or provision on campus, as this helped to improve student anxiety around sex and relationships. One member students' union said that it offered a free termly clinic, offering full STI services, with results texted to the students.

The nature of these relationships

The relationships that GuildHE providers have with external services vary. Some providers said that they did not have the resource to 'do much with them', as energy was focused on engaging with students with acute mental health conditions.

In particular, GuildHE providers are struggling to build sustainable relationships with the NHS. Staff suggested that this was owing to lack of resource, constant changes in NHS staff, and limited capacity within the provider to invest in these relationships. Many students also cited problems with waiting lists for external support, such as counselling.

Some providers are able to share services with other providers in the area. Whilst this was shown to work successfully for some providers, others felt that they are less of a priority compared to the other (often bigger) provider. For multi-campus providers, there was an issue of consistency of provision across different campuses.

Regional differences

It is also important to acknowledge regional differences in provision. Providers in cities are likely to have access to a range of different services. However, many small providers are situated in rural areas, which are less likely to have such provision.

Responding to the 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision: a Green Paper', GuildHE advocated for partnerships between services to develop regional strands, and where appropriate, to consider individual HE providers, to ensure that every young person in higher education has access to the same quality of care.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does your institution signpost students to services supporting student mental health?
2. Does your institution have local partnerships with other providers in the area to share resources where appropriate and effective?

7. ACCOMODATION

The importance of a healthy living environment

According to '**Student Living: Collaborating to Support Mental Health in Student Accommodation**', the student living environment has 'a role to play on a strategic level in terms of creating a community that promotes positive wellbeing'. GuildHE providers rated having a comfortable and affordable living situation as one of the most important factors to student wellbeing. Not only does this affect a students' finance, it can also have an impact on their social lives in higher education and their ability to cope while studying.

Some GuildHE providers offer their own student accommodation, while others have developed relationships with accommodation providers. Some of the surveyed providers do not have the resource to offer their own accommodation, which made it more difficult to guarantee affordable provision. The students interviewed also consider this to be a big risk factor to poor student wellbeing.

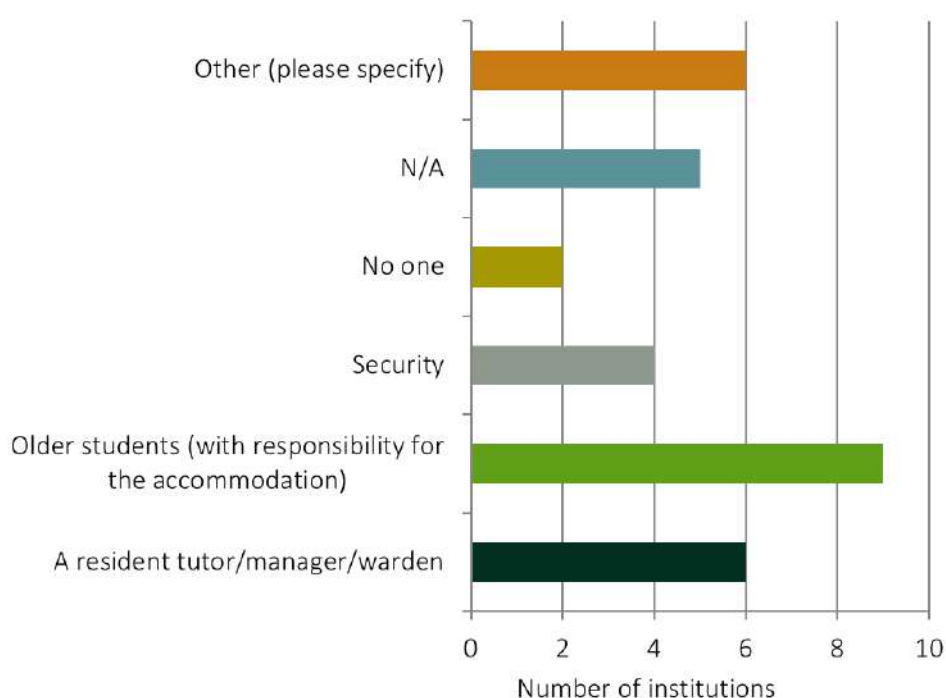
On campus accomodation

Over half of providers (61%) said that they offered on-campus accommodation to their students. The providers that did not offer campus accommodation tended to be those from the creative and performing arts sector, health based colleges, and FE colleges (where students are more likely to be living at home with parents). They were also more likely to be (but not exclusively) London based.

For higher education providers which did offer accommodation, first-year students were overwhelmingly most likely to be guaranteed a place, with vulnerable students and disabled students the next likely.

Providers were also asked who else lived alongside the students to provide additional support. Respondents mainly cited older students (who had a responsibility for the accommodation), or a resident tutor/warden. Two providers said that only students live in halls of residence, without live-in duty managers, security or wardens.

Who lives in student accommodation (besides students)?



When considering what these live-in staff do, most providers said that they had a pastoral role, and/or provided an oversight of health and safety. Fewer providers said that they were there for disciplinary or security reasons. Only one provider said that they had a signposting role, and one a social/community engagement role.

Providers face a challenge in balancing student independence against wellbeing and mental health. Students who experience stress or isolation could have these feelings exacerbated in an accommodation environment, and it is important that they are able to access support.

Like personal tutoring, there is also a risk to staff or older students who live with the students - particularly around the blurring of the definition of 'pastoral' support. It is important that those who assume that role are given rigorous training, and that providers work jointly with accommodation organisation and those volunteers to outline the expectations that should be placed on those staff.

Providers without accommodation supporting students

Lots of smaller providers can not afford to build their own accommodation, and rely on relationships with private landlords. In order to support students through this process, they run days which link students with local landlords and agencies so that students can find housing. This can be a tricky process, and providers need robust filtering processes in order to ensure that they are showcasing organisations who support students with affordable rents, clean and comfortable living spaces, and good communication. Some providers also develop relationships with other, larger providers in the area and share resources with them.

Private accommodation can also have an impact on student finances, where students are either at risk of a lack of regulation in the private rental sector, or expensive 'plush' accommodation blocks if they want to live in a halls-style environment in order to make friends.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does your institution support students that need accommodation, and is it affordable?
2. Do your halls of residence and other student accommodation embed pastoral support within the building for students to access easily and confidentially?
3. If so, how are those responsible for delivering the pastoral support trained and supported?

8. ENGAGING ALL STUDENTS: TARGETED SUPPORT

While it is important to note that all students are at risk of poor wellbeing, some cohorts of students might need targeted support in order to thrive in higher education.

The survey asked officers and staff to identify groups of students who they considered to be 'most at risk of poor wellbeing'. It is important to note that this will not be the same for every provider; each individual provider should work to identify those students who are at increased risk, and develop a more targeted approach to support them. Furthermore, students can fall into more than one category, and should not be treated as a homogenous group.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students

BME students were identified by both students and staff as being a group who were at increased risk. However, it is important to note that BME students should not be treated as a homogenous group, and to consider different communities and intersectionalities to gain a greater understanding of which students might be in need. BME students were particularly highlighted in providers where the majority of students were from a white ethnic background, and where there was a lack of representation for BME students.

Lesbian, Gay, Bi and Trans students

NUS research suggests that LGBT students are more likely to experience mental health problems. In particular, the group identified as being most at risk were trans students. It was felt that providers still did not have adequate processes in place to support trans students, such as how correct pronouns and names were registered. Research also shows that trans students, in particular, are more at risk of experiencing sexual abuse, bullying and harassment, and of feeling isolated from friends and family.

Students with disabilities

Students with disabilities were also identified as more likely to experience poor wellbeing. This was particularly the case for students who had previously undiagnosed conditions. It was also particularly pertinent within providers where there was a physical demand on the student - such as a drama or performing arts institutions.

International students

One provider identified international students as a group at risk of poor wellbeing. They suggested that the language barrier, the lack of family support in the UK, and feeling isolated by their culture could cause them to experience poor wellbeing. Another suggested that non-EU fees could cause them to feel additional financial and academic pressures to succeed.

Care leavers

Students who have left care were identified as being in need of additional support. A particular situation where it was felt they could experience poor wellbeing is when trying to find accommodation, as they were more likely to struggle with money and less likely to have a guarantor. This issue has also been identified as one facing international students, when asked to provide a UK based guarantor. One provider suggested that institutions should look at becoming guarantors where possible, in order to support those students through the housing process. This is currently the case for a number of larger universities in the sector.

Carers and parents

Carers and parents were also identified as students who would need additional support to improve their wellbeing whilst studying. A key way to mitigate additional stress on student parents is to provide affordable, on-campus childcare. At GuildHE providers, there were mixed levels of provision, with 57% of respondents making no childcare available. Three providers had an on-campus nursery, six said that they had a relationship with the local nursery. Two providers said that students were able to take children to class if they could not afford childcare. One other said that arrangements would be made on a case-by-case basis. Providers felt that students with caring responsibilities were also particularly difficult to identify, as many students did not identify themselves as carers and did not seek additional help or support.

Commuter students

Commuter students were also identified as a group which were 'hard to hear', because they were not as engaged with the campus community. Providers were asked whether they had additional facilities for commuter students - 85% of those who responded to the survey said that they did not.

First in the family

Another group that was highlighted as being at risk of poor wellbeing were those students who were the first in the family to access higher education, or who were taking non-traditional routes into study. A provider which highlighted this cohort took proactive steps to support these students by managing expectations for study pre-arrival, and providing additional study support.

Course cohorts

Providers also identified students on specific courses who might be at risk of poor wellbeing. It is important that providers examine the factors which might prevent students from coping with the course.

Representation

One way to ensure that these at-risk students are heard is through creating representative officers who will promote the rights of those students, and campaign with them and on their behalf. NUS have traditionally adopted a model of 'liberation' officers, who represent women, LGBT+, BME and disabled students. The term **liberation** is used because these officers campaign for freedom from the oppression people face because of their identities. This model has been adopted by a large number of students' unions. As well as these defined roles, providers may wish to consider how they capture the views of students who are careers, commuters, work-based learners, mature/part-time or first in their family, these distinctive backgrounds may influence their engagement with HE.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Does your institution know the different needs of different groups of students, and how are these identified?
2. How are these different groups supported to engage and provided with a voice to ensure that their issues are heard?

9. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Why community participation?

A key part of the World Health Organisation's definition of wellbeing is a person's ability to 'contribute to their community', and **research** has shown that community participation can have a positive effect of students' mental health and wellbeing. In particular, volunteering can boost self-esteem, make mental health conditions more manageable, improve family relationships and encourage a healthier lifestyle.

Active Citizenship: The role of higher education

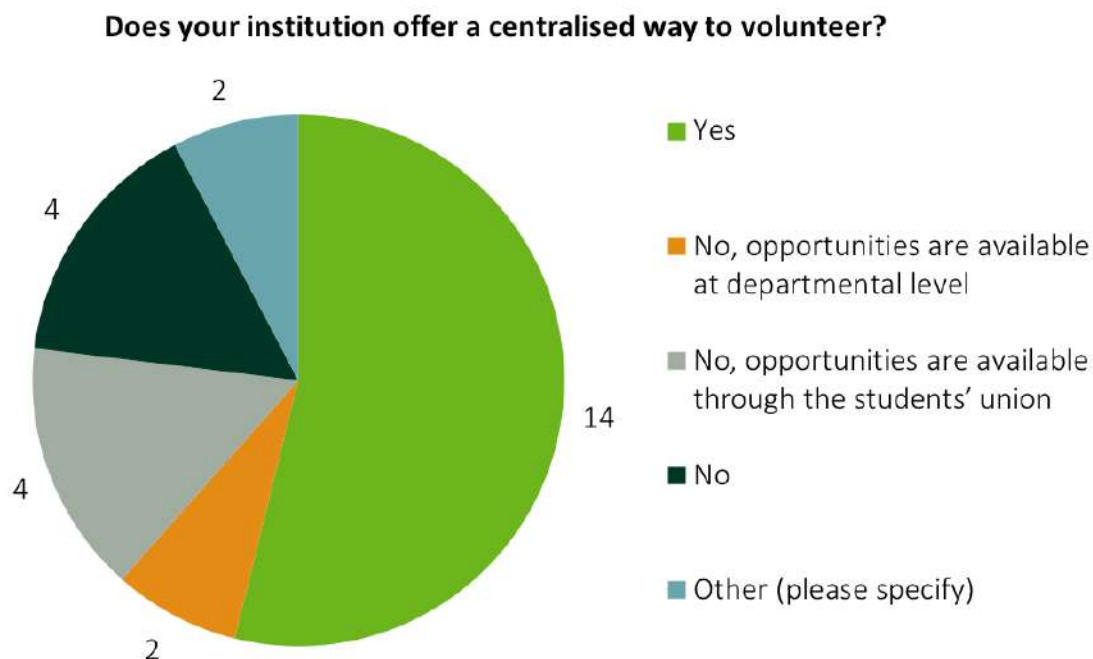
In 2016, GuildHE and NUS jointly **published a report** on the role of higher education in developing students into active citizens.

The report highlights six key 'pillars' of active citizenship: volunteering, democratic engagement, environmental sustainability, community engagement, global citizenship and reflection and development.

Volunteering

Providers were asked whether students were able to contribute to their community through volunteering. The majority of providers had opportunities for students to volunteer.

In terms of delivery, 53% of providers offered a centralised way for students to volunteer. Providers also cited the students' union, individual departments and the careers service as other ways students might be able to access volunteering opportunities.



The most popular ways of rewarding students for volunteering were through awards ceremonies - either administered through the provider or the students' union.

The next most popular was through mentioning it on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). Six providers did not specifically reward volunteering. Other ways included:

- paying volunteers for attending training;
- employability/careers award;
- publicity by the provider for their volunteering.

A key way for students to volunteer in the community was through using the skills they learnt at their provider. Students from arts providers are volunteering by performing locally, creating artwork for the community, and running pop-up not for profits. Health providers are practising their profession not only locally, but overseas.

Some students' unions felt that they were contributing to society through being politically engaged with the National Union of Students, and jointly running or campaigning alongside national officers.

Voting also **contributes to a students' wellbeing**, by encouraging an emotional connection to a community, and creates a sense of self-worth. Two thirds (68%) of providers encourage national democratic participation through encouraging voter registration. Students' unions take responsibility for this in 24% of providers.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Has your institution read the GuildHE Active Citizenship: The role of higher education report and considered the aspects of the Active Citizenship Charter?
2. Has your institution considered how it recognises and rewards student volunteering?
3. Has your institution considered the recent **DfE Guidance** on supporting students to register in local and national elections?

10. FINANCE

An important area that emerged from the research was anxiety around finances and living costs. Providers identified budgeting help as one of the more important factors in student wellbeing, and students themselves raised it as a fundamental issue in the survey and interviews.

A key ask from students was to bring back the maintenance grant, as this supported students with the more financially challenging aspects of student life, such as accommodation. Some students raised the issue of the language around funding and finance. Many students felt that there was a misconception around what student loans were spent on, and there was anxiety around graduate debt.

In order to mitigate worries around money, one provider ran a bus which sold second-hand clothes, alongside cups of tea and a chat with a wellbeing advisor. This not only enabled students to buy things cheaply, but also allowed them to tap into additional support.

Bursaries

A number of providers offer bursaries to widening participation students. Our providers have seen an increase in the number of students who have requested bursary support since the removal of maintenance grants. When asked about the impact of bursaries, students have generally found them a useful contribution to their studies - particularly when there has been no parental support. Some providers also noted that they had an impact on attainment and retention. However, some GuildHE providers have said that offering bursaries to students had no discernible effect on student choice and recruitment, and therefore did not offer them.

Hidden course costs

NUS is **campaigning** for the reduction of 'hidden course costs', which can impact student finances and, in turn, their wellbeing (especially when these costs are unexpected). In particular, students with higher course costs found an inability to concentrate on their studies. Students also felt that transparency around costs was important, as it allowed them to budget effectively. Bench fees, musical instrument hire, course-related sports facilities, specialist software and studio fees were listed as costs students were least likely to know about.

Although some GuildHE providers suggested that their courses did not incur extra costs, it is important that providers are mindful that some parts of the course can be expensive, and that they are supporting students in not only demonstrating what might have to be paid for, and how the provider can support the student to meet these costs.

Royal Central School of Speech and Drama: Support after graduation

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama offers a bursary to care leavers of £1,000 a year, in two £500 payments. Students are able to control when these are received. These students also obtain a £500 'exit bursary', helping them to cover expenses after they graduate from the provider. The school also refers students to the '**Drive Forward Foundation**', which supports care leavers through sustainable employment.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How does your institution support students with advice on budgeting and finance support?
2. How does your institution support students that get into financial difficulties?
3. Does your institution provide money saving opportunities on campus, such as second-hand clothing sales, cheaper food or inexpensive opportunities to socialise?
4. Does your institution provide clear information about additional course costs?

SUMMARY OF QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. DEFINITIONS OF WELLBEING AND WELLBEING STRATEGIES

- Has your institution developed a mutually agreed upon definition of wellbeing with students and student representatives?
- Has your institution developed an institution-wide wellbeing strategy?
- Is this strategy regularly reviewed with the student body to reflect the changing nature of student bodies?

2. CREATING A CULTURE OF STUDENT WELLBEING

- Does your institution reflect on how students' positive wellbeing could be embedded across the whole student lifecycle - from pre-arrival to graduation and beyond?
- Does your institution provide training for all staff - including non-academic staff - to identify the signs of poor mental health, so that they are able to pick up on students who may be having wellbeing issues?
- Are your wellbeing initiatives jointly run with the students' union or developed with student input?

3. ACADEMIC SUCCESS

- How does your institution prepare students for academic study? Does it work with schools to start preparing students for the rigour of academic life before university, particularly with applicants from widening participation backgrounds?
- Does your institution consider how the wellbeing of students across all course and assessment development - including timetabling, and personal tutoring systems?
- How does your institution measure student wellbeing?

4. STUDENT WORK LIFE BALANCE: GAINING SKILLS FOR EMPLOYMENT

- Does your institution actively encourage staff to maintain a healthy work/life balance to set a good example to students?
- Does your institution support students to reflect on their work/life balance?

5. SPORTS, SOCIETIES, AND SOCIAL SPACE

- Does your institution provide opportunities for students to socialise with other students?
- Does your institution provide quiet spaces on campus for students?
- Does your institution, or students' union, track participation in clubs and societies?

6. STUDENT WELLBEING AND SERVICES

- How does your institution signpost students to services supporting student mental health?
- Does your institution have local partnerships with other providers in the area to share resources where appropriate and effective?

7. ACCOMODATION

- How does your institution support students that need accommodation, and is it affordable?
- Do your halls of residence and other student accommodation embed pastoral support within the building for students to access easily and confidentially?
- If so, how are those responsible for delivering the pastoral support trained and supported?

8. ENGAGING ALL STUDENTS: TARGETED SUPPORT

- Does your institution know the different needs of different groups of students, and how are these identified?
- How are these different groups supported to engage and provided with a voice to ensure that their issues are heard?

9. COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- Has your institution read the GuildHE Active Citizenship: The role of higher education report and considered the aspects of the Active Citizenship Charter (available at <https://tinyurl.com/ac-in-he>)?
- Has your institution considered how it recognises and rewards student volunteering?
- Has your institution considered the recent OfS Guidance on supporting students to register in local and national elections (available at <https://tinyurl.com/dfe-electoral-registration>)?

10. FINANCE

- How does your institution support students with advice on budgeting and finance support?
- How does your institution support students that get into financial difficulties?
- Does your institution provide money saving opportunities on campus, such as second hand clothing sales, cheaper food, and inexpensive opportunities to socialise?

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

- Fund young people's mental health services in all parts of the country - particularly in light of the Green Paper looking at a strategic partnership looking at 16-25 years mental health.
- Reinstate maintenance grants to support positive student wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SECTOR

- Develop a means of measuring student wellbeing against retention and attainment, so that we can collect formalised data on this.

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