



courage

wellbeing project

Case Study – The Lakeside View PGR Blog

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Setting the scene

The Lakeside View Blog was set up as part of the Courage Project to create a platform to focus on the lives, experiences and concerns of PGRs. This a PGR community blog, written by and for PGRs and all contributors to the blog are current or previous PGRs or University Staff who work directly with PGRs.

Action taken

There have been 48 blog posts on the Lakeside View PGR blog across the duration of the Courage Project. All topics relating to PGR life were welcomed and over the duration of the project the blog has covered:

- Mental health and wellbeing
 - Personal experiences from PGRs and staff working with PGRs
 - Supporting others mental health and wellbeing
- The PGR Journey
- Alternative places to write
- Findings from Courage Project activities
 - Walk and Talk
 - PGRunners
 - PhDiggers
 - Silent Space
 - Courage Festival
- Gardening
- Associate Tutor rights
- Augar Review for PGRs
- Being a parent and a PGR
- Courageous Conversations – giving voice to PGRs

Key impacts and outcomes

The blog has been used as a platform to begin conversations about mental health and wellbeing across the research community. A key example of this can be found in two blog posts written by a senior academic. The first was published in October 2018 and the second a year later in October 2019. In the first post we learnt about the individual experience of a sense of low enjoyment in academic work over a long period of time, alongside seeking professional help to support their mental health and eventually a shift in career.

“A researcher was outwardly on track, but wasn’t inwardly enjoying his work all of the time. Research has its ups and downs, but the ups and downs of the soul are different. There were periods when things just didn’t feel right, seeding doubt about what he was doing. The option of quitting research and finding something else to do felt like a bigger challenge than carrying on with research, so nothing really changed. There was a sense of being trapped....

...What lessons did he learn from this? Gather all your courage. Get the most appropriate professional help you can find. Seek to make changes in your life, and consider those that seem impossible at first. Think about lifestyle, values, motivation, relationships, dealing with experiences, career, etc. Be prepared to revise how you see yourself and how you see the world – they constantly change. Accept that your best on a tough day is not the same as your best on a good day.

Be patient - resolutions sometimes come sooner, sometimes later. His journey took years, but he knows others that have reached their destinations much quicker. Above all, be kind to yourself and to those around you.”

The following year, we heard again from this academic after a period of increasingly demanding workload, personal challenges, alongside a series of successes in their career, which resulted in anxiety, severe insomnia and depression.

“What have I learned this second time? Like a back injury, the wrong move can flare things up again. However, if one can recover once, one can do it again. Moving forwards, one’s workload must be sustainable. Short-term stress is fine, but when days and weeks turn to months of pressure, this is not good. Seek help early to stay resilient. The irony is that I advise others to do this - but I now know how hard it is to judge this correctly. With my therapist’s guidance, I’ve understood better how one’s thoughts can all too easily become self-critical. I’ve also better understood how

one's catastrophising can tap into one's deepest fears, bypassing the most robust logic. I've been very open with my colleagues about my mental health issues, unlike the first time around. Do I regret it? No. My colleagues have been very supportive. In fact, I should have asked for help when the workload was starting to get out of control. I've recently trimmed some of my responsibilities with the support of management, and this has helped enormously."

Following from the publication of the second blog post, the PGR Mental Health Coordinator and the author of the blog planned a Walk and Talk. A walking group where people could submit questions anonymously before the walk that the blog author would answer on the walk. In doing so, the walk and talk created an opportunity to discuss in a supportive and non-judgmental manner personal experience of mental health in academia. The shoulder-to-shoulder approach of the walk makes it easier to discuss mental health and personal experiences and created an easy way to have courageous conversations.

Overall, the Lakeside View blog has been a fundamental part of the Courage Project. Creating a platform for people to engage in the project in different ways. The personal experiences that have been shared in the blog have opened up a discussion around the challenges of postgraduate research, particularly around mental health. For some, engaging in the blog is an easier way to reflect on their own experiences and reduce the sense of loneliness by understanding that there are other people who are having or have had similar experiences. At many times, the content of the blog has been thought provoking and challenging, but overall this has resulted in open, honest and courageous conversations to take place across the research environments, PGRs, staff and the institution.