

Using Evidence to Inform Support Services in Higher Education



**Pedagogical Research and Educational
Scholarship Research Cluster**
research.reading.ac.uk/pedagogical-research-pcls

**Funded by the BPS
Research Seminars
scheme**



About today's seminar

- Final part of a BPS-funded seminar series: ***Students' Wellbeing at the Centre of their Academic Journey: Translating pedagogic research into practice***
 - First seminar at Royal Holloway: 'For Students, By Students': Translating pedagogic research into co-produced student initiatives to benefit student wellbeing
 - Second seminar at Warwick: "Designing curriculum with a difference: Utilising research to design engaging and thought-provoking curriculum and assessment"
- This seminar focuses upon partnership working between academic staff and university support services, to support evidence-based practice
 - Examples, inspiration, tips, and networking

Today's seminar organisers

- Run by the Pedagogical Research and Educational Scholarship (PRaES) research cluster in the School of Psychology and Clinical Language Sciences
research.reading.ac.uk/pedagogical-research-pcls



Prof. Alana James



Dr. Rachel Pye



Dr. Paul Jenkins

Schedule

10.00-10.15	Introduction
10.15-11.00	Talks 1: Research in Partnership
11.00-11.30	Break/Networking – served in room 1L06
11.30-12.15	Talks 2: Practice in Partnership
12.15-1.15	Lunch – served in room 1L06
1.15-2.30	Workshop: Developing and implementing collaborations between academics and support services, and between institutions, to promote effective student support
2.30-2.45	Break/Networking - served in room 1L06
2.45-3.15	Workshop Wrap-up and Final Thoughts
3.15	Close (seminar organisers meeting 3.15-4.00)

Housekeeping

- If you would prefer not to be included in photos please let Paul, Rachel or Alana know
- Main activities are in room 1L08
 - Refreshments in the breaks and lunch will be served in room 1L06
 - During the Talks sessions room 1L06 may be used as a quiet room
- We are not aware of any planned fire alarm tests
- Please go to building reception if in need of first aid

Introductions

- Get into pairs or threes, ideally with someone you don't already know
- Introduce yourself, where you are based, and what you hope to think about during today's seminar

Talks 1: Research in Partnership

Prof. Alana James	Evaluating the University of Reading Life Tools programme
Dr Katie Barfoot	Working in partnership with the SportsPark on student research
Denis Persichini	Comparing international and home students' perceptions of university support
Dr Rachel Pye	Researching awarding gaps
	Panel Q&A/Discussion

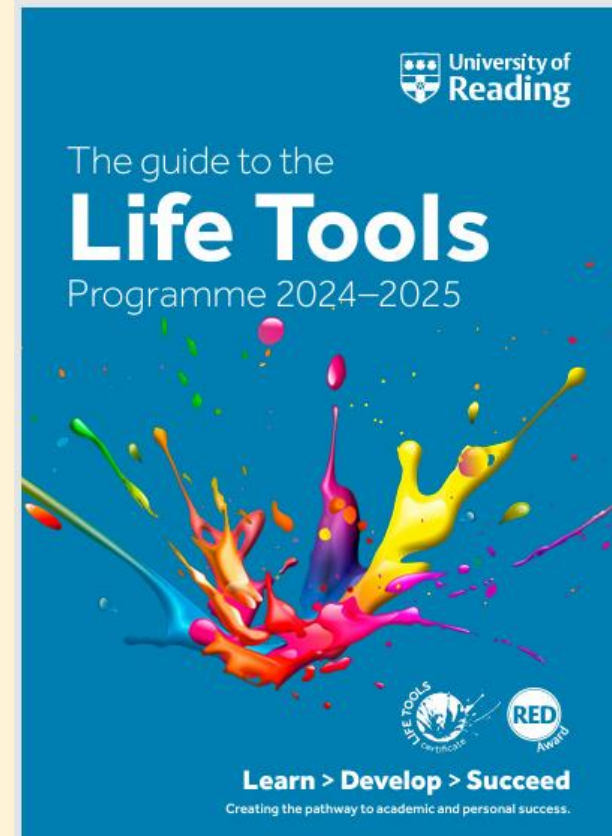
Evaluating the University of Reading Life Tools Programme

Prof. Alana James (Psychology)

a.i.james@reading.ac.uk

Dr Alicia Pena Bizama (Life Tools Manager)

Denis Persichini (as a Student Researcher)



Life Tools

- Universal
- **Psychoeducation:** evidence-based content promoting self-management
- **Prevention-focused:** supporting Student Wellbeing services
- **Multi-mode:** Talks; Virtual learning environment (vle); Life Tools certificate
- **Student roles:** Student voices; placements; responsive to feedback



Example topics

Mindfulness for exam prep
Feedback: Food for thought
Stressed? Learn ways to maintain your health

Research partnership

- Ongoing collaboration between Life Tools Manager and academic in Psychology
- Supported by placement students
 - Project within a Psychology Professional Placement Year
 - Short-term placements in a Part Two Psychology module
- Trialled an evaluation through final-year project students
 - Less effective as timeline poorly aligned, dependent upon student interests

Evaluation of online adaptation

- Pandemic -> online webinars
- Supported by vle resources and weekly messages
- Opportunity to assess the potential benefits of digital provision
- Evaluation in partnership with placement year student and a short-term placement student

Evaluation

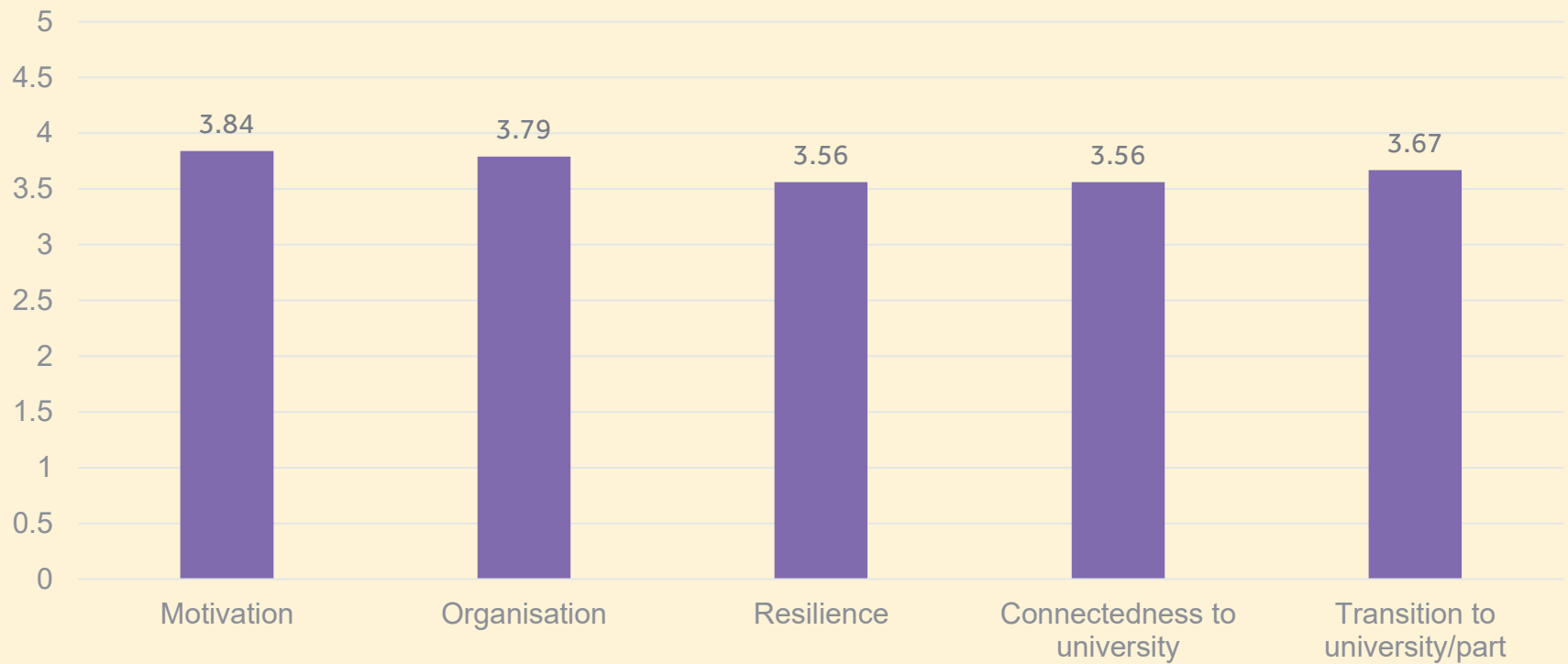
Recruitment: Dec 2020-Feb 2021

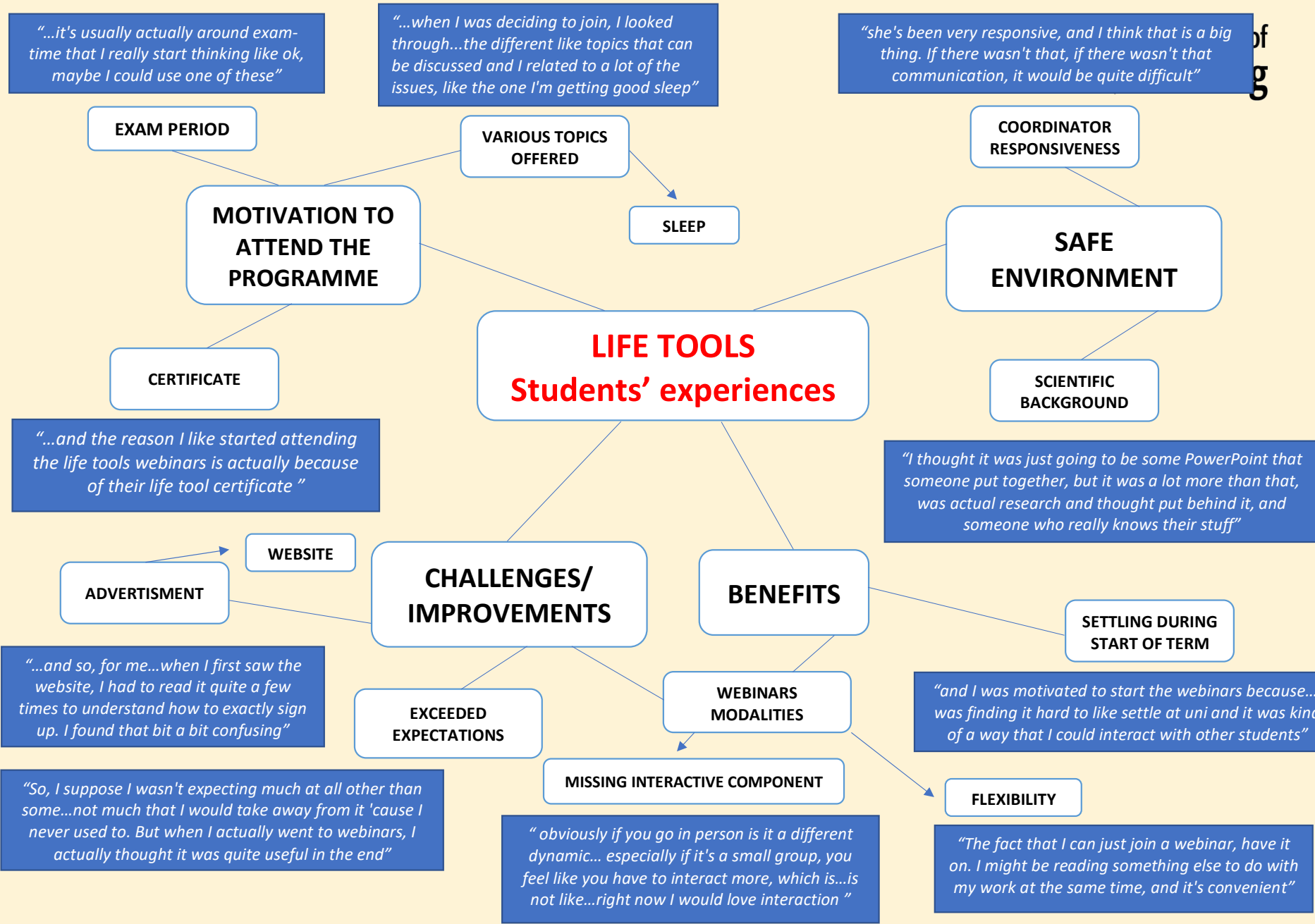
Online survey: 46 students (33 UG); perceived impact on target domains

Interviews and focus groups: 13 students (7 UG); programme experience

Perceived Life Tools impact

Programme Target Areas (rated 1 to 5)





Evaluation impact

- Informed decision to move to **primarily online delivery of talks**
- Increased **interactivity in webinars**
- Developed sustained student-staff partnership working -> **Student Success Champions**
- Featured in UoR University Mental Health Charter Award application
- Now developing an evaluation of the Life Tools Certificate as an embedded assessment option in a History module

Please contact us with any questions or collaboration ideas: a.i.james@reading.ac.uk



University of
Reading

SportsPark



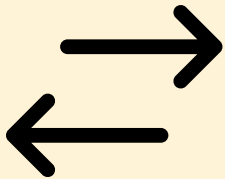
Working in partnership with SportsPark on student research

Dr Katie Barfoot
Lecturer in Psychology
katie.barfoot@reading.ac.uk

Why this partnership?



It aligned with the University's wider strategy around sport, wellbeing, and collaboration across campus



My aim was to create a mutually beneficial relationship: students gain authentic research experience, and the SportsPark benefits from data-driven insights into their activities

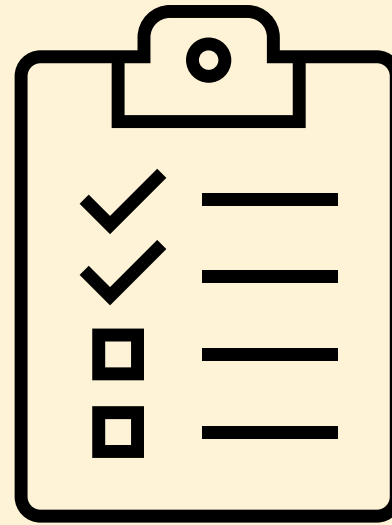


Post-COVID, I was particularly keen to find projects that built employability, gave students hands-on experience, and had impact beyond the University



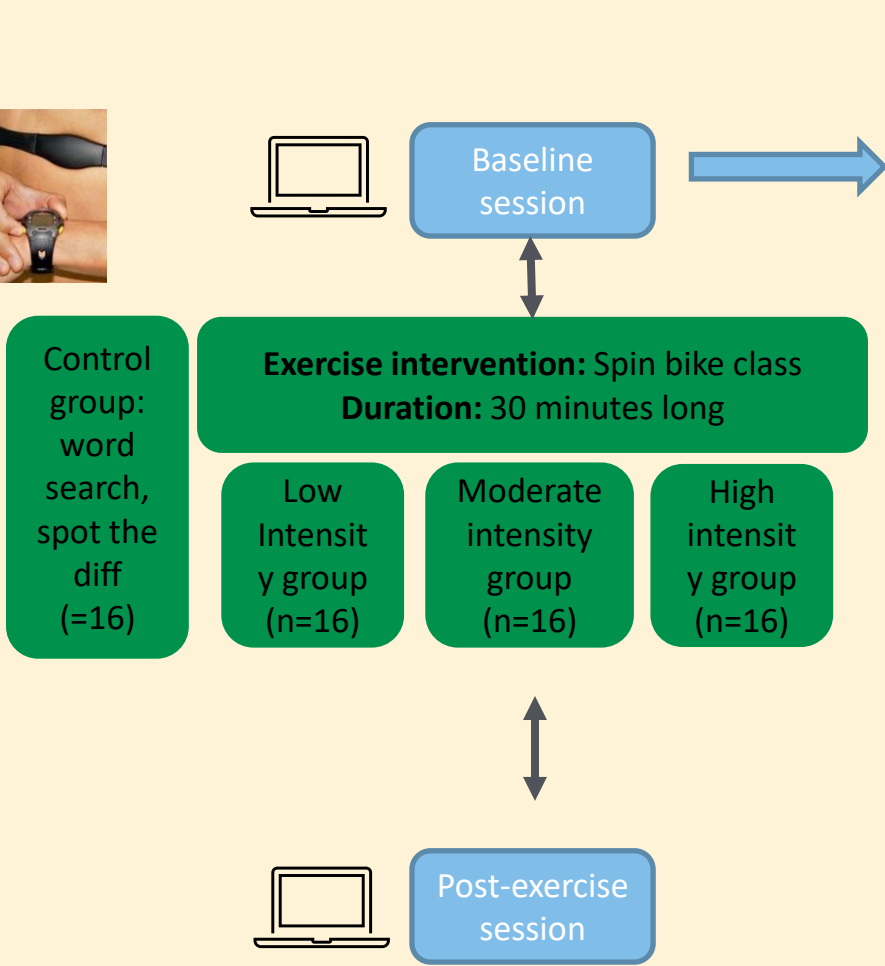
Supervise projects within my personal and research interests

So, what did we do?



Does the intensity of exercise affect immediate mood?

Heart rate monitors before, during and after



Baseline/demographic variables:
Age, gender, weight, height, current depression levels (PHQ-8), current anxiety levels (GAD-7 & STAI-T), Pittsburgh sleep scale, psychological/physical diagnoses, medication, frequency of exercise (during & after COVID), subjective fitness levels, diet etc see other slide...

Dependent variables (DVs) at Baseline & Post-exercise
Measures of:
Acute anxiety (STAI-S)
Acute depression (IMS)
Acute mood (PANAS)
Acute stress (PSS)
Body temperature
Blood pressure

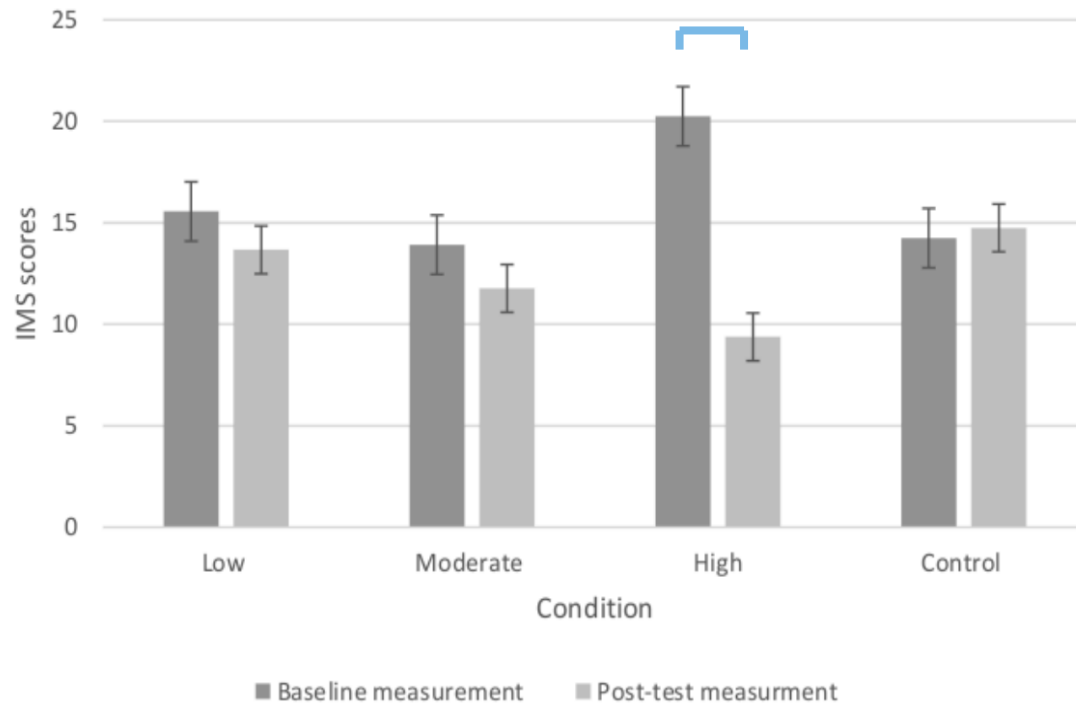
Project management logistics

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- ◆ Equipment
- ◆ Funding
- ◆ Ethics
- ◆ Timelines
- ◆ Assigning student leaders
- ◆ Training sessions
- ◆ SportsPark bookings and staff
- ◆ Staff presence on all test days



Preliminary

Average IMS scores before and after exercise for all conditions

Significant change from baseline scores in the high intensity group only ($p=0.03$)

Why this partnership worked

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- **Shared goals** - SportsPark were receptive to my ideas
- **Flexibility** - Research proposal based on scientific literature and what SportsPark were willing to offer
- **Non-disruptive** to daily running of SportsPark
- **Confidence** – that myself and my students could pull this off or could adapt quickly to a backup plan

Success!

- Student dissertations showed good understanding, they seemed to 'get' their data, they considered their results in a more applied way
- Students had experience of running a randomised control trial in a commercial setting
- SportsPark were impressed with our students' professionalism and welcomed us back for follow up sessions for MSc placement students
- Results are being prepared for submission to an academic journal
- This work was included in the University's application to the Mental Health Charter 2023



Student comments

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“I learnt many lessons outside of the academic realm”

“I feel more prepared for different situations now and also to talk to people I don't know”

“Our group really came together. I realised I was letting everyone down if I didn't pull my weight. SportsPark were doing such a lot for us”

Thank You!



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International students' perspective on help-seeking and mental health literacy

A mixed methods study at the University of Reading

Denis Persichini, PhD student

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Prof Alana James

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Help seeking & Mental health literacy (MHL)

- **Mental health concerns among students: 1 in 3** first-year students worldwide report a disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018). In the UK, 57% reported a mental health issue, but **only 27% sought help** for an official diagnosis (Student Minds, 2023).
- MHL refers to *people's knowledge of mental health, their recognition of risk factors, and their attitude towards seeking help* (Jorm et al., 2000).
- **MLH** has been found to be **positively related to help-seeking intentions or behaviour** in several countries, such as the US, Canada, China, Saudi Arabia, and Israel (e.g., Gorczynski & Sim-Shouten, 2022; Yang et al., 2024; Almanasef, 2021; Abo-Rass et al., 2024).
- International students face added challenges: Acculturation can hinder help-seeking (Alharbi & Smith, 2018), with evidence of lower treatment rates and service engagement (Han, 2025). Studies also show lower MHL and mixed patterns in help-seeking intentions (Zeng et al., 2023; Clough et al., 2019).

methodology

Mixed methods

- Survey
 - Psychological distress: K10 (Kessler et al., 2002)
 - Help-seeking intentions: GHSQ (Wilson et al., 2005, adapted)
 - Mental health literacy: MHLS (O'Connor & Casey, 2015)
 - Open-ended responses
 - Semi-structured interviews
-
- ❖ Consultation with RUSU reps and international student representatives to ensure the study addressed relevant wellbeing concerns.
 - ❖ Recruitment pathways:
 - Via key university staff (student support, wellbeing services, international office).
 - Collaboration with RUSU networks and international student societies and social media

SURVEY - QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

- Sample

N = 68 (18 international, 50 home)

Mean age = 21.5, 93% female, 75% UG, mostly Psychology students

- Group comparison

- Psychological distress

Home = 26.2 , Int = 27.1

no differences (p = .684)

- Help-seeking intentions

Home = 28.5 , Int = 33.5

Higher for internationals (p = .037)

- Mental Health Literacy

Home = 137.5 , Int = 131.7

no differences (p = .105)

➤ Home students scored significantly higher than Internationals on **self-treatment knowledge**, $t(66) = 2.78$, $p = .007$, and **attitudes that promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking**, $t(66) = 2.22$, $p = .030$

SURVEY – QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

What are the ways that your university supports students' wellbeing?

- **Overall wellbeing services** (home 75% and international 76.4%)
- Particularly *counselling* and the *welfare team*
- **Academic support** and **student support services** also frequently mentioned.

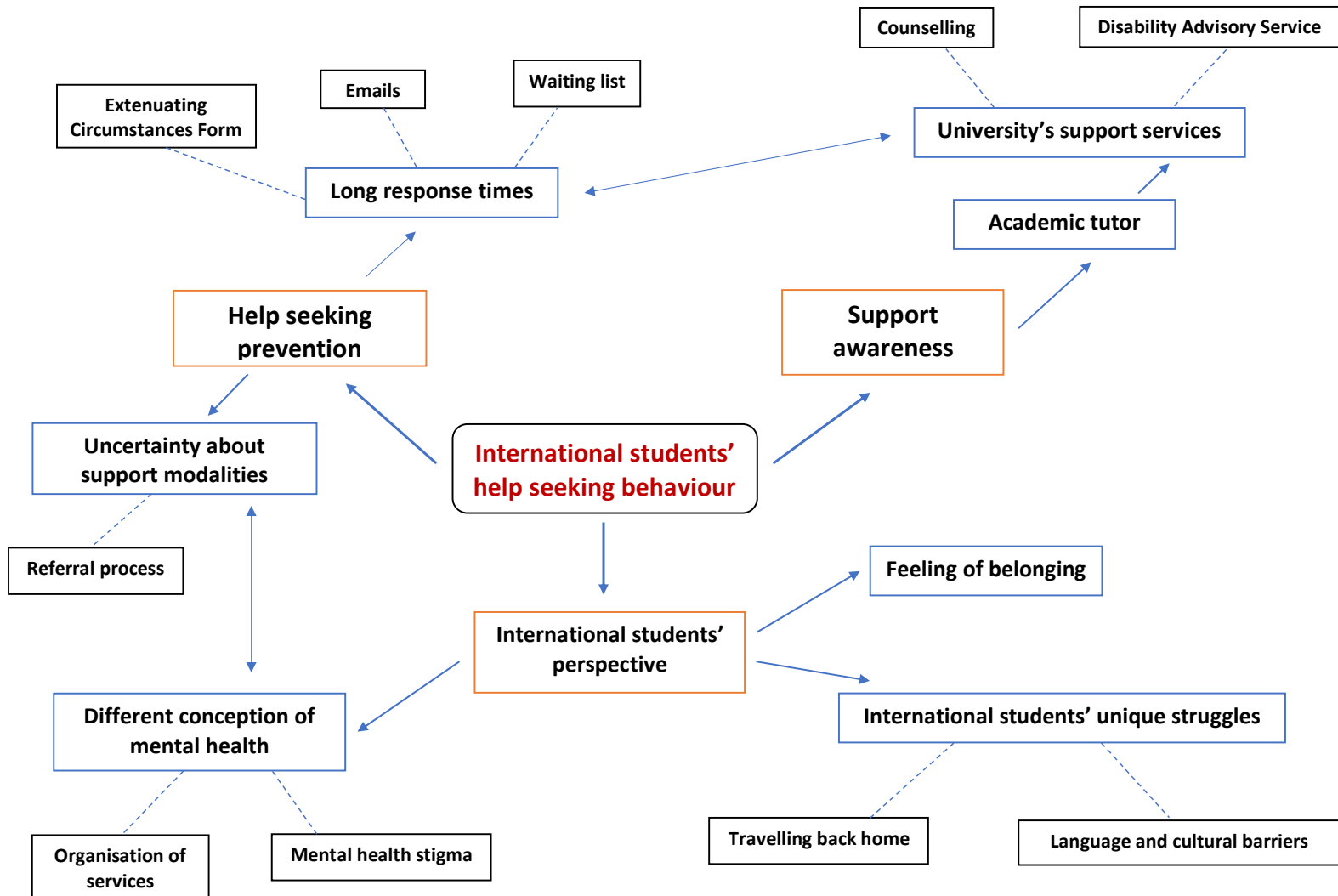
How well do you believe your university supports students' wellbeing?

- Most **general positive statements** (home 64.5% and international 76.4%)
- They felt the *university generally supported them*, that this is *free*, and that the university demonstrates *genuine care*.
- A small portion of both groups provided specific concerns (home 31.2% and international 29.4%), particularly *limited offering of support available* and *experience of stigma* and *challenges accessing support*.

How do you think the university could encourage students to seek help when needed?

- **Need for greater advertising and clearer information** (home 45.8% and international 41%)
- **Tackling stigma** (home 14.5% and international 29.4%)

INTERVIEWS – QUALITATIVE FINDINGS



Reflections on Implications for Universities

Clarify support processes

- Internationals highlighted uncertainty about referral pathways and modalities. Clearer information, provided early and consistently, could reduce confusion and encourage engagement.

Trusted academic staff

- Academic tutors are seen as valuable signposting figures.

Address cultural perspectives and stigma

- Differences in mental health conceptions point to the need for culturally responsive approaches.
- Campaigns tackling stigma and peer-led initiatives could help bridge this gap.

Foster belonging and community

- International students expressed feeling misunderstood by UK peers and emphasised homesickness and cultural barriers. Universities should strengthen initiatives that build intercultural understanding and belonging within the student body.

Thank you!

Thoughts and questions?

Denis Persichini, PhD student
Prof Alana James

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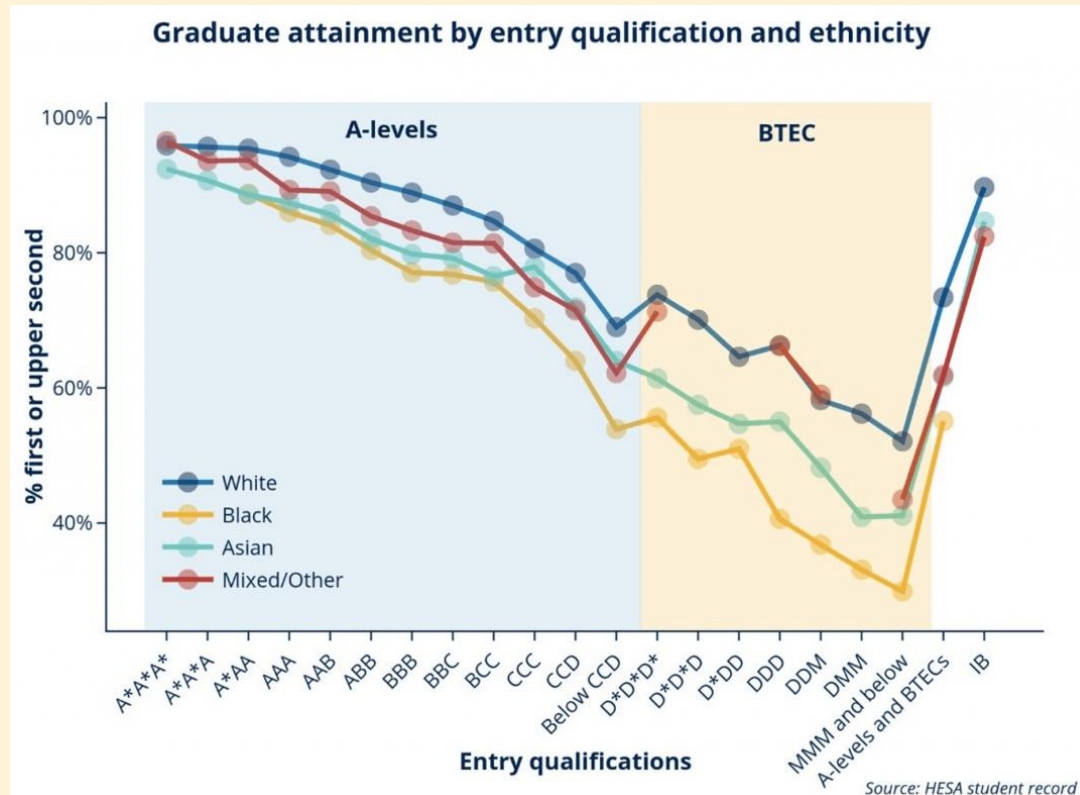
RESEARCHING AWARDDING GAPS



Dr. Rachel Pye
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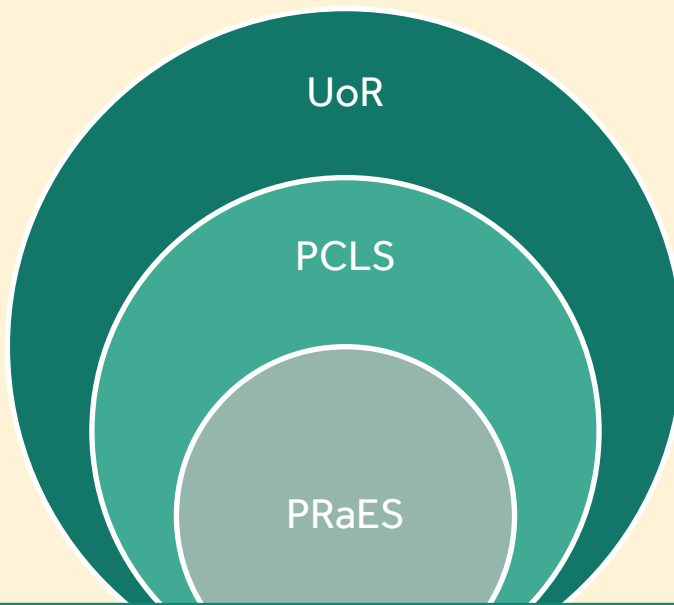


Awarding Gaps



How do we address these disparities?

Working in partnership



Awarding Gap toolkit
Awarding Gap Steering Group
Academic Development (CQSD)
Inclusion Consultants (students)

STEAP

BoSSEs

Self-selecting team

Diversity & Inc. Support Officer

by training

DE

IMPLEMENTATION			
Activity(i ^{es}) proposed <i>Identify the activity(i^{es}) you will undertake to address the priority and the objectives of those activities. Group activities, objectives and target dates under year headings according to when the activity was first proposed, and use track changes when there are amendments to the previous year's text, or new additions. Clearly mark activities as complete or discontinued, as applicable.</i>	Activity	Objective	Target date / date completed / discontinued
	2023/4 1. Collaborative design of an awarding gap plan based on a thorough exploration of data, reference to evidence and exploring best practice	1. To take an evidence-based approach to addressing this issue within PCLS	1. Completed successfully (plan appended for information)
	2024/5 – Awarding Gap 1. Implement activities listed as 'Essential' in the plan by the end of AY24/5 2. Plan to implement activities listed as 'Recommended', aiming for end of AY24/5 3. Use an evidence-based approach to further explore the 'Explore' activities, with support from the AGSG team	All in order to start reducing awarding gaps in PCLS	All by end of AY24/5, to be reviewed in STEAP BoSSE

Creating a plan

AGAP updates: Explore

Action	Update	Who	Next steps
Create modules / progs with EDI focus	New UG Psych Pt3 module	DDTL	PGT Psych yet to

AGAP updates: Recommended

Action	Update	Who	Next steps
Academic Misconduct rates	Data shows BAME & IMD students over-	SDTL / DDTLs	Explore why with student partners

AGAP updates: Essential

Action	Update	Who	Next steps
Focus Groups with students to identify barriers	FGs completed, currently being analysed	SDTL / DISO	Use info to identify AGAP gaps
Celebrate BHM & DHM	Organised too late for 24/5	DISO	Try again for 25/6!
Allow space for students to interact	Staff asked to do so at start of AY24/5	DDTLs	To review / continue
Add signpost slides to end of each lecture	Done in UG Psych, PGT Psych, SLT	PDs	Staff don't like – students do!
Ensure consistent M&M + fdbk	Updated assmnt criteria; session today	DDTLs	Continue to monitor through SSPGs

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- Formally monitored through WIDE & STC
- Reports to UoR via STEAP
- Informal monitoring & support through AGSG
- Owned by SDTL & DISO
- Shared with all staff via Teams
- Reported annually via T&L Away Day

Researching AGs

- PRaES member UG projects
 - Disability gaps: Alana, Zola
 - Ethnicity gaps: Emma
- Other staff / student projects
 - ND and imposter syndrome
- Student partners & placements
 - Placement experiences
 - Academic misconduct
- BPS Seminar series
 - Next Steps event to build student community / SoB
 - Buddy scheme pilot

Thanks to



Mat Haine
Student Outcomes Manager



Michael Kilminster
Academic Developer

ANY QUESTIONS?

Schedule

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1.15-2.30	Workshop: Developing and implementing collaborations between academics and support services, and between institutions, to promote effective student support
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2.45-3.15	Workshop Wrap-up and Final Thoughts
3.15	Close (seminar organisers meeting 3.15-4.00)

Talks 2: Practice in Partnership

Karen Cross	How universities support autistic students: an Fof investigation
Dr Zola Dean	How compassionate pedagogy can inform partnership working as a Department Director of Academic Tutoring and Academic Disability Rep
Dr Michelle Lee	Developing effective support for hearing impaired students on a clinical training programme
Gareth Hughes and Nick Bell	Partnership working between the Disability Advisory Service and Academic Schools on the Implementing Reasonable Adjustments Project
	Panel Q&A/Discussion

Invisible Needs and Uneven Recognition: A National FOI Study of Autism Support Across Diagnostic Stages in UK Universities



**University of
Reading**

**BPS Seminar - Using evidence to
inform Support Services in Higher
Education**

Practice in Partnership

Karen Cross, BSc (Hons), MSc, GMBPsS



Autistic Students Experiences Greater Challenges than Neurotypical Peers



Social & Sensory
Demands ¹



Uneven
Support ²



Lower Grades
and Completion
Rates ³

¹ Knott & Taylor, 2014; Cage et al., 2020

² Fabri et al., 2020

³ Lucas & James, 2018

- The number of diagnosed autistic students in UK universities has **nearly tripled since 2014** (HESA, 2023)
- Yet many students **remain undiagnosed, seeking diagnosis, or self-identifying without clinical assessment**

Up to 72%
Of autistic adults may remain undiagnosed.

O'nions et al. (2023)

Legal entitlements not always upheld! ¹

Abrahart v. University of Bristol (2024)



This study explores...how UK universities recognise and support students across autism diagnostic stages

“How do UK universities identify and support autistic students across diagnostic stages?”

- Explore institutional responses to autistic students in UK universities
- Focus on three groups:
 - 1) Formally diagnosed**
 - 2) Seeking diagnosis**
 - 3) Self-identifying without formal diagnosis**
- Investigate policies, eligibility decisions, and adjustment pathways
- Understand variation in practice across institutions

“Support and recognition must extend beyond the formally diagnosed.”

Sample

- 142 publicly funded UK universities
- 88% response rate

FOI Tool

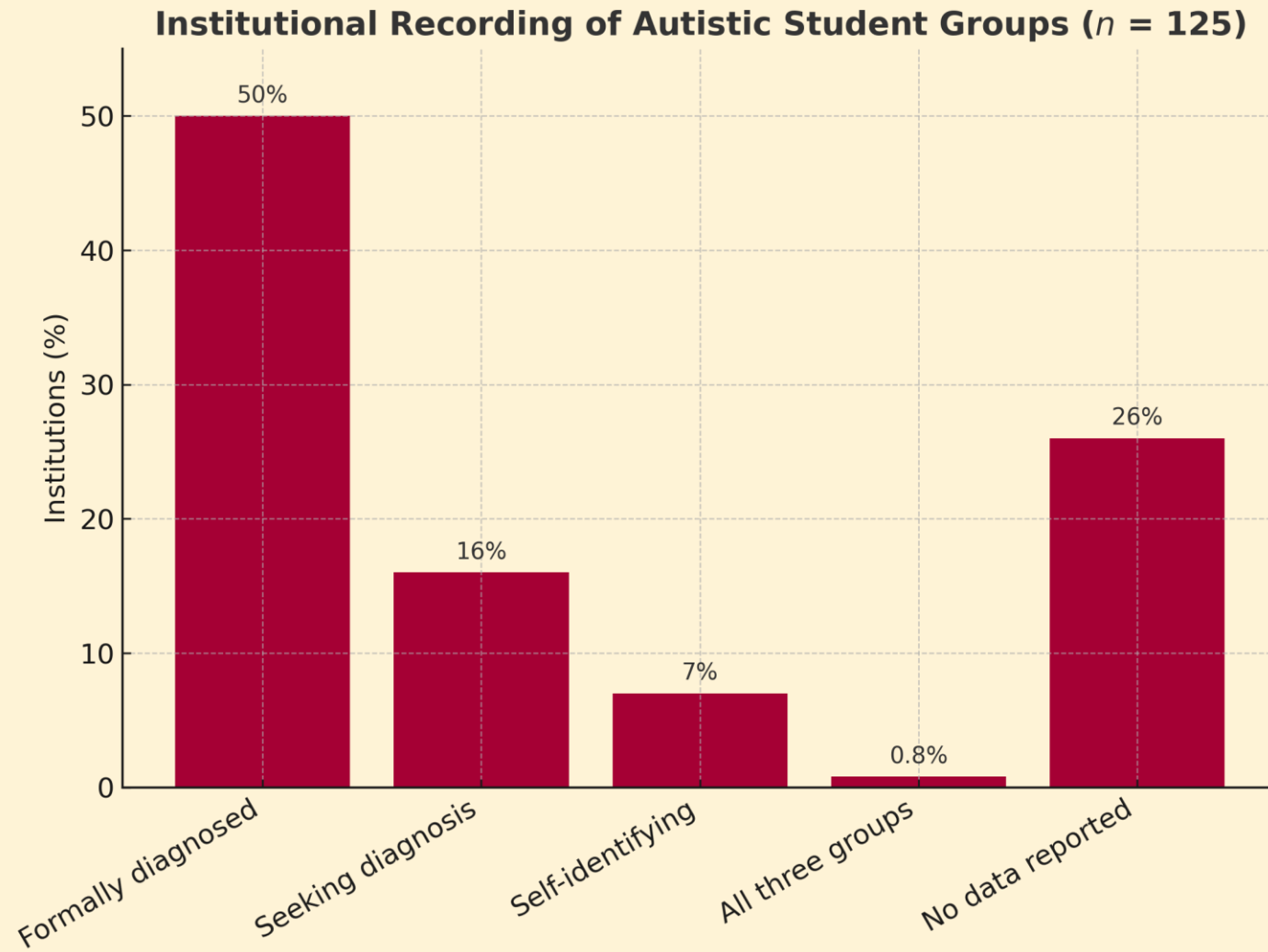
- 77-item questionnaire
- Designed in collaboration with Reading University Disability Advisory Service & Information Management Policy Services
- Developed via Jisc platform
- Combination of multiple choice and free text

Design & Analysis

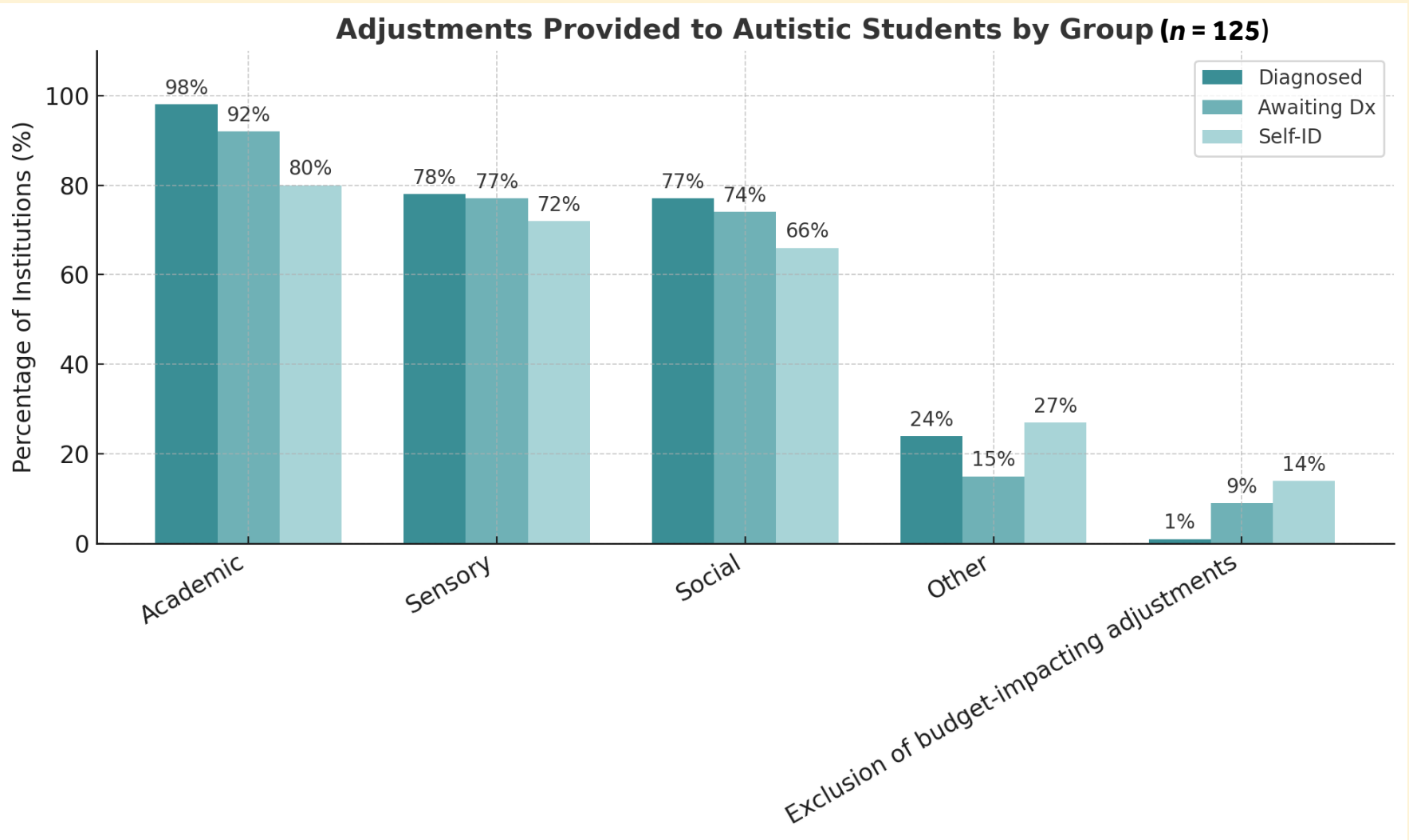
- Quantitative descriptive statistics
- Qualitative reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

“Where surveys often reflect individual experiences, FOI enabled direct access to institutional processes, offering a broader, more representative picture.”

Key Quantitative Findings



Key Quantitative Findings

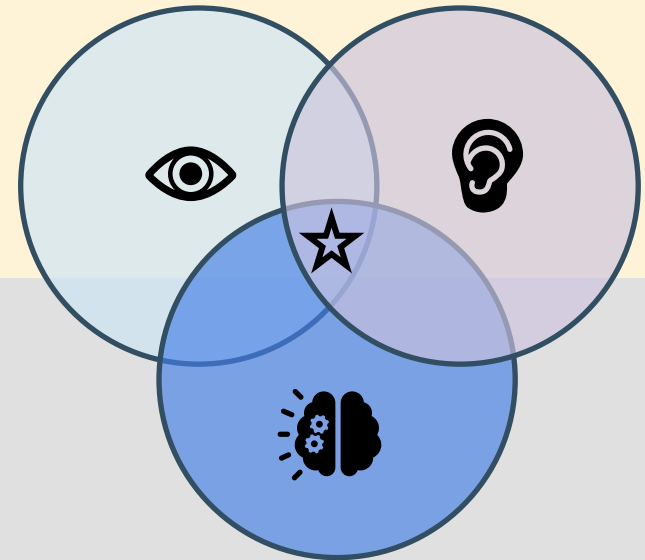


Conclusion

- **Invisible needs ≠ non-existent needs** - large hidden cohort with unmet requirements.
- **FOI revealed system-wide gaps** - in recognition, policy, and adjustments.
- **Students need** - equitable support regardless of diagnostic stage.

Support should be available to all autistic students, whether they are diagnosed, seeking diagnosis, or self-identify. Diagnosis should be used to tailor help, not decide who gets it.

Compassionate Pedagogy & Working in Partnership



Dr Zola Dean (she / her)

Lecturer in Psychology | Disability Representative | Departmental Director of
Academic Tutoring

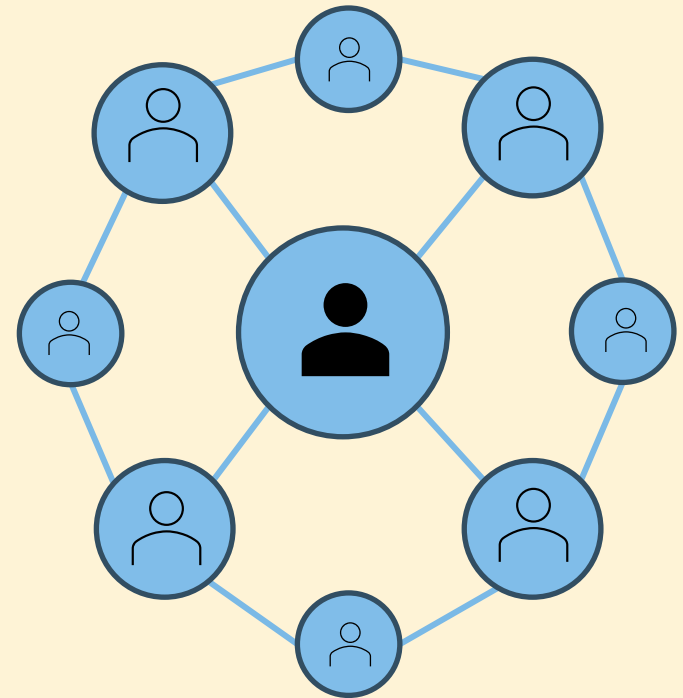
z.p.dean@reading.ac.uk

Compassionate Pedagogy

(Killingback et al., 2025)

An educational approach that

- Recognises suffering, distress, or disadvantage
- Is committed to actively alleviating suffering, distress, or disadvantage
- Promotes wellbeing and growth
- Holistic and person-centred



“

I'm reaching out again as I have contacted both the disability and wellbeing service and I got a response from disability saying it will be minimum 3-4 weeks until I get a response...

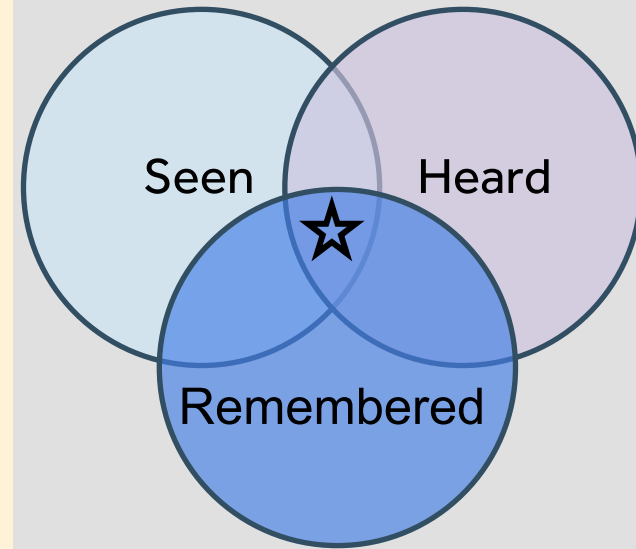
I am really struggling with the workload due to my mental health. I feel so overwhelmed and stressed and on the verge of tears constantly...

I'm just fed up of going round and round in circles and it all being 'reach out if you need support' yet I'm being ignored or misunderstood everywhere I go and just leads in disappointment

”

Student Partnership: Study Support Meeting

- Give time to actively listen
 - Avoid assumptions
 - Understand barriers (immediate & bigger picture)
 - Not assigning blame to shortcomings
- Collaboratively problem solving to achieve a shared goal
 - Agreeing an action plan
- Aftercare



Working in Partnership to Relieve the Container



Student Partnership: Compassionate Communication

Clear & Confident

- Direct
- Structured
- Simple
- Reassuring

Solution-Focused

- Supported
- Empowered
- Personalised
forward-focused

Empathetic

- Valued
- Acknowledged
- Respected
(them & situation)

Inclusive

- Free from
judgement

Engaged

- Genuine
- Meaningful
- Two-way
- Action

Timely

- Defined timelines
to manage
expectations &
avoid delays

Why?

Compassionate Pedagogy

- Nothing revolutionary
- Approachability → early intervention
- Trust → learn → improve
- Reciprocated compassion
- Diffuses situations & complaints
→ better NSS

Working in partnership

- More effective (Hughes & Spanner, 2019)
- Consistency
- Compassion!

“

Thank you for your
support and
listening to me
when others only
ever heard me

”

Using evidence to inform support services in Higher Education

Developing effective support for Deaf student on a clinical training programme

Michelle Lee



Thanks to: Nakita Oldacre, Eleanor Vials, Molly Trillow, Emma-Jayne Conway, Levi Spence, James Kachellek, Lucy Malyon & Tara Nadi

1. Challenges

Financial implications

- Time required to get DSA in place
- Overall cost of ensuring adequate support is higher than this allowance (university often having to meet this shortfall)

Providing support in a timely manner

- Reliance on interpreter availability if student needs to arrange a support meeting at short notice (academic and other University-based support)
- Difficulties of navigating documentation in English

Accessibility of online learning for BSL users

- Need for additional platforms concurrently during teaching

2. What was helpful

Positive attitude of educators, admin team and students

- Collaborative working with students, facilitators & service,
- Collection of feedback after each teaching session and acting on this in a timely manner

Practical considerations

- Accessible video/audio resources, online teaching, turn taking, roleplaying with Deaf role play facilitators
- Blanket extensions for written assignments in English

Ensuring equity in clinical assessments

- Additional time where necessary, review of marking rubrics to consider communication style in BSL

3. Areas for improvement

Ensuring there's sufficient time to put support in place

- Earlier recruitment for Deaf trainees

Practical considerations

- Accommodating all facilitators and support animals.
- Being mindful of cognitive load of all-day teaching and anticipating/communicating when additional support might be needed

Closer consideration of facilitators

- Core group of interpreters is ideal to ensure good working relationship with students and helps ensure consistency when translating a 'jargon-heavy' course into BSL.
- Consideration of the emotional impact on translators

The training matched my needs. They understood that I...that I have different needs. They made sure that there were deaf role models because of course I would never work with a hearing person at work.so I do feel very grateful. I felt they did wonderfully. There were very few criticisms about this course. I felt it was....it was just brilliantly worked through and worked out for someone like me to... to access. So yeah, it's been a great, a great experience.

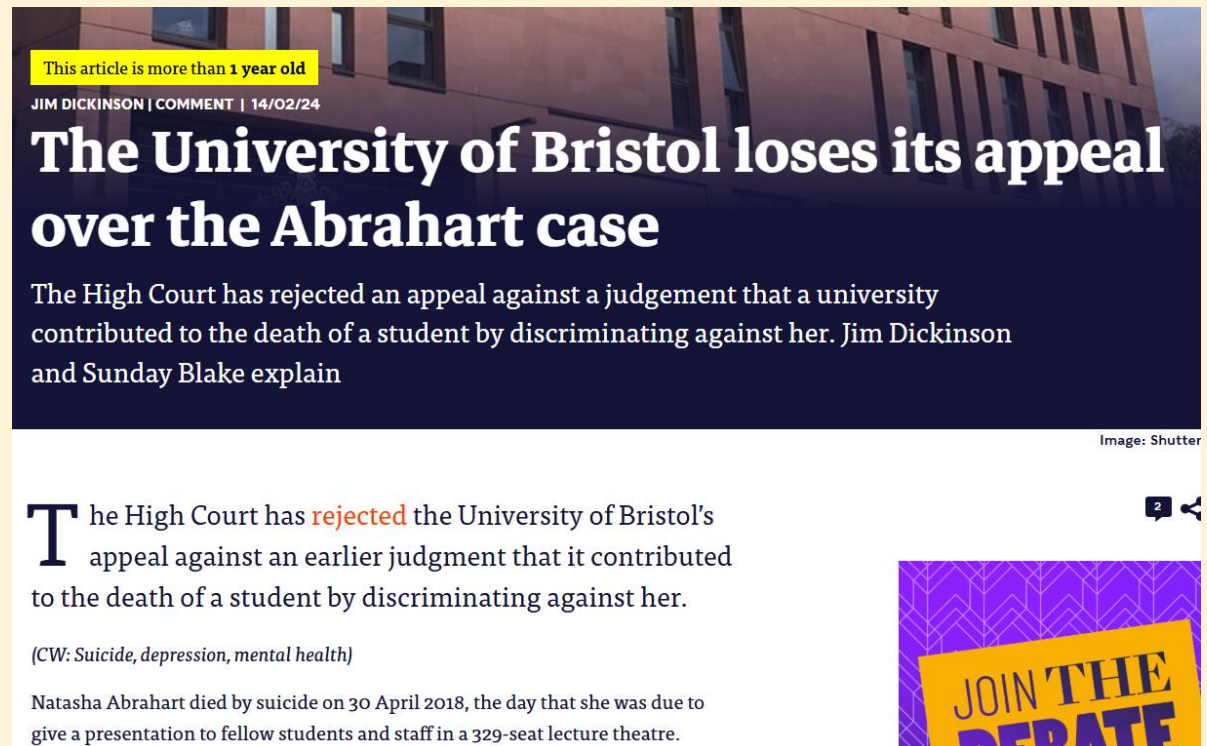
Implementing Reasonable Adjustments Project

Disability Advisory Service (DAS)
University of Reading
September 2025



February 2024 - High Court Ruling

- Student Natasha Abrahart died by suicide
- University of Bristol found to have not met their duty of care
- Precedent set: if any university staff member knows of a student's disability under Equality Act 2010, the university *as a whole* is considered to be aware and must act accordingly
- Universities must be proactive and widen access to reasonable adjustments
- How do we, as a HE provider, implement this?



This article is more than 1 year old

JIM DICKINSON | COMMENT | 14/02/24

The University of Bristol loses its appeal over the Abrahart case

The High Court has rejected an appeal against a judgement that a university contributed to the death of a student by discriminating against her. Jim Dickinson and Sunday Blake explain

Image: Shutterstock

The High Court has **rejected** the University of Bristol's appeal against an earlier judgment that it contributed to the death of a student by discriminating against her.

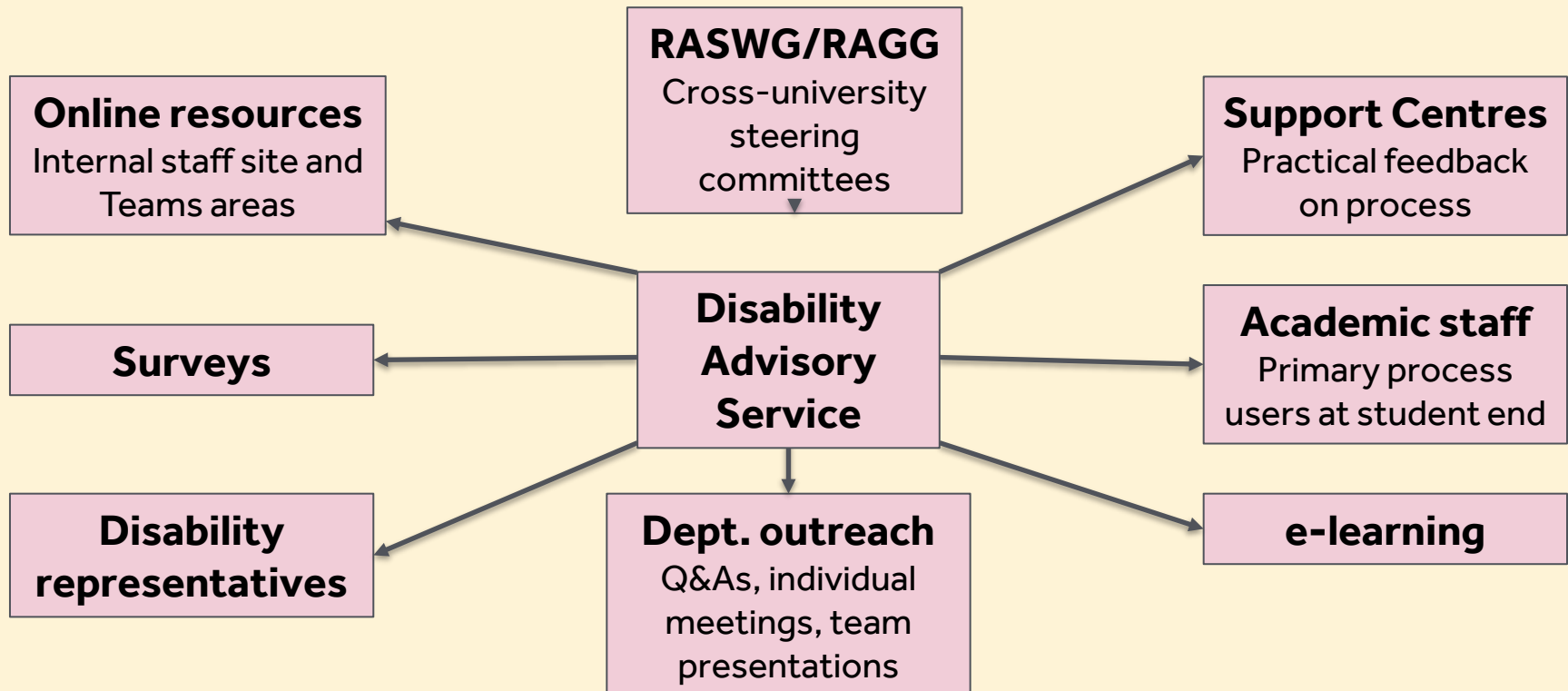
(CW: Suicide, depression, mental health)

Natasha Abrahart died by suicide on 30 April 2018, the day that she was due to give a presentation to fellow students and staff in a 329-seat lecture theatre.

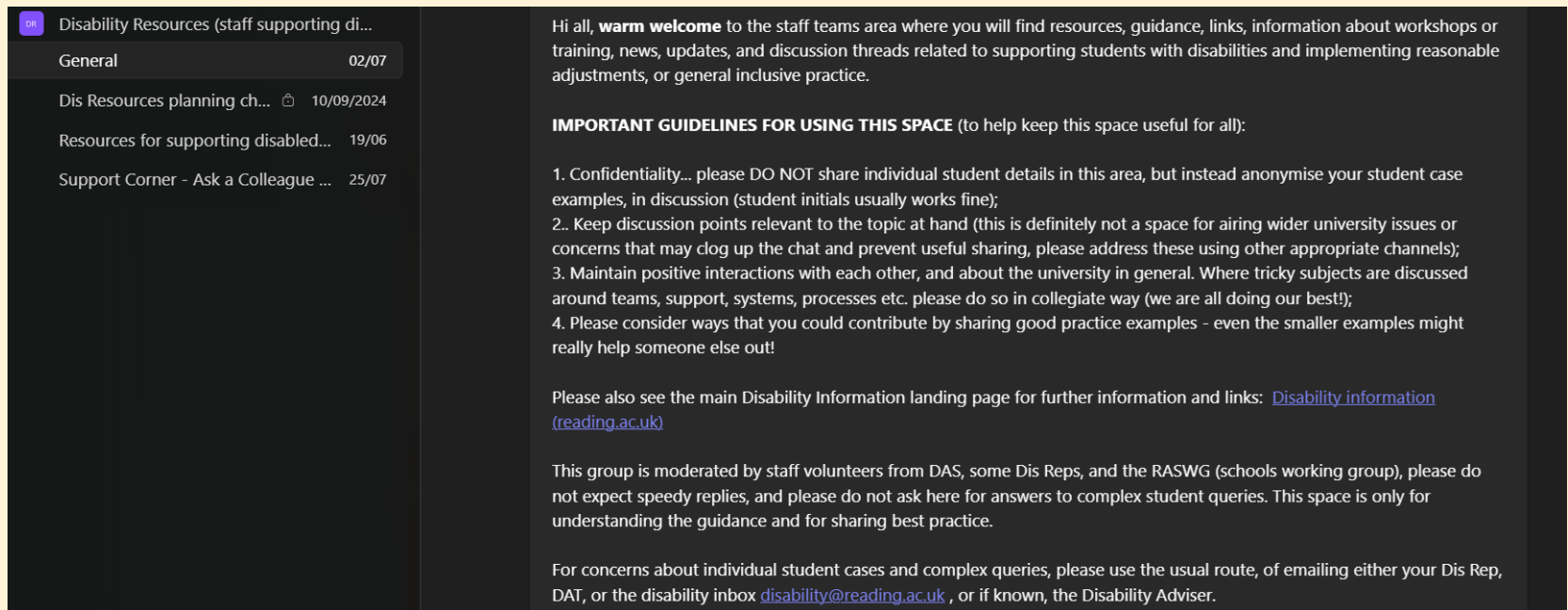
JOIN THE DEBATE

<https://wonkhe.com/blogs/the-university-of-bristol-loses-its-appeal-over-the-abrahart-case/>

Implementing Reasonable Adjustments Project at University of Reading



Disability resources Teams area



Disability Resources (staff supporting di...)

General 02/07

Dis Resources planning ch... 10/09/2024

Resources for supporting disabled... 19/06

Support Corner - Ask a Colleague ... 25/07

Hi all, **warm welcome** to the staff teams area where you will find resources, guidance, links, information about workshops or training, news, updates, and discussion threads related to supporting students with disabilities and implementing reasonable adjustments, or general inclusive practice.

IMPORTANT GUIDELINES FOR USING THIS SPACE (to help keep this space useful for all):




1. Confidentiality... please DO NOT share individual student details in this area, but instead anonymise your student case examples, in discussion (student initials usually works fine);
- 2.. Keep discussion points relevant to the topic at hand (this is definitely not a space for airing wider university issues or concerns that may clog up the chat and prevent useful sharing, please address these using other appropriate channels);
3. Maintain positive interactions with each other, and about the university in general. Where tricky subjects are discussed around teams, support, systems, processes etc. please do so in collegiate way (we are all doing our best!);
4. Please consider ways that you could contribute by sharing good practice examples - even the smaller examples might really help someone else out!

Please also see the main Disability Information landing page for further information and links: [Disability information \(reading.ac.uk\)](#)

This group is moderated by staff volunteers from DAS, some Dis Reps, and the RASWG (schools working group), please do not expect speedy replies, and please do not ask here for answers to complex student queries. This space is only for understanding the guidance and for sharing best practice.

For concerns about individual student cases and complex queries, please use the usual route, of emailing either your Dis Rep, DAT, or the disability inbox disability@reading.ac.uk , or if known, the Disability Adviser.

Disability resources Teams area - resources

 Gareth Hughes 12/06 15:23  

Implementing Reasonable Adjustments FAQs






Dear all,

I am pleased to announce we have now published a Frequently Asked Questions document for Implementing Reasonable Adjustments. You can find it here: [Implementing Reasonable Adjustments FAQs \(June 2025\)](#)

June 2025


Frequently Asked Questions about the Implementing Reasonable Adjustments guidance

Resources for supporting disabled students (UoR)

 Name ▾
 Good Practice Examples
 GUIDANCE on Implementing Reasonable Adjustments
 Guides for specific disabilities
 other internal resources and information

Disability resources Teams area - resources

In-depth condition leaflets

 University of Reading

Disability Advisory Service

What is Fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia, meaning pain in the body's fibrous tissues, is a chronic condition that is characterised by widespread musculoskeletal pain and fatigue. Affected areas often include the upper and lower back, shoulders, neck and areas around the joints. Both pain and fatigue can be profound, interfering with all daily activities.


The severity of symptoms varies from person to person and from day to day. Many people experience periodic flare-ups when their symptoms become suddenly worse, leaving them totally drained of energy. Aggravating factors include changes in the weather, cold environments, stress, anxiety and over-exertion. Fibromyalgia can lead to depression and social isolation.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

The predominant symptoms are usually unremitting pain, and overwhelming and persistent fatigue following mental or physical activity. People with Fibromyalgia say that the pain often feels as if it affects the whole body; that they ache all over which affects their ability to learn. Other symptoms and associated syndromes include:

- Headaches
- Irritability or feeling miserable
- Bladder and bowel problems

Grab sheets for quick use

 University of Reading

Disability Advisory Service

Masking – Grab sheet


The word 'masking' in a disability context refers to changing one's own behaviour, whether consciously or unconsciously, in order to avoid drawing attention to one or more disabilities or hide it altogether.

Masking is typically most commonly associated with Autism and ADHD especially, but masking behaviours are not just common amongst those with other neurodivergences (e.g. Tourette's or Specific Learning Difficulties like dyslexia) but [any disability](#).

Masking can be known by other names such as camouflaging or passing. Masking behaviours can include:

- Suppressing stimming behaviours (e.g. use of fidget toys, restless legs, etc.) or changing to less noticeable stimming behaviours
- Suppressing physical or verbal tics, or staying quiet (not contributing/missing out)
- Hyper-vigilance for social expectations and adjusting behaviours to fit them, reflecting or mirroring behaviour (e.g. forcing eye contact, feigning interest)
- 'Scripting' (i.e. planning what to say or do in advance)
- Presenting differently to fit in (e.g. imitating dress sense or makeup styles of others)
- Hiding emotional responses (e.g. pretending to be relaxed about upcoming deadlines, or last-minute changes of plan)
- Self-deprecation about symptoms (e.g. responding to an error caused by executive dysfunction by saying 'oh, I forgot about that, I'm such an idiot')
- Downplaying the impact of symptoms (e.g. avoiding expressing pain or discomfort)

Disability resources Teams area - collaboration

 Gareth Hughes 15/10/2024 12:05

A.

Coloured paper

Hello all!

We had a query recently regarding students needing handouts to be printed on specifically coloured paper, e.g. light blue, yellow or pink.

It may be worth staff noting that if DAS have put an adjustment in a student ILP requesting handouts on specific coloured paper, this means that we have most likely already explored with the student other options, such as using a coloured overlay instead, which may have been established as not suitable for their needs (overlay can sometimes cause glare and affect sensory issues).

Our general advice, even if the handouts for a module or programme are all-online rather than printed, if a student requires these printed on coloured paper, is that it should be reasonable and practicable for the University to provide this for them. We would suggest being prepared, to prevent adjustments like these being prohibitive in time resources or cost, certain options can be explored, for example, printing one copy of each handout in the specific colour, or keeping a ream of the relevant coloured paper in the departmental office. And as we always advise, speaking to the student about their adjustment needs.

Hope this helps
Thanks,


Hi all,

I have had a few conversations with students with DAS existing records about how I can best support them on my modules, and for those struggling to manage deadlines and stay organised/focused, etc., I suggested I could check in with them every week or so via email to see how they're progressing with the coursework they will submit in January. In one case I also suggested the student could send me a schedule in advance of how far they want to have got with their project after each week, and then email me what they've done each week to help them stick to it (I would then acknowledge the submission and perhaps give a generic comment, but not offer additional feedback on the draft, per se).

My question is: do these count as reasonable adjustments that I should be reporting to DAS via the SOI form? Or just general support?

Thanks!
see less

B.

 Gareth Hughes 06/11/2024 10:05

Hi [redacted]



Excellent question! I can definitely see the arguments in either direction - I'm not sure we would be able to justify requesting something this specific, as it is more similar to things like specialist mentoring/study skills that external funded support would provide for students. But equally, if it's something that a department has the capacity to do, it essentially qualifies as 'reasonable.' [redacted] any thoughts?


- A. Staff query with DAS behind the scenes
- B. Staff query with DAS openly
- C. Staff query with each other and share practice

C.


Preparing exam MCQs

Hi all, in PCLS we were wondering whether other Schools or DAS have some guidance on writing MCQ questions, with SpLDs in mind in particular but also in general? Thanks a lot!


 

 [redacted] 24/07 11:03

Hello [redacted] The Academic English Assessment team within ISLI has expertise in designing test items including MCQs. You could contact my colleagues [redacted] (Director of Academic English Assessment) [\[redacted\]@reading.ac.uk](mailto:[redacted]@reading.ac.uk) and Dr [redacted] (Deputy Director) for further dialogue [\[redacted\]@reading.ac.uk](mailto:[redacted]@reading.ac.uk)

 [redacted] 24/07 12:17

[redacted] and I used to run an in person CQSD workshop on this. I haven't looked into the research recently but at the time there was quite a lot on what to avoid to support those with SpLDs. I would be happy to help with what I know.

 [redacted] 24/07 13:31 Edited

hi [redacted], I have sent an email to you about the Blackboard AI Design Assistant (released recently on UoR Blackboard) which can generate MCQs in the format of Blackboard Tests and question banks. <https://sites.reading.ac.uk/TEL-Support-Staff/blackboard-ai-design-assistant-ai-tests-and-question-banks/>

Schedule

10.00-10.15	Introduction
10.15-11.00	Talks 1: Research in Partnership
11.00-11.30	Break/Networking – served in room 1L06
11.30-12.15	Talks 2: Practice in Partnership
12.15-1.15	Lunch – served in room 1L06
1.15-2.30	Workshop: Developing and implementing collaborations between academics and support services, and between institutions, to promote effective student support
2.30-2.45	Break/Networking - served in room 1L06
2.45-3.15	Workshop Wrap-up and Final Thoughts
3.15	Close (seminar organisers meeting 3.15-4.00)

Workshop Wrap-up

Using Evidence to Inform Support Services in Higher Education

Thank you for joining us!

Stay in touch:

a.i.james@reading.ac.uk; rachel.pye@reading.ac.uk;
p.jenkins@reading.ac.uk



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