



courage

wellbeing project

PGR Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator Case Study

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Action taken

As part of the Courage Project, the University of East Anglia Students' Union hired a full-time PGR Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator post, a unique and distinctive role. This post was to lead on the four 'PGR-facing' strands of work of Courage. This primarily included:

1. Supervising 8 PGR placements as part of the Research Culture and Community strand
2. Developing, piloting and evaluating training to support PGRs in managing stressful circumstances as part of Personal and Professional Development.
 - a. Supervising a PGR placement as part of this strand who conducted research into PGR opinions of resilience and resilience training
3. Coordinating the development, pilot and evaluation of low commitment sports, fitness and social activities for PGRs
4. Coordinating the development of a network of PGRs who teach (Associate Tutors) and supervising a PGR who worked on this strand

In addition, key areas of work from this role included:

1. Introducing Courage and PGR wellbeing as part of all PGR inductions at University and faculty level
2. Supporting and presenting at PGR wellbeing events at University of East Anglia, University of Suffolk and Norwich Bioscience Institutes
3. Developing training on Imposter Syndrome
4. Involvement in key project decisions at monthly Courage Project Strand Leads meetings
5. Coordinating with external partners to create the first University Silent Space and the first Silent Space in East Anglia
6. Being trained as a Mental Health First Aider and providing key signposting support to PGRs attending workshops, events, training or through email communications
7. Establishing and coordinating a series of communication channels, with the support of a part-time communications assistant;
 - a. PGR blog, the Lakeside View
 - b. Weekly Courage Project bulletins, sent to all PGR emails.
 - c. Establishing and maintaining Courage Project webpages (www.uea.su/courage)
 - d. Developing physical and digital advertisements (e.g. leaflets, posters and magazines, digital screens)

8. Chairing the organisation and implementation of the Courage Festival, a large public facing event with attendees from University of East Anglia and across the country to discuss PGR mental health and wellbeing.
9. Developing and maintaining collaborations across University departments, including from the Students' Union with the Student Support Service, the PGR Service, UEA Estates team, the SportsPark, UEA Wellbeing Interest Network (WIN), and a range of academics and staff from across the university who were involved in the various projects implemented.
10. Coordinating events as part of national and global mental health awareness days e.g. walk and talk, tea and chat
 - a. Blue Monday / Brew Monday
 - b. World Mental Health day
 - c. Time to Change Day
 - d. University Mental Health Day
11. Dissemination across a range activities at internal and external events, including:
 - a. 1st International Conference on the Mental Health & Wellbeing of Postgraduate Researchers (May 2019)
 - b. Student Voice and the Co-Creation of Interventions for Improving PGR Mental Health and Wellbeing (December 2019)
 - c. Young Peoples Mental Health and Wellbeing Conference (November 2019)
 - d. Norwich Business School PhD Colloquium – invited key note – (November 2019)
 - e. Postgraduate Education Conference (November 2019 & November 2018)
 - f. Student Mental Health Research Network (SMaRteN) Student Mental Health Conference 2019 (December 2019)
 - g. PGR Directors Conference - University of East Anglia (September 2018 & September 2019)
 - h. PhD to Professional: Looking Forward – what comes next? University of East Anglia Careers Central (July 2019)
 - i. University of East Anglia Learning and Teaching Day – Walk and Talk – Silent Space (May 2019)
 - j. Wellbeing Interest Network Meeting - University of East Anglia (December 2018, February 2019, October 2019)
 - k. A StepChange in Support for PGR Mental Health & Wellbeing – University of Nottingham (October 2018)
 - l. Moving on in Your Academic Career - University of East Anglia Careers Central (September 2018)
 - m. Staff Wellbeing In Higher Education: Precepts, Practices and Potentialities in Challenging Times (July 2018)

Key impacts/ outcomes

The PGR Mental Health Coordinator supervised 9 PGR placements across the strands of work that they led on. This led to the production of 8 reports reflecting a vast range of work that was conducted. This included original research studies into PGR perceptions of working spaces, resilience training, PGR mentoring, supervisory relationships and the meaning of research culture and community. In addition, a PGR ran an empowerment training workshop, a lunchtime seminar series for PGRs and a Breakfast Club Meetup, amongst a range of other activities.

In addition, across the duration of Courage, the PGR Mental Health Coordinator co-ordinated the development of over 165 PGR mental health and wellbeing events and trainings, including 27 Walk and Talks, 24 Running Groups, 43 PhDiggers allotment and gardening sessions, and 5 6-week Yoga for the Mind courses.

Virtual engagement with the Courage project was through the weekly Courage bulletins that included information about upcoming Courage activities, updates on project work and information about PGR community and wellbeing events across the university. Overall, there were over 50 blog posts shared across the duration of the Courage project, written by PGRs or people working with PGRs and covering a range of topics. From mental health and wellbeing, gardening, being a parent as a PGR, casualised contracts and issues as an associate tutor. The blog received hundreds of views each week, with over 400 views to the blog during some key posts (e.g.

<https://www.uea.su/blogs/blog/lakesideview/2019/10/02/Being-Well-Again/>).

Internal and external dissemination events that the PGR Mental Health Coordinator was involved in presenting amounted to over 35 separate engagement events, including mental health awareness days and PGR induction events that were key in establishing PGR mental health and wellbeing as part of everyday conversation, destigmatising a discussion around mental health.

A key impact of this role was the opportunity that it led to developing constructive collaborations across areas of the university with an investment in PGR mental health and wellbeing, including strong links with from the University of East Anglia Students' Union and the Student Support Services PGR Wellbeing Adviser. Moreover, this role heavily increased the promotion and engagement of PGRs with the range of events taking part as part of Courage. This involvement include physically being present and engaged at events and training and also virtually connecting with the project through the weekly bulletins and Lakeside View PGR Blog posts.

Having a dedicated member of staff, working as part of a team who were dedicated to PGR mental health and wellbeing enabled this to be a priority on the 'agenda' of many areas of the university context. Importantly, this role provided a diverse range of opportunities for PGRs to engage in the Courage Project, feeling supported and that the challenges they face are taken seriously. This role, alongside the others that were created as part of the Courage project (PGR Adviser in Student Support Services and PGR Placements) were an investment in the mental health and wellbeing of PGRs at the University.