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Abstract
Background

Epidemiological trends demonstrating disproportionate, proliferating, and unequal student and staff mental health outcomes at UK universities have coincided with a marked neoliberalisation of higher education. With few exceptions however, these trends have been conceptualised in isolation, with epistemological predisposition towards isolated individual-level explanations and interventions for distress across student mental health research that are in inherent tension with the implementation of a whole university approach to wellbeing in policy and practice. To address these conceptual, methodological, and practice-based gaps across the field, this thesis seeks to address the primary research question: 'how do students experience wellbeing and living and learning in a neoliberal higher educational context and what are the implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach?'

Design and Methods

Grounded in pragmatist ontology, a multi-phase research design is applied containing five symbiotic studies. Study one synthesises biopsychosocial systems-based theories of wellbeing; cross-disciplinary neoliberal critique; and Foucaultian philosophy on subjectivity to conceptualise a multi-dimensional relationship between the neoliberal higher education system and student wellbeing. Study two conducts an integrative and interpretative narrative

literature review to identify the social, academic, and financial determinants of student wellbeing within the context of the neoliberal higher education system. Study three utilises a cross-sectional survey with a national sample of 815 undergraduate and postgraduate students to identify the prevalence, variance, and associations of salient social, academic, and financial determinants of wellbeing with identifiable socio-material and socio-psychological neoliberal conditions. Study four performs ten student focus groups to explore student experiential narratives of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal system, whilst eliciting recommendations for policy and practice. Study five uses expert interviews with nine relevant stakeholders to explore the influence of neoliberal socio-material and socio-psychological conditions on service delivery and elucidate recommendations for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach.

Findings

Taken together, the findings present preliminary evidence that identifiable neoliberal higher education principles and policies mediate student exposure, both socio-materially and socio-psychologically, to academic, social, and financial determinants which demonstrably, detrimentally, and differentially impact on subjective wellbeing. It is argued therefore that pragmatic conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach must be contextualised within the neoliberal higher education system. Implications for policy, practice, and research are presented.

Being WELL in the Neoliberal University:

Conceptualising a Whole University Approach to Student **W**ellbeing and **E**xperiences of **L**iving and **L**earning at UK Universities in a Neoliberal Higher Education Context

Michael Priestley

A dissertation submitted to Durham University in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the Faculty of Social Science

Durham University School of Education

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Foreword

The positionality and various subjectivities that I have traversed as student, academic staff, mental health service user, mental health researcher, third sector mental health volunteer, mental health policy advisor, assessor for the University Mental Health Charter, Student Involvement Coordinator for the Charlie Waller Trust, and Samaritans listener have all been fundamental to the formulation of this thesis. Situated within these roles, the thesis rationale emerged from a discernible disconnect between the dominant forms of mental health knowledge, and my lived experience both of the university setting, and of the practical needs of multiple stakeholders. Specifically, the predominant epistemological frameworks of mental health that I encountered tended towards individual-level explanations and interventions for student distress in relative isolation of the wider social, structural, and systemic challenges that frame and constrain student experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university. I experienced this discrepancy as both ethically and efficaciously problematic, both in its inability to 'do justice' to the lived experience of students and staff, and in the subsequent re-direction of resources to individual-level interventions and services dissociated from student and stakeholder needs for wider systemic change.

This experience coincided with growing public, political, and professional attention to student mental health, characterised by widespread sectoral transition to a holistic and inclusive 'whole university approach' culminating in

the publication of the University Mental Health Charter in 2019; a voluntary accreditation to inform and incentivise UK universities to adopt a whole university approach in practice. Having contributed to the development, recommended enactment, and evaluation of the Charter principles (see Priestley et al., 2022; Priestley & Cowley, 2022; Priestley et al., 2021; Jones et al., 2021; Brewster et al., 2021; Hughes, Priestley, & Spanner, in press; Wilbraham et al., in press), I experienced a similar tension between existing operationalisation of a whole university approach across policy and practice, and the structural and cultural context of the neoliberal macro-system. Mobilising and synthesising multiple experiences, perspectives, and expertise across different stakeholders and disciplines, this thesis seeks pragmatist innovation to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach as situated within the context of the neoliberal higher education system.

Chapter One: The Case for Investigation

Introduction and Chapter Overview

Internationally and in the UK, student mental health is a growing **public** (e.g. BBC News, 2022; 2021; The Times, 2021; The Guardian, 2019; The Independent, 2018), **political** (e.g. Burghart, 2021; Williamson, 2021; Donelan, 2020; Skidmore, 2019; Gyimah, 2018), and **professional** concern (e.g. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021; Advance HE, 2020; Universities UK, 2018; Higher Education Policy Institute, 2019). The conceptualisation and causation of student mental health challenges remain widely contested however, compromising effective interventions and policy responses (Sampson et al., 2022; Barkham et al., 2019; Byrom, 2018).

'Neoliberalism has become the dominant political-economic ideology across the globe in recent decades but, to date, little or no research has examined its impact on health and wellbeing' (Becker & Hartwich, 2021, p.2). Indeed notwithstanding documented increase in prevalence, severity, and inequality of detrimental student and staff mental health outcomes in parallel to the neoliberalisation of UK higher education policy, existing research has tended towards individual-level explanations and interventions (see Ayres, 2022; Jackman, 2022; Berg, Harting & Stronks, 2021; Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Slavin et al., 2014) where 'the neoliberalisation of higher education is invariably overlooked in the literature as a primary cause of stress' (Thornton, 2016, p.42). This chapter seeks to explicate the rationale for conducting a pragmatist exploration of student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the

context of the neoliberal higher education system, and the inherent implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach.

A Whole University Approach To Student Mental Health

Against the backdrop of increasing reports of psychological distress[1] (e.g. Ward et al., 2022; Linden, Boyes & Stuart, 2021; Horgan, 2018; McIntyre et al., 2018), demand for university mental health services (e.g. Pollard et al., 2021; Oswalt et al., 2020; Brown, 2018; Thorley, 2017; Broglia, Millings, & Barkham, 2017), inequality in student mental health outcomes (e.g. Stoll et al., 2022), and significant academic (Jones et al., 2021), social (Priestley et al., 2022), and financial (McCloud & Bann, 2019) stressors within the university environment, there has been marked sectoral transition to a whole university approach to mental health in the UK (see e.g. Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021; Office for Students, 2021; Universities UK, 2020; 2017). The Covid-19 pandemic ostensibly compounded these trends (Bennett et al., 2022; McLafferty et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2021) and stressors (Weber et al., 2022; Macall et al., 2022; Mehus et al., 2021; Hager, Judah & Milam, 2022; Slack & Priestley, 2021; Son et al., 2020), further entrenching demand and sectoral commitment to a whole university approach (Hughes & Spanner, 2020; Priestley, 2020; Burn, 2020).

[1] Whether this is indicative of an actual increase in symptomology and/or prevalence, or reflective of societal changes in identification (Crook, 2020; Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019), disclosure (Ecclestone, 2020; Barkham et al., 2019; Arie, 2017) and/or student demographics (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021; Broglia, Millings and Barkham, 2018) remain contested. Notwithstanding, approximately 75% of students experiencing psychological distress do not access university services (Lipson et al., 2015; Macaskill, 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2012; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010)

In essence, 'a whole university approach takes a multi–stranded approach that, alongside accessible and effective services, mobilises all aspects of university life to support and promote good mental health and wellbeing' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p.10). It foregrounds the effect of culture, environment, and inequalities on mental health and wellbeing (UUK, 2020), and 'entails a joined-up approach to transform cultures and embed mental health initiatives beyond student services … across all policies, cultures, curricula, and practice … provid[ing] an environment and culture that reduces poor mental health, as well as supporting good mental health' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p.10).

Taken together, a whole university approach is commonly theorised to contain three conceptual components (Dooris, Powell & Farrier, 2019; Dooris, 2016; Dooris, Wills, & Newton, 2014; Dooris & Powell, 2012; Dooris, Doherty, & Cawood, 2012; Dooris et al., 2010):

1. A healthy living, learning, and working culture and environment where individuals can manage and maintain good wellbeing.
2. A strategic focus on mental health that is embedded across all aspects, activities, and areas of work, complementing the university's core missions of teaching, learning, and research.
3. An inclusive focus on the whole population, with emphasis on mental health inequalities; staff mental health; and partnerships with local NHS services, third-sector organisations, and Further Education colleges.

A scoping review of existing literature (Dooris, Wills & Newton, 2014) has identified four key theoretical influences underpinning existing conceptualisations of a whole university approach, namely: socio-ecological theory; salutogenic theory; systems theory; and settings-based health promotion. These theories draw on multiple disciplines including sociology, psychology, management, and geography to interrogate the relationship between health, behaviour, institutional systems, space, place, process, and policy [Kokko, Green & Kannas, 2014; Dooris et al., 2007; Dooris, 2006; 2004; Poland, Green, & Rootman, 2000].

A Settings Approach

A settings approach situates mental health promotion in and through the settings and contexts in which individuals live, learn, work, and interact (see Frohlich & Poland, 2007). 'To encourage the promotion of mental health at university, setting-based approaches move from individual-based to population-based interventions and are more concerned with changing the structural and organizational factors that impact on health, rather than individual risk factors' (Fernandez et al., 2016, p.798). As such, 'the settings-based approach to health and wellbeing encapsulates how the university setting can be critical in promoting improved student wellbeing' (Burns, Dagnall & Holt, 2020, p. 5).

Systems-Based Theories of Mental Health

Systems theory (Burns & Flam, 1987; Mintzberg, 1983; Buckley, 1967; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Von Bertalanffy & Rapoport, 1956; Easton, 1953; Parsons, 1951; Homans, 1951) situates each setting as an interconnected component of a complex system (Poland, Green & Rootman, 2000), wherein exposure to mental health determinants and the effectiveness of mental health interventions is determined by complex factors and actors across and beyond the university system (Pfeffer & Stichweh, 2015; Luhmann, Baecker & Gilgen, 2013). Outcomes in a complex system emerge through generative mechanisms as a property of combining and interacting cases within a system of relations 'that may result in very different outcomes depending on the dynamic interplay of conditions and mechanisms over time and space' (McQueen & Jones, 2007, p. 341). As such, systemic stressors may compromise the effectiveness of an intervention in a specific context (Jackman, 2022; Daniels et al., 2020), such as the effectiveness of a stress management intervention in a stress-inducing setting (Ayres, 2022; Saltmarsh, 2016). Furthermore, settings-based stressors accumulate and interact across the system (Shareck, Frohlich & Poland, 2013), producing differential outcomes across different individuals and groups (Dooris & Doherty, 2010; Dooris, 2009; 2006; 2001) that require 'multiple interconnected interventions tailored to the culture and needs of a specific setting' (Dooris et al., 2007, p.349).

The Social Ecology of Health

The social ecology of health situates individual mental health related behaviours and choices as framed and constrained by differential exposure to mental health risk and protective factors within the wider politico-economic system (Shareck, Frohlich & Poland, 2013; Abel & Frohlich, 2012), 'recast[ing] the focus from individual behavioural risk factors to the more distal determinants of health' [Poland, Green & Rootman, 2000, p.11]. Economic, political, and cultural factors exist within the macro-system' (Pinder-Amaker & Bell, 2012, p. 176) that shape a student's perception of mental health, and access to and utilisation of mental health services' (ibid, p.176). Thus 'social ecological models of health focus on the influence of environments, policies, and other structural factors on health and wellbeing, both directly and through supporting individuals and populations to make informed health-related choices in their daily lives' (Holt et al., 2015, p.675) via 'broad environmental change as well as individual behaviour change' (Poland, Green & Rootman, 2000, p.6).

Salutogenesis Theory

Salutogenesis theory (Antonovsky, 1996; 1987; 1979) seeks to shift 'concern with risk factors, with pathogens' (Antonovsky, 1996, p. 13), in the deficit model of illness, to harnessing 'the health enhancing assets, strengths, and potentials inherent in the social and institutional settings of everyday life (Kickbusch, 1996, p.6). 'A salutogenic orientation, then, as the basis for health promotion, directs both research and action efforts to encompass all persons …. through 'the

creation of appropriate social conditions which underlie or facilitate health-promotive behaviours' (Antonovsky, 1996, p.12).

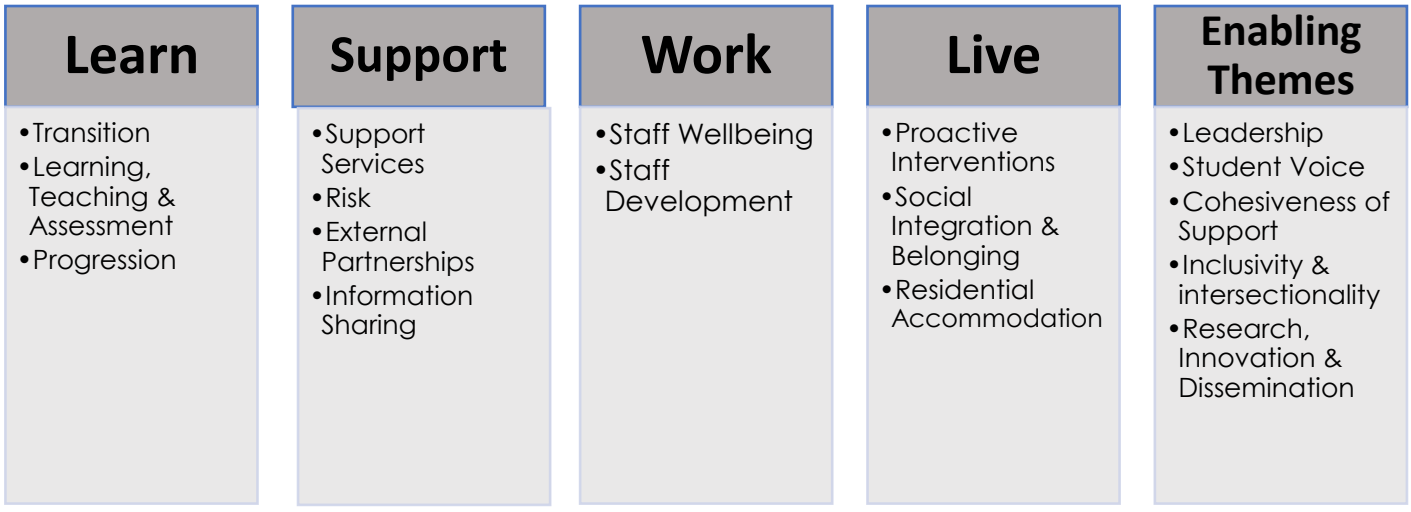
A whole university approach is propounded with reference to the significant symbiotic institutional and individual benefits of good mental health in a higher education setting (see e.g. UUK, 2020; Baik, Larcombe & Brooker, 2019; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Hodgins & Scriven, 2014; Dooris & Doherty, 2010). Indeed, mental health and wellbeing has been consistently bi-directionally associated with enhanced cognitive, social, and psychological functioning inherent to optimal academic processes and outcomes (Hughes et al., 2022; Lee & Son, 2022; Csikszentmihalyi, 2013; Oswald, Proto & Sgori, 2015), whilst mental health difficulties predict attrition (Lipson & Eisenberg, 2018; Breslau et al., 2008) non-progression (Hubble & Bolton, 2019; Office for Students 2019) and academic under-performance (Monrad et al., 2021; Lindsey, Patricia & Stark, 2009). Given that no single intervention has been found to be universally effective (Worsley, Pennington & Corcoran, 2022), and that the majority of students experiencing distress do not present to university support services (Macaskill, 2013), a whole university approach has been postulated as the most effective strategy to improve mental health outcomes for the whole university community (Mackenzie & Williams, 2018; Reis et al., 2018; Suárez-Reyes & Van den Broucke, 2016; Fernandez et al., 2016; Newton, Dooris & Wills, 2016).

A Whole University Approach: Policy and Practice

The University Mental Health Charter

Endorsed by the Minister for Universities (2021), the Department for Education (2020), the Office for Students (2020), and the National Union of Students (2020), the University Mental Health Charter (2019) provides an evidence-informed framework and voluntary accreditation to inform and incentivise UK universities to holistically and inclusively prioritise and promote student mental health and wellbeing as part of a whole university approach. Inspired by the Australian Edmonton Charter (2005), the Canadian Okanagan Charter (2015), and the American College Health Association Healthy Campuses initiative (2019), the University Mental Health Charter (Hughes & Spanner, 2019) presents 100 principles of good practice across 18 themes spanning 5 domains [see figure 1). To date, 61 UK universities have committed to joining the University Mental Health Charter programme (Student Minds, nd).

Figure 1: University Mental Health Charter



Student Support Services

The University Mental Health Charter instructs higher education institutions to retain operational autonomy In the enactment of a whole university approach, by developing and adopting bespoke procedural policies and practices relevant to the provision of services and interventions within their setting (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). Whilst university support services vary according to type and size of institution and student demographic (Ruckert, 2015), their role and function within a whole university approach typically entail the provision of a breadth of support options [see figure 3], including bespoke time-limited individual and group student counselling both in person and online; prevention and outreach; consultation to faculty and staff; and risk assessment and management (Priestley et al., 2021; Randall & Bewick, 2016; Prince, 2015). Ultimately, provision of both universal and clinical interventions is stipulated within a whole university approach to promote population health and target severe and/or enduring symptomology respectively (Conley et al. 2017; Reavley & Jorm, 2010).

Figure 2: University Service Provision

Category	User	Services
Proactive outreach	General student population	Includes: psychoeducational and lifestyle interventions; self-help materials.
General support for student wellbeing not as primary function	General student population	Includes accommodation services, library services, physical exercise services, financial advice services, spirituality and faith services and academic services.
Short-term specialist support	Students experiencing mental health difficulties	Includes counselling and psychotherapy services, mental health teams, wellbeing officers and advisors, residential assistants and wardens, pastoral academic officers, peer support and listening services
Long-term specialist support	Students with long term mental health diagnoses	Includes Disability Services; Mental Health Practitioners and Advisors, Specialist Mentors and Liaison Officers, often funded by Disabled Students' Allowance.
Crisis and urgent care	Students at immediate risk of harm to themselves and/or others	Includes crisis case workers, vulnerable student officers, security services, safeguarding officers, and external partnerships with NHS and third-sector crisis services.

Clinical Interventions

Counselling is the most consistently offered clinical intervention in a university setting (Broglia et al., 2021), and the data available suggests that short-term embedded counselling is clinically effective, with 56% of students (n=846) reporting reliable and clinical improvement (Connell, Barkham, & Mellor-Clark, 2008), and the combined rate (n=5, 568) for severe and moderately severe distress falling from 60% at pre-counselling to 27% post-counselling (Broglia et

al., 2021). University counselling can also demonstrably benefit academic performance and retention, with 67% of students (n=129) that present to counselling services with academic issues experiencing reliable improvement (McKenzie et al., 2016) and 81% of students (n=1, 263) reporting receipt of counselling prevented attrition (Wallace, 2012).

Non-Clinical Interventions

Whilst 'clearly the most severe problems should be treated by specialist services, universal interventions may be sufficient to support developmental changes during university' (Brown, 2018, p.195). Non-clinical universal and indicated interventions are delivered in university settings to students without presenting difficulties and/or students with mild to moderate subclinical symptoms respectively (Suarez-Reyes & Van Den Broucke, 2016; Reavley & Jorm, 2010). The following non-clinical interventions have demonstrated varying degrees of acceptability and efficacy in a student population, namely: recreation interventions (Litwiller et al., 2022; Worsley, Pennington, & Corcoran, 2020; Huang et al., 2018; Conley et al., 2015); physical health interventions (Plotnikoff et al., 2015); peer support interventions (John et al., 2018); social prescribing interventions (Boyd, 2022); animal therapy interventions (Rothkopf & Schworm, 2021; Thelwell, 2019; Ward-Griffin et al. 2018; Binfet et al., 2017; Wood et al., 2017; Shearer et al., 2016); curricular based interventions (Upsher et al., 2021; Soulakova et al., 2019; McConville, McAleer & Hahne, 2017; Wasson et al., 2016); psycho-educational interventions (Barnett et al., 2021; Rith-Najarian, Boustani, & Chorpita, 2019; Lo, Gupta & Keating,

2018); stigma reduction interventions (Yamaguchi et al., 2013); and e-health interventions (Franzoi et al., 2022; Ferrari et al., 2022; Bolinski et al., 2020; Harrer et al., 2019; Lattie, 2019). 'To date however, the research literature has not yielded systematically evaluated and recommendable preventative mental health and wellbeing programs for university students' (Seppala et al., 2020, p.1).

External Partnerships

A whole university approach to policy and practice is further framed by external partnerships with national primary, secondary, and third sector practitioners (Broglia et al., 2022). 'University wellbeing services, however excellent, cannot replace the specialised care that the NHS provides for students with mental illnesses' (UUK, 2015, p.3). Primary mental health care services are accessed through local General Practitioners [GPs] and provide generalist support and centralised needs-based triage for common mental health difficulties. Secondary mental health care services comprise multi-disciplinary teams commissioned by Clinical Commissioning Groups to provide referral-based specialist mental health services for adults with severe and enduring mental health difficulties (Augustus, Bold & Williams, 2019). Multiple third sector and private organisations deliver – either exclusively or partially - a range of psychoeducational training and resources, strategic policy briefings, peer support, and funded services. 'It remains the case, however, that there is currently no single organisation resourced sufficiently to coordinate activity

and interest groups related to student mental health across the UK higher education sector' (Williams et al., 2015, p.27).

The Research Gap: A Whole University Approach in a Neoliberal Higher Education Context

Whilst 'a whole university approach has helped to decisively shift the conversation away from simply considering the provision of services towards consideration of the impact of the university environment' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p.8), to date, there remains a dearth of theoretically informed critical interrogation as to how the neoliberal higher education policy system impacts on the university environment and culture, the exposure to institutional determinants of wellbeing, and the implications for the delivery of services and interventions (Zeira, 2022; Thornton, 2016). This omission is particularly striking given evidence that both students and academic staff[2] report a higher prevalence and severity of psychological distress than the general population (Larcombe, Baik & Finch, 2022; Lewis, McCloud, & Callender, 2021; Maguire & Cameron, 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2021; 2020; Neves & Hillman, 2019; 2018; 2017; 2016); that intra-individual distress increases upon entry to university and decreases upon graduation (Evans et al., 2021; Conley et al., 2020; Hagemeier et al., 2020; Cvetkovski, Jorm & Mackinnon, 2019; Whittle, 2018; Pitt et al., 2018); and that both rates of psychological distress and mental health inequalities have increased over time and space in parallel to the neoliberalisation of higher education policy (Linden, Boyes & Stuart, 2019;

[2] See e.g. Wray & Kinman, 2021; Douglas, Weick & Vasiljevic, 2021; Shen & Slater, 2021; Kinman & Wray, 2014; Mark & Smith, 2012

McManus & Gunnell , 2019; Knapstad et al., 2018; Duffy, Twenge & Joiner, 2018; Lipson, Lattie & Eisenberg, 2017; Thorley, 2017; Oswalt, 2015; Ruud et al., 2015; Sletta, Tyssen, & Løvseth, 2015; McManus & Gunnell, 2014). Where a whole university approach is principally concerned with differential exposure to stressors and access to interventions across the whole university experience, the failure to take account of the broader neoliberal context arguably compromise the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in practice (Daniels et al., 2020).

The Neoliberal Higher Education Policy Context

'Despite all the literature, neoliberalism is increasingly difficult to define clearly, precisely because it is used in so many different ways, empirically and analytically, by different scholars, commentators, and activists' (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013, p. 260). Indeed the term 'is so widely and so loosely used, it is in danger of becoming a detached signifier' (Ball, 2012, p. 18) that 'often serves more as an epithet than an analytically productive concept' (Evans & Sewell, 2013, p.36). Synthesising interdisciplinary insights from geopolitical analysis (Ratzel, 1901); neo-Marxist analysis (Bourdieu, 1990; Gramsci, 1971; Althusser, 1970); economic historical analysis (Schmoller, 1933); institutional analysis (Ostrom, 1990); and Foucaultian analysis (Foucault, 1974), three identifiable dimensions of neoliberalism emerge namely: neoliberalism as politico-economic theory, neoliberalism as policy enactment, and neoliberalism as social psychology (Ryan, 2020; Evans & Sewell, 2013; Giroux, 2011) [3],.

Neoliberalism as Politico-Economic Theory

Neoliberal politico-economic theory essentially valorises the libertarian and utilitarian principles of classical liberalism as the ideal model for social service provision, grounded in the tenets of autonomous choice; free-market

[3] Note that neoliberalism has been enacted differently across different countries (Steger & Roy, 2010) 'depending on its position in the international order, the makeup of its national field of power, and the configuration of its social space' (Wacquant, 2012, p. 74).

competition; private property; and non-interventionism (Steger & Roy, 2010; Olssen & Peters, 2005) [4].

Autonomous Choice

Methodological individualism postulates that self-interested autonomous choice generates an aggregate socio-economic equilibrium through the 'invisible hand' (Smith, 1776, p.242) of the free market, wherein individuals are liberated to exercise rational, autonomous, and self-interested choice which collectively, through the 'neighbourhood effect' (Friedman, 1962, p.86), self-regulate the greatest social and economic good 'to benefit all' (Hayek, 1960, p.505).

Free-Market Competition

The installation and extension of free-market competition (Styhre, 2014; Mirowski, 2013; Dean, 2012; Amable, 2011; Crouch, 2011; Cerny, 2008; Mudge, 2008) is theorised to efficiently and effectively self-regulates supply and demand according to public interest (Turner, 2007; Harvey, 2005), driving up standards of goods and services through 'a process of natural selection' as underperforming providers 'go out of business' (Gordon & Whitty, 1997, p.461).

[4] Whilst neoliberal ideology has been embraced across the political spectrum (Farnsworth & Irving, 2018), critics (e.g. Robotham, 2009; Apple, 2006) have highlighted a particular affinity with neo-conservativism, centred on the rule of law and protection of private property (Wacquant, 2012); emphasis on moral values determining individual choice and meritocratic competition (Harvey, 2006); and the role of family and philanthropy in welfare provision (Steger & Roy, 2010).

Private Property

Free-market competition liberates individuals to make decisions based on private interests (Hayek, 1948), wherein 'private property is the embodiment of individual liberty' (Gray 1986, p.50). Whilst Fordist-Keynesian models position inequality as socio-economically detrimental to consumption (Zalewski & Whalen, 2010), marginal productivity theories (Wicksteed, 1910; Clark, 1898) legitimate inequality as both an inevitable and desirable outcome of market competition that reflect and reproduce individual freedom and entrepreneurship (Laffer, 1975; Friedman, 1957). Hence 'inequality is not an unintended result but itself an important feature of neoliberal politics because it is supposed to serve as a mechanism to increase competition and productivity' (Becker & Hartwich, 2021, p.948).

Non-Interventionism

All state intervention is held to be detrimental to the self-regulating market and parasitic on individual liberty (Friedman, 1993; Buchanan, 1978; Simons, 1976; Hayek, 1944).The methodological individualist informed 'theory of spontaneous order' (Hayek, 1945, p.78) postulates that market competition permits spontaneous coordination of individual agentic decisions in adaptation to continuously changing circumstances, with superior efficiency and effectiveness than centralist state actors (Buchanan, 1978; Simons, 1976). As such, responsibility for welfare is reconfigured as individual, familial, or charitable (Ward, 2014; Fudge & Cossman, 2002). Hence, contrary to the methodological holist proposition that collectivist social structures are superior

to individual action, state regulation is theorised to produce economic disequilibrium and political authoritarianism (Popper, 1945). Critically however, where classical liberalism prohibits all state intervention as restrictive of individual freedom and detrimental to social good, the neoliberal state is responsibilised to construct and institutionalise the free-market conditions in which individuals practice autonomous choice (Eucken, 1938; 1932; Böhm, 1937). Neoliberal decentralisation therefore paradoxically depends on centralist state interventionism (Ward & England, 2016; Dardot & Laval, 2014; Mirowski, 2013).

Neoliberal Higher Education Policy

'Neoliberalism arguably finds its fullest expression through education policy' (Ward, 2017, p.1). Whilst differentially enacted across the devolved policymaking powers in the UK, 'the higher education policy agenda has become more explicitly neoliberal' (Maisuria & Cole, 2017, p. 605) since 1990, enacting tenets of privatisation, instrumentalisation, competition, performativity, consumerism, and globalisation [see figure 3].

Privatisation

Where Robbins' (1965) post-war expansion of UK higher education relied on interventionist public spending, 'successive UK governments have sought to increase the number of students entering higher education and to pay for this expansion largely by transferring costs from the state to the student' (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020, 199), through progressively replacing centralist

state grants with private income contingent tuition and maintenance loans (Hastings, 2019; Mayer & Eccles, 2019). £1000 means-tested annual tuition fees for home students were implemented in 1997 (Dearing, 1997) increasing to £3000 income contingent loans in 2004 (Gov, 2004), to a maximum £9,000 for domestic undergraduate students in England for the 2012/13 academic year (Bolton 2012). Whilst 'institutions remain partly dependent on government funding in the forms of research-related support, teaching subsidies, and the subsidization of the loan system through non-repayment of debt' (Marginson, 2018, p.1), neoliberal higher education policy has increasingly compelled universities to 'raise a growing proportion of their own funds' (Marginson, 2018, p.15), 'increasing the reliance on private sources of funding' (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015, p.44) and on tuition income, manifest through 'a relentless drive to mass higher education' (Harland, 2009, p.513). Concurrently, 'casualisation is becoming normalised, consistent with the neoliberal-programmed privatisation of education' (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015, p.61), 'to push costs down, maintain profit, and increase organisational flexibility' (Desierto & Maio, 2020, p.151).

Instrumentalisation

'The shift towards neoliberalism has seen a concomitant and progressive instrumentalisation of education at all levels in the service of economic competitiveness' and private capital accumulation (Morrison, 2017, p.199) by which 'education is reconfigured as a private good that will provide a vehicle for competitive advantage in the labour market and yield a return in

the form of future earnings' (Mintz, 2021, p.83). Where privatisation 'foregrounds the purpose of higher education as providing private goods whose benefits are referenced against their potential future economic exchange value' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.451), students are exhorted to 'measure the value of this commodity in terms of the subsequent market value it confers upon them' (Connolly, 2013, p. 229). 'This promotion of the "knowledge economy"(Gov, 2016, p.2) has accelerated and legitimised the implementation of neoliberal policy in higher education' (Courtois & O'Keefe, 2015, p.43).

Competition

There are 'clear relations between neo-liberal ideas of marketisation and individualism, and education trends of competition' (Wilkins, 2012, p.768). Privatisation of higher education, abolition of the cap on student numbers, and establishment of new providers situate higher education institutions in free-market 'competition between providers' (Gov, 2016, p.8) for student tuition income (Burgess, Senior & Moores, 2018; McCaig, 2018; Maisuria & Cole, 2017), framed as 'part of the wider government agenda to put more power in the hands of the consumer' (BIS, 2011, p.15), 'At the centre of these reforms is the basic idea that if higher education institutions (HEIs) do not present themselves as delivering high standards then they will lose customers and therefore revenue, ultimately leading to the competitive market being closed to them' (Maisuria & Cole, 2017, p.606).

Performativity

'In the UK, the key instrument for directing neoliberal change is public accountability for state funding through performativity metrics' (Harland, 2009, 513). 'For competition in the higher education sector to deliver the best possible outcomes, students must be able to make informed choices' (Gov, 2016, p.11). In theory that is, statutory representation of standardised performance indicators in national league tables[5] enable students to exercise rational consumer choice to meet individual needs, resulting in free-market competition between institutions for tuition income (Ball, 2012; Hazelkorn, 2011) 'in a 'triple convergence of market, managerialism, and measurement' (Spooner, 2017, p. 898). From 2014[6] for example, The REF has been used to inform the selective and competitive allocation of council grant funding for research, provide accountability for public investment in research, and produce evidence of 'impact' or benefice of this investment for industry and societal end users (Terama et al., 2017; Olssen, 2016). Similarly since 2017, Teaching Excellence Framework [TEF] awards have been allocated with the explicit aim to differentiate fees between higher education providers (Maisuria & Cole, 2017), 'inform the competitive market and drive up the standard of teaching in all universities' (Gov, 2016, 13).

[5] The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework prescribes measures of graduate employment rates and destinations, future salaries, and student satisfaction.

[6] Note the Research Excellence Framework was preceded by the Research Assessment Exercise [RAE]. The RAE started in 1986, followed by subsequent assessments in 1989, 1992, 1996, 2001, and 2008. Similar evaluations exist in Iceland (Evaluation System for Public Higher Education Institutions), Australia (Excellence in Research for Australia), Denmark (Den Bibliometriske Forsknings indikator) and New Zealand (Performance-Based Research Fund).

Consumerism

'The clearest manifestation of marketisation is the shift to "student as consumer" (Lawson, 2018, p.12). Since 2015, students in English universities are financially protected by the Competition and Markets Authority consumer rights legislation (Gov, 2015) and encouraged to complain 'if expected standards are not met' (BIS, 2011, p.22). 'One of the main outcomes of the CMA legislation on student expectations is that they started to be considered consumers in their learning' (Maisuria & Cole, 2017, p.606) with 'students now hav[ing] an understanding that they are largely purchasing their education, to enable them to enter the world of work' (Harland, 2009, p.516), and 'the emergence of a dominant idea that suggests getting a 'good degree' is an entitlement paid for by their fees' (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009, p.279).

Globalisation

Under neoliberalism, 'there is constant emphasis on the international competitiveness of the university and of UK higher education as a whole' (Radice, 2011, p.413). The number of international students entering the UK grew rapidly between 2001-2002 and 2011–2012, with the UK share of the global market reaching 13% (OECD, 2015). Transnational education has similarly expanded, involving delivery of UK programmes and awards in other countries, often through collaborative arrangements with local partners as universities seek to extend market reach (Kosmützky & Putty, 2016; Middlehurst & Fielden, 2011). UK universities have a strong financial incentive to expand non-EU international enrolments and tuition income, particularly

following Brexit as access to EU international students and research funding is curtailed (Kleibert, 2020; Marginson, 2018).

Neoliberalism as Social Psychology

The percolation of neoliberal discourse and policy models within everyday social life and the institutional systems of the university produce certain clear 'psychosocial effects of neoliberalism' (Layton, 2013, p.1). Indeed, neoliberal higher education both 'require and enact a new type of individual' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p.88) characterised by individual autonomy and responsibility for welfare; enterprise and entrepreneurship; and free-market competition (Scharff, 2016; Chandler & Reid, 2016; Layton, 2013; Saleci, 2010).

Figure 3: Neoliberal Higher Education Policy Timeline

Legislation	Year	Summary	Neoliberal Principle
Education (Student Loans) Act	1990	Replaced publicly funded maintenance grants with means-tested maintenance loans worth £1,710 per year with interest for higher education students, repaid through periodical instalments.	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring cost from the state to the individual.
Further and Higher Education Act	1992	Removed Further Education colleges from the control of Local Education Authorities; abolished the binary system of higher education, allowing polytechnics to become universities; unified higher education funding under the Higher Education Funding Council [HEFC]; and introduced competition for funding between institutions.	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **competition** between providers to drive up standards.
Education (Student Loans) Act	1996	Extended maintenance loans to £2035 per year for all independent full time home undergraduate students, repaid through monthly instalments plus interest following graduation.	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring cost from the state to the individual.
Dearing Report	1997	Advocated additional funding for universities to expand student enrolment and maintain adequate infrastructure through means tested tuition fees, continuation of means tested maintenance grants, and student loans.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring cost from the state to the individual.
Education (Student Loans) Act	1998	Transferred the provision of student loans from the Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE) to the private sector, replacing the standard maintenance loan with a means tested loan of £3635 per year for eligible full time home students, repaid through monthly instalments following graduation.	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring cost from the state to the individual.
Teaching and Higher Education Act	1998	Required full-time home undergraduate students to contribute £1,000 tuition costs	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**,

		upfront, payable through low interest loans to be repaid through monthly instalments after £10,000 graduate earnings or means-tested grants administered by the local education authority or institutional governing body.	transferring cost from the state to the individual.
The Future of Higher Education White Paper	2003	Recommended: Strengthening the Higher Education Innovation Fund network and Knowledge Exchanges to reward and support collaboration with business; provision of information on teaching quality 'to help student choice drive up quality' (p.7); restoring grants for students from lower income families and abolishing up-front fees for all; Introducing a new Graduate Contribution Scheme up to £3,000 per year.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principles of **instrumentalisation** for private capital accumulation; **performativity** to inform consumer choice**;** and **privatisation**, transferring cost from the state to the individual.
Higher Education Act	2004	Allowed universities to charge variable top-up fees (up to £3,290) from the 2006/2007 academic year with approval from the Director of Fair Access; provided bursaries of at least £300 per year to low-income students; established a student complaints scheme ran by the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.	Enacts the neoliberal principles of **competition** based on differential fees; and **consumerism** through consumer complaints.
Sale of Student Loans Act	2008	Allowed the government to sell existing rights and obligations relating to repayment of income-contingent student loans, transferring responsibility for processing from the local authority to the private sector (the Student Loan Company).	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring the cost (& market risk) from the state to the individual and private sector.
Browne Review	2010	Recommended: lifting the cap on student tuition fees and introducing differential fees for different courses/ institutions; reducing allocation of public funding from	Demonstrates the neoliberal principles of **competition** between providers based on

		the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE); lifting the cap on student enrolments by 10% over three years; Increasing maintenance grants to £3,250 per year; abolishing bursaries for low income students; determining eligibility for student finance by minimum entry standards; increasing student choice through student charters & performance information relating to course/ institution employment prospects and mean salary.	differential fees and increased student enrolment; **privatisation**, transferring the cost (& market risk) to the individual and private sector; **performativity** to inform consumer choice; and **instrumentalisation** for private capital accumulation.
Comprehensive Spending Review	2010	Implemented recommendations from the Browne Review, with universities able to charge students a maximum £9,000 per year from the 2012-2013 academic year; introduced a threshold for loan repayment at £21,000 per annum with variable repayment costs and interest rates related to income; reduced public funding allocated through the Teaching Grant.	Enacts the neoliberal principles of **privatisation** transferring the cost from the state to the individual; and **consumerism by** 'putting financial power into the hands of learners to make student choice meaningful (p.8).
Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education White Paper	2011	Recommended: publication of information for prospective & existing students regarding staff expertise, course employment/ earnings outcomes, and student experience surveys; performance related institutional reviews; increased consumer complaint systems; and collaboration with the National Consortium of University Entrepreneurs, the National Council for Graduate Entrepreneurship and the Quality Assurance Agency to develop student enterprise skills	Demonstrates the neoliberal principles of **performativity** to inform consumer choice; **instrumentalisation** for private capital accumulation; and **consumerism** through consumer complaints.
Fulfilling Our Potential Green Paper	2015	Recommends establishment of Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); deregulation of sector entry	Demonstrates the neoliberal principles of **performativity** to

		and expansion; merging regulatory organisation into the Office for Students (OfS) responsible for access agreements, teaching funding, Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) & quality assurance.	inform consumer choice
Review of the Research Councils	2015	Recommended creation of a formal organisation responsible for allocating quality-related research funding.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principle of **competition** to improve standards and efficiency
Government Spending Review	2015	Pledged to increase tuition fees in line with inflation from the 2017/ 2018 academic year.	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring the cost from the state to the individual.
Success as a Knowledge Economy White Paper	2016	Recommended: 'competition between providers' (p.8); deregulation of new providers; a Teaching Excellence Framework and enhanced data on employability.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principle of **competition** to improve standards; **performativity** to inform consumer choice; and **instrumentalisation** for private capital accumulation
Higher Education and Research Bill	2016	Replaced maintenance grants with means-tested maintenance loans; introduced postgraduate student loans of up to £10, 000; established a new system for providers to attain degree awarding powers; compelled institutions to publish application, offer, acceptance, & progression rates to inform student choice; created a single regulatory body (the Office for Students) to replace the Higher Education Funding Council for England [HEFCE] and the Office for Fair Access [OFA], with responsibility for the Teaching Excellence	Enacts the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring the cost from the state to the individual; **instrumentalisation** for private capital accumulation; **competition** to raise standards based on more competitors and enrolments; **performativity** to inform consumer choice

		Framework and allocation of teaching grant funding; expanded Office of Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to all registered higher education providers; & enacted Nurse review recommendation to unify allocation of quality-related research funding through a single body [UK Research and Innovation].	
Higher Education and Research Act	2017	Increased tuition fees to £9,250 in line with inflation, with yearly inflationary increases dependent on Teaching Excellence Framework outcomes; allowed the Office for Students to grant degree-awarding powers to education providers; established UK Research and Innovation [UKRI]; allowed universities to charge higher fees for accelerated courses; expanded The Office of the Independent Adjudicator's role in handling student complaints; empowered the Office for Students to assess the quality and standards of universities through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).	Enacts the neoliberal principles of **privatisation,** transferring the cost from the state to the individual; **competition** to raise standards between more competitors; **consumerism** through consumer complaints; **performativity** to inform consumer choice;
Higher Education Policy Changes in England	2019	Increased student loans in line with inflation to £8,944 per year.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring the cost from the state to the individual.
Higher Education Policy Statement	2022	Froze the tuition fee cap at £9,250 until 2024 and increased the student loan repayment threshold to £25,000 until 2026-27.	Demonstrates the neoliberal principle of **privatisation**, transferring the cost from the state to the individual.

Research Objectives and Questions

Taken together, neoliberalism is demonstrably complex, dynamic, and multidimensional; manifest as politico-economic theory, policy enactment, and social psychology; and operant through neoliberal discourses, principles, and technologies within UK higher education policy that reconfigure the purpose, functions, and values of higher education according to privatisation, instrumentalisation, competition, performativity, consumerism, and globalisation. To date however, notwithstanding sectoral transition to a systems-based whole university approach, the neoliberal context of higher education has been largely dissociated from student experience and exposure to systemic academic, social, and financial determinants of wellbeing.

Against this backdrop, the following primary research question is specified:

RQ: How do students experience wellbeing and living and learning in a neoliberal higher educational context and what are the implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach?'

The following four composite research questions are specified to address the primary research question:

- What theoretical insights are illuminated through synthesising systems-based theories of wellbeing, cross-disciplinary neoliberal critique, and Foucaultian philosophies of subjectivity?
- What are the financial, social, and academic determinants of student wellbeing situated within a neoliberal higher education context?

- What are the opportunities and challenges of survey, focus group and interview methods for situating the experience of wellbeing and service provision within a neoliberal higher educational context?
- What are the practical implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university?

Each composite research question is addressed through subsidiary research questions underpinning each phase of the design [see Figure 5]. Grounded in pragmatist ontology, the research objective is to synthesise multiple methods, disciples, experiences, and discourses to develop practical recommendations for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach, situated in the neoliberal context and in alignment with student and stakeholder experience, needs, and challenges.

Definition of Terms

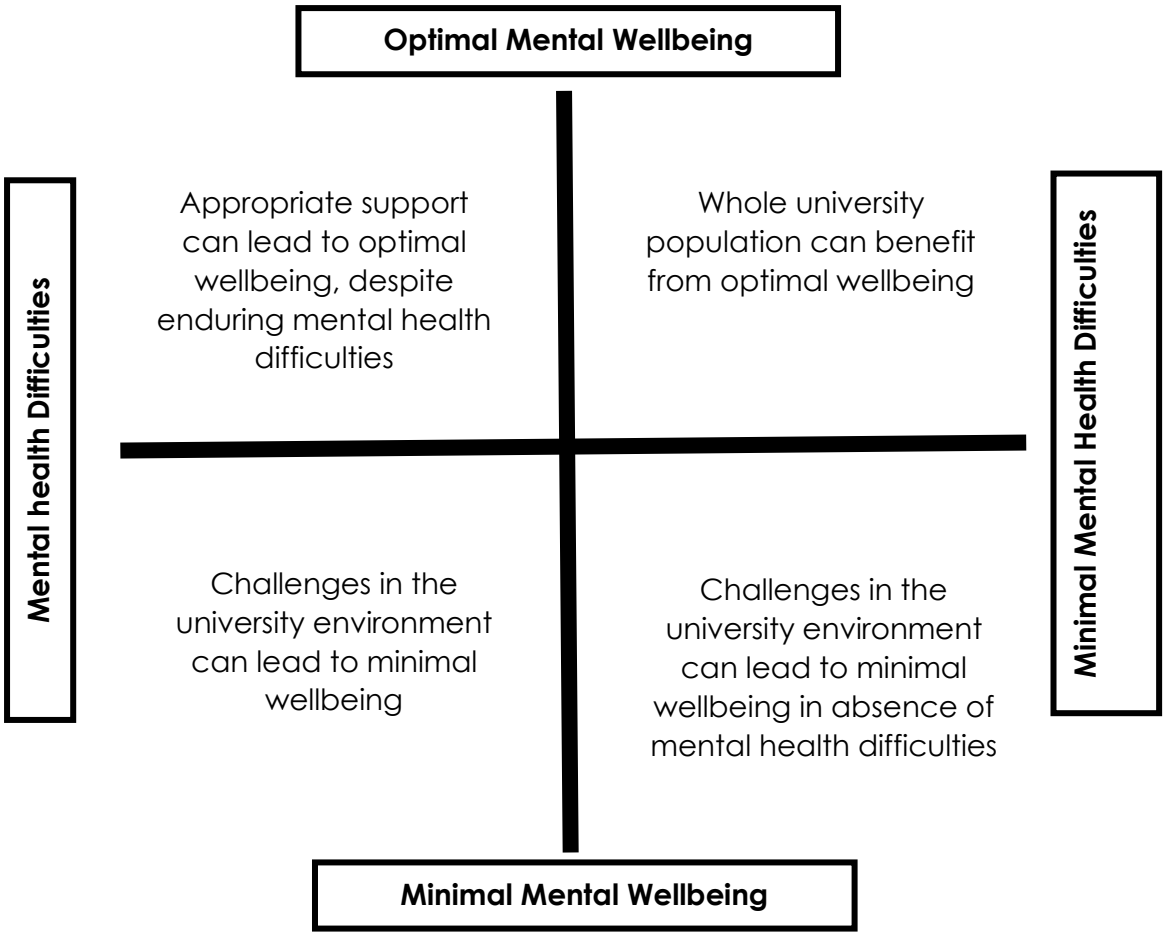
Modelled on contemporary student mental health policy (UUK, 2020; IPPR, 2017) and practice (HEA, 2018; Student Minds, 2018), this thesis applies a dual continua model (Downie et al., 1990; MNHW, 1988) to define, differentiate, and develop mental wellbeing, mental health, and mental illness in relation to the neoliberal higher education context and a whole university approach. A Dual Continua Model (Downie et al., 1990; MNHW, 1988) essentially posits that mental wellbeing exists on a continuum with mental health difficulties, wherein stressors in the university environment can induce periods of poor mental wellbeing which, if prolonged and in the absence of adequate support, can

increase the risk of developing mental health difficulties, or exacerbate existing and/or enduring mental health difficulties. Equally however, students with severe and enduring mental health difficulties can still experience good mental wellbeing (Keyes et al., 2012).

- **Mental wellbeing** is conceptualised as universal, dynamic, and environmental (White, 2015; Atkinson, 2013), defined as the eudaimonic and hedonic 'ability of an individual to fully exercise their cognitive, emotional, physical, and social powers leading to flourishing' (Hughes & Spanner, p.9) 'in which an individual feels positive emotion toward life and is functioning well" (Keyes, 2002, p. 294), beyond simply the absence of disease or disorder (World Health Organisation, 2006).
- **Poor mental wellbeing** is defined as a transient state of distress in which environmental stress exceeds an individual's psychological and/or social coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), which, if sustained and unsupported, may or may not lead to 'mental health difficulties', 'problems' or 'challenges' in the long term (McLaughlin & Hatzenbuehler, 2009).
- **Mental health difficulties** encompass social and situational difficulties in a non-deficit model (Meyer & Strevens, 2022), defined as severe and enduring emotional and/or psychological distress that impedes daily functioning, which may receive or be eligible to receive a clinical diagnosis as a mental disorder, and which may be classified as a disability under the Equality Act (Priestley & Cowley, 2022).

- **Mental health** is used as a hypernym for this spectrum of psychological experiences (Huppert, 2009).

Figure 4: Dual Continua Model of Mental Wellbeing



Applying a dual continua model, it is postulated that the neoliberal higher education system can influence student experience of living and learning at university and mediate exposure to determinants of subjective wellbeing and, by extension, mental health difficulties - whilst in the acknowledgement that not all mental health difficulties are caused or alleviated in a simple linear relationship with neoliberal policy (Priestley, 2019). Equally through

universal interventions to reduce the determinants of wellbeing and increase access to support, the university can provide a strategic site to promote better mental health and wellbeing among the whole university community as part of a whole university approach, whilst in the acknowledgement that 'Institutions are academic, not therapeutic, communities: the task for institutions is to help students to capitalise on the positive mental health benefits of higher education while identifying and providing appropriate support to those who are more vulnerable to its pressures' (UUK, 2015, p.4).

Thesis Overview

This thesis is presented in three sections constituting five discrete studies to address four composite research questions, comprising fifteen chapters [see figure 5]. Chapters one to three consist of the theoretical synthesis section. Having presented the case for investigation, chapter two specifies the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of this study and chapter three draws on Foucaultian philosophy to theorise the process by which neoliberal policy discourse, truth, and power socio-materially and socio-psychologically infuse student experience of wellbeing and living and learning at university. Chapters four to seven constitute the interpretative narrative review section, reporting the method and findings of the academic, social, and financial determinants of student wellbeing in the neoliberal higher education context, alongside examination of theoretical and methodological research trends and existing policy and practice recommendations.

Chapters eight to fourteen constitute the empirical mixed methodological section, examining implementation of the theoretical section in practice. Chapter eight and nine present the methodological rationale, procedure, and findings from a cross-sectional national student survey, investigating the prevalence, variance, and predictors of academic, social, and financial determinants of wellbeing in the neoliberal system. Chapter ten and eleven present the methodological procedure and findings from thematic axial analysis of ten student focus groups exploring student experiential narratives of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal context, whilst eliciting recommendations for policy and practice. Chapter twelve presents Foucaultian-informed interpretative narrative inquiry, exploring the socio-material and socio-psychological consequences of neoliberal higher education policy discourses on student experience of wellbeing and living and learning. Chapter thirteen and fourteen present the findings from nine cross-sectoral interviews with multiple stakeholders to contextualise student experience of wellbeing and provision of policy and practice in the neoliberal system. Chapter fifteen concludes with an integrative summary and discussion, elucidating the implications of the neoliberal higher education context for student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning, and the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach.

Figure 5: WELL@UNI Research Questions and Design

WELL@UNI Research Questions and Design			
1. Primary Research Question How do students experience wellbeing and living and learning in a neoliberal higher educational context and what are the implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach?			
Composite Research Questions	**Secondary Research Questions**	**Study Number**	**Chapter Number**
1.1. What theoretical insights are illuminated through synthesising systems-based theories of wellbeing, cross-disciplinary neoliberal critique, and Foucaultian philosophies of subjectivity?		1. Theoretical Synthesis	1. Case for Investigation 3. Foucaultian Theory
1.2. What are the financial, social, and academic determinants of student wellbeing situated within a neoliberal higher education context?	- 1.2.1 what are the implications of theoretical and methodological trends across the existing literature for the conceptualisation of student wellbeing in a neoliberal higher education context?'	2. Interpretative Narrative Literature Review 3. Cross-Sectional Student Survey 4. Student Focus Groups	5. Financial Narrative Review 6. Social Narrative Review 7. Academic Narrative Review 9. Survey

	- 12.2. 'What recommendations for a whole university approach are propounded across the existing literature?	5. Expert Interviews	11. Focus Group Findings 12. Interpretative Analysis 14. Interview
1.3. What are the benefits and challenges of survey, focus groups and interview methods for situating the experience of wellbeing and service provision within a neoliberal higher educational context?	- 1.3.1. What is the prevalence, variance, and associations of salient social, academic, and financial determinants of student wellbeing within the context of the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal university? - 1.3.2. How do students articulate experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university?' - 1.3.3. How do neoliberal discourses infuse and intersect with student experience of wellbeing	3. Cross-Sectional Student Survey 4. Student Focus Groups 5. Expert Interviews	2. Methodology 8. Survey Method 10. Focus Group Method 13. Interview Method

	and living and learning and recommendations for change?		
1.4. What are the practical implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university?	- 1.4.1. 'What are student perspectives and proposals for policy and practice changes to improve student wellbeing? - 1.4.2. What are the salient issues, needs, and challenges experienced by different stakeholders in a whole university approach to student mental wellbeing?	3. Cross-Sectional Student Survey 4. Student Focus Groups 5. Expert Interviews	15. Discussion

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explicated the conceptual and methodological rationale for an exploration of student experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the context of the neoliberal higher education system.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This thesis applies a multi-phase research design to investigate how the neoliberal higher education context mediates student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the UK to elucidate the implications for a whole university approach in policy and practice. Having first presented the rationale and core tenets of pragmatist ontology with reference to predominant conceptual, theoretical, and methodological trends across the existing literature, this chapter elucidates the methodological implications for the five composite WELL@UNI studies.

Existing Methodological Trends in Student Mental Health Research

The ontological and epistemological foundations of this thesis are situated in response to conceptual fragmentation across existing research and practice (SMaRteN, 2021; Bentall, 2009). Traditional biomedical and psychological paradigms of mental health arguably tend toward a-theoretical and/or individual-level explanations for distress (Meyer, 2019; White, 2015; Atkinson, 2013), foreclosing critical examination of the socio-political context (Loveday, 2018; Gill & Donaghue, 2016; Fisher, 2011). As a result, 'campus health interventions have largely addressed individual and interpersonal factors, rather than environmental/policy-level changes' (Bailey et al., 2020, p. 694), with resource invested into isolated interventions targeting individual behaviours that prove to be ineffective in practice because 'the intervention mechanism is not activated, or even undermined, by the organisational

cultural and political conditions' (Daniels et al., 2020, p.11). Primary emphasis on individual-level interventions is also an ethical concern, given that individual responsibilisation for systemic deficiencies can cause significant physical, emotional and psychological harm (Shoka, 2022; Thomas, 2019). Against this backdrop, a theoretically rigorous 'socio-political epidemiological approach' (Bambra & Eikemo, 2018, p.111) is an epistemological, ethical, and efficacious imperative in order to examine the socio-political and institutional structures, systems, and cultural values that mediate etiological exposure and interventional provision, engagement, and effectiveness within a whole university approach.

The conceptual gaps in the existing evidence base are further compounded by pervasive methodological limitations, wherein robust prevalence estimates and temporal trends are compromised by conceptual inconsistencies regarding terminology and measures, and methodological limitations regarding sampling procedure and size (Sampson et al., 2022; Dodd, 2021; Brown, 2018). Indeed, the field is populated with a multitude of disconnected cross-sectional survey-based reports yielding vastly differing estimates of student wellbeing and mental health difficulties, with no strategy for comparing or interpreting data (Barkham et al., 2019; Linton, Dieppe, & Medina-Lara, 2016). Often these studies are conducted with relatively small, self-selecting, and a-typical samples which conflate different dimensions of wellbeing and menial health diagnoses (Dodd et al., 2021; Hewitt, 2019). These methodological and operational inconsistencies undermine reliable

prevalence estimates, identification of temporal trends, comparison across demographics, and reliable evaluation of interventional outcomes within a whole university approach (Barkham et al., 2019; Brown, 2018; Goodwin et al., 2013; Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012).

Given these limitations for practice, pragmatist ontology and epistemology is ideally placed to synthesise multiple disciplines, methods, and measures by which to produce meaningful, context-specific, and socially-situated policy and practice solutions relevant to the diverse lived experiences, needs, and challenges of different students, staff, and stakeholders (Yahalom & Hamilton, 2023). In particular, pragmatist ontology is consistent with an interdisciplinary biopsychosocial model of mental health, with relative explanatory weighting contingent on individual circumstances and context (Long, McDermott & Meadows, 2018). 'The emergence of both the objective aspects of disease and the nuances of subjectively experienced illness can be accommodated by the biopsychosocial model … offer[ing] the prospect of holism or complexity in relation to health and illness' (Pilgrim, 2015, pp. 165-166) whilst 'leav[ing] room for multi-perspectival conceptualizations of any given mental health problem and multiple points of intervention' (Benning, 2015, p.351). Premised on the pragmatist supposition that 'absolute universal knowledge of mental health is impossible' (Midgley, 2006, p.467) and that 'it may never be possible to know all the factors that contribute to any given health outcome' (Benning, 2015, p.348), this thesis seeks a pluralist and practically applicable biopsychosocial conceptualisation of student wellbeing in the context of the

neoliberal system, to elucidate the implications for multiple stakeholders in the operationalisation of a whole university approach.

Pragmatist Philosophy

Underpinned by Deweyan (1938) philosophy, American pragmatism postulates that knowledge emerges through adaptive problem-based inquiry in contexts where existing experience and language are inadequate to direct future action (Brandom, 2010; Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). The criterion for knowledge is thus not the direct representation of empirical reality, but its practical application and consequences for experience (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Baert, 2005). 'Instead of asking "does this knowledge accurately reflect the underlying reality?", the question becomes "does this knowledge serve our purposes?"' to address the problems which social actors experience (Rorty, 1999). Knowledge is therefore never final, universal, or absolute; rather it is constituted of inherently partial and evolving perspectives, represented through language, that are informed by particular needs, interests, and experiences within a specific situation or context (Bacon, 2012; Reschner, 2001). Different sources and uses of language become helpful to connect with experience in different contexts for different purposes; there can be no single perspective or source of knowledge which is inherently privileged (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009).

Given that 'knowledge ties in with cognitive interests and objectives, [and] no cognitive interest can take a-priori precedence over others; the method

used depends, at least in part, on what the research wants to achieve' (Baert, 2005, p.195); 'no method is intrinsically better than another, though methods may be better than others in relation to particular interests' (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009, p.804). Instead, multiple voices, experiential perspectives, and forms of knowledge must be synthesised dialogically to develop a collective language that is contextually respondent to emergent social problems with utility to make a purposeful difference in practice (Denscombe, 2008; Reschner, 2001; Rorty, 1999; 1989; 1981).

Ontological and Epistemological Position

Each section of this thesis is underpinned by the pragmatist ontological proposition that synthesis of multiple experiences, perspectives, methods, and disciplines is ultimately instrumental to knowledge production that is attuned, applicable, and beneficial within a specific context (Long, McDermott, & Meadows, 2018; Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). Pragmatist ontology demands methodological synthesis of the partial and evolving perspectives inherent to the language, context, and lived experience of different disciplines, student demographics, and stakeholders (Priestley, 2020). Consistent with pragmatist ontology therefore, each phase seeks to contribute to a shared practical outcome: the generation of stakeholder-informed recommendations for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in the neoliberal higher education context.

In pragmatist terms (Rorty, 1981), this thesis cannot and does not seek a universal explanation of the impact of neoliberal policy on student wellbeing through deterministic linear relations of causality (Bell & Green, 2016; Schrecker, 2016). Rather, it seeks a new language of understanding that is more helpfully aligned to pluralist and multi-dimensional subjective experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal context, to 'enable both critique and action' (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009, p.801) in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach through 'deepening the socio-political analysis in order to locate action in the broader context of power relations' (Shareck, Frohlich & Poland, 2013, p.46).

Researcher Positionality

Pragmatist ontology justifies the epistemological imperative and value of ongoing experience with a diverse range of stakeholders to mobilise 'valuable local knowledge from their individual experience and context' (Piper & Emmanuel, 2019, p.3) to ensure that the study outputs remain attuned to stakeholder experiences, needs, and challenges (Ochocka, Janzen, & Nelson, 2002), particularly following the Covid-19 pandemic (Priestley, 2020). As a collaborative PhD award, the study rationale, theory, design, and methodology are all indissociably and symbiotically informed by ongoing engagement as: Research Assistant and Assessor for the University Mental Health Charter; Member of the student-led research team and Special Interest Group co-chair for the Student Mental Health Research

Network [SMaRteN]; Research Assistant for Mind Universities Program; Student Involvement Coordinator and Consultant Trainer for the Charlie Waller Trust; Student Minds Blog Editor; and Research Associate for the North Tyne and Wear NHS Trust. This engagement with student and stakeholder experience elucidated the disconnect between existing knowledge structures and experience in the neoliberal context, the subsequent limitations for action, and the consequent criteria for problem-focused knowledge production orientated to a whole university approach (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Ruwhiu & Cone, 2010; Denscombe, 2008). Hence where from a realist or positivist epistemological perspective, personal context and interest bias knowledge production, the lived experience of the researcher is instrumental to productive pragmatist inquiry by providing the criteria against which epistemological validity can be judged (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009). Furthermore, because experience is conditioned through social participation in a shared language, experience of unfamiliar contexts and subsequent development of new sense-making structures can, in pragmatist terms, elucidate solutions to socially situated challenges (Dewey, 1938).

Research Design

The pragmatist ontological and epistemological underpinnings of each phase of the research design and methodology are subsequently presented in turn.

The design and methodology of study one to five is conceptually grounded in the pragmatist premise that different disciplinary understandings, discourses, and methods are useful in understanding different student experiences and stakeholder perspectives of mental health and wellbeing in different contexts, which dialogically synthesised, produce practically applicable and context-specific knowledge for policy and practice consistent with a whole university approach (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019; Rylander, 2012). In study one, the theoretical synthesis method utilised 'a conjunctive theorising approach' (Tsoukas, 2017, p.302) to develop an innovative theoretical formulation, based on a pragmatist proposition of synthesising different types of data from multiple sources [Torraco, 2016]. Likewise in study two, the integrative and interpretative narrative literature review method was informed by the pragmatist supposition of purposive and pluralist findings from multiple disciplines using different methodologies (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018)

'Pragmatism is generally regarded as the philosophical partner for the mixed-methods approach' (Denscombe, 2008, p.7), where 'multiple methods are chosen in terms of their practical value for dealing with a specific research problem' (Denscombe, 2008, p. 280). Befitting pragmatist ontology therefore, the empirical research design integrated mixed-methodological data collection within a concurrent embedded design (Kettles, Cresswell & Zhang, 2011), combining complementary online focus groups, online interviews, and online survey methods with different student and stakeholder samples across

studies three to five. The selection of these methods correspond with sectoral calls for collection and use of rich data involving the combination of large and representative data sets, as well as detailed accounts of lived experiences and perspectives on student mental health to inform practice and policy (Broglia et al., 2022). Rather than producing an integrated explanation or series of corroborative or parallel accounts, a concurrent embedded design aims to produce plural complementary representations of the same phenomena, with practical utility for different purposes in different contexts (Rylander, 2012; Mason, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddie, 1998). Given this purposive exploration of the plurality and multidimensionality of wellbeing 'with a clear sense that these deal with integrated parts of a whole' (Mason, 2009, p.6) this design comprises a mixed methods study interrogating enriched breadth and depth of experience in contrast to a multiple methods design characterised by complementary methodologies, chosen according to given criterion within a qualitative or quantitative paradigm (Anguera et al., 2018; Salmon, 2015),

Ethical Statement

Ethical approval was obtained from the School of Education Ethics Committee at Durham University [see Appendix 1]. Ethical protocols fully aligned with both the Economic and Social Research Council [ESRC] Framework for Research Ethics and British Educational Research Association [BERA] Ethical Guidelines (2019). The following principles were observed: voluntary informed consent; disclosure; right to withdraw; Protection from

harm; Privacy; Anonymity, confidentiality, & GDPR (Thompson & Chambers, 2011).

Participants were provided with full informed consent [Appendix 2]. Information about the study was communicated appropriately, providing opportunities, in both written and verbal formats, for participants to ask questions and/or raise any concerns. To avoid coercion, participants were not paid but proportionately and fairly renumerated for their time and participation, in line with NHS Ethics Guidance (2014). Given the sensitivity of the research topic, particular care was taken to ensure sensitive language across all communication and data collection to safeguard and avoid personal and social harm. As an accredited Mental Health First Aider and having undertaken Continuous Professional Development safeguarding training with Samaritans, the If U Care Share Foundation, the Charlie Waller Trust and Student Minds, the researcher was particularly well-placed to ensure safe inclusive communication and interaction. Participants were debriefed that a range of specialist support services in the university, the NHS, and the third sector are available with documentation including detailed signposting information on when and how to self-refer, or how to seek advice to support a student peer.

Participants were reminded, verbally and in writing, of their right to withdraw from the study or omit any questions which they did not want to answer. Anonymity was fully protected during data analysis and in external

dissemination through use of pseudonyms for all participants. Anonymisation of data occurred from the first saving of all transcriptions and saved records through the use of codes. Full, and GDPR compliant, systems for privacy, security, and confidentiality of data were also in place, documented in a Data Management and Privacy Plan. All data were stored safely and securely in line with Durham University Information security policies within an ISO 27001 environment. In particular, all identifiable information, including signed consent forms, were stored separately to project data. Survey data were attached to a unique participant ID code stored and processed separately to identifiable information, whilst interviews and focus groups were recorded and stored on an encrypted device until transcription, at which point the recording was erased. An escalation protocol was devised in the event of suspected participant data sharing or infiltration by non-participants. Commitment to academic integrity and transparency was pursued throughout, with no academic misconduct from falsification, distortion, or plagiarism (Dane, 2011).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the pragmatist ontological and epistemological underpinnings uniting the five composite WELL@UNI studies used to address the primary research question.

Chapter Three: Foucaultian Theory and Student Mental Health in a Neoliberal Context

Introduction and Chapter Overview

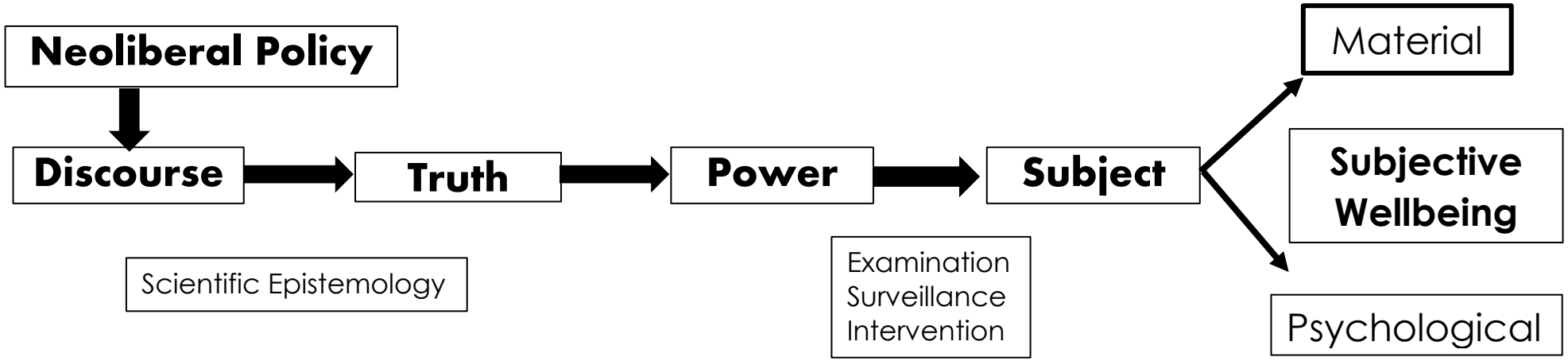
The conceptualisation of neoliberalism propounded in chapter one particularly befits a Foucaultian analysis of the relations between discourse, truth, power, and the subject to critically interrogate student experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal context. Indeed, the multidimensional, dynamic, and encompassing nature of neoliberalism precludes linear causal analysis of singular neoliberal higher education policies on student mental health outcomes, 'requiring instead understanding of discursive regulation, biopolitics, and governmentality' (Birch, 2015, p.575). Drawing on a Foucaultian theoretical framework, it is proposed that the politico-economic neoliberal discourses manifest in UK higher education policy collectively produce, both materially and discursively, a given truth or reality of higher education which, in doing so, reproduce neoliberal power relations that condition the subject and subjective experience (Brooks, 2018; Raaper, 2017; Ball, 2013). Conceptualised as 'a way in which certain actions modify others' (Foucault, 1982, p.788), these neoliberal power relations are theorised to purportedly impact on educational subjects' mental health and wellbeing by mediating exposure, both socio-materially and socio-psychologically, to academic, financial, and social determinants of wellbeing presented in chapters five, six, and seven [see figure 6].

Thus, where systems-based social-ecological theories of mental health foreground the context and settings in which individuals live, learn, and interact, Foucaultian theory is ideally placed to historicise and problematise the neoliberal context of higher education, elucidating specifically how contemporary neoliberal policy discourses construct students' subjective beliefs and behaviours. By deconstructing the neoliberal context of student experience, Foucaultian theory can 'bring assumptions and things taken for granted again into question, to shake habits, ways of acting and thinking, to dispel the familiarity of the accepted' (Foucault, 1984, p.27) and reimagine higher educational possibility conducive to wellbeing consistent with a whole university approach.

This chapter applies a Foucaultian lens to elucidate the underlying relations between discourse, truth, power, and the subject, which frame and constrain subjective experiences of wellbeing in the neoliberal university. Part one identifies the relation between scientific discourse, truth, and power within neoliberal higher education policy, manifest in the enactment of the examination, surveillance, and disciplinary intervention. Part two identifies the biopolitical intersections, founded upon individual ethico-economic intervention, between scientific knowledge of education and mental health in the neoliberal state apparatus, and the implications for the conceptualisation of a whole university approach. Part three identifies the subsequent socio-material and socio-psychological implications of neoliberal

higher education policy for student subjectivity and experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university.

Figure 6: Foucault Philosophy



Neoliberal Higher Education Policy Discourse, Truth, and Power

Discourse and Truth

Discourse, for Foucault (1970; 1974; 1976; 1980; 1982; 1988; 2008), is a social system of language which determines the statements which are possible, meaningful, and acceptable as knowledge within a given field at a given time (Hook, 2007). Hence, discourse encapsulates the socio-cultural conditions that determine who is allowed to speak, what is allowed to be said, and how it can be said within a certain field to be epistemologically valid (Olssen, 2014). Hence, 'discourse is not the equivalent of "language"'; discourse is that which constrains and enables writing, speaking, and thinking' (Ball, 2015, p.311); 'of course, discourses are composed of signs but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things; it is this "more" that renders them irreducible to the language and to speech, it is this "more" that we must reveal and describe' (Foucault, 1974, p. 49). Foucaultian genealogical analysis seeks to present 'a history of the present' (Foucault, 1970, p.208), problematising the normative disciplinary discourses of knowledge 'which we tend to feel are without history' (Foucault, 1980, p.139) to demonstrate their social specificity, and illuminate their significance and implications within a specific social context, 'making it so that what is taken for granted is no longer taken for granted' (Foucault, 1974, p.456).

For Foucault, every discourse is underpinned by a discursive episteme (Foucault, 1974). An episteme is 'the set of rules enabling one to establish which statements in a given discourse can be described as true or false'

(Foucault, 2008, p.35), or rather, a 'strategic apparatus, which permits of separating out from among all statements which are possible those that will be acceptable …. and which it is possible to say are true or false' (Foucault, 1980, p.197). As such, it provides 'a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and functioning of statements as truth' (Foucault, 1976, p.113). Hence discourse, for Foucault, is fundamentally indissociable from socially-specific epistemological rules determining which utterances count as truth and knowledge within a given social context (Hook, 2007).

Foucault (1972) specifies four constitutive elements of a discursive episteme, namely: rules governing the formation of objects; rules governing the formation of concepts; rules governing discursive authority or 'enunciative modality' (Foucault, 1972, p.50); and rules governing theoretical relations to other discourses. Rules governing the formation of objects specify the social 'surfaces of emergence' (Foucault, 1972, p.41) in which objects are delineated from other social categories as 'manifest, nameable, and describable' (Foucault, 1972, p.41) and included in the domains of the discourse; the 'authorities of delimitation' (Foucault, 1972, p.42) wherein specific speakers are endowed with authority to determine the objects pertaining to a specific discursive domain; and the 'grids of specification' (Foucault, 1972, p.42) or the systems whereby discursive formations classify and relate different kinds of objects. Rules governing the formation of concepts specify the relations between statements; the principles upon

which statements are to be accepted and rejected; and procedures of discursive intervention to produce new statements within defined conceptual parameters. Rules governing 'enunciative modality' (Foucault, 1972, p.50) determine the right of a speaker to use a discourse in a given context and institutional site. Rules governing theoretical relations specify 'the formation of strategies' for diffraction or discursive constellation, whereby two or more incompatible statements are permitted or prevented. Indeed, discourses operate as 'discontinuous practices, which cross each other, are sometimes juxtaposed with one another, but can just as well exclude or be unaware of each other' (Foucault, 1970, p.67).

Education theorists (e.g. Ball, 2013; 2012; Doherty, 2008; Walshaw, 2007; Besley & Peters, 2007; Jardine, 2005; Peters, 2002) have thus conceptualised higher education policy, in Foucaultian terms, as 'a discursive construct that relates to wider social processes' (Ball, 2015, p.308). That is, in its reflection and reproduction of the educational discourses, meanings, and values which are accepted as truth, policy is both indicative and formative of specific social relations and systems of language within a given context (Ball, 2013). By extension, it has been theorised that performativity functions as a discursive episteme of neoliberal higher education policy (Lyotard, 1984). That is, as a system of prescribed performance outputs, performativity essentially imposes discursive rules that govern neoliberal higher education policy pertaining to the surfaces of emergence, authorities of delimitation, enunciative modality, and strategies for discursive constellation by which statements are

considered valid and meaningful in the higher education space (Ball, 2012). In Foucaultian terms therefore, neoliberal policies must be conceptualised holistically and collectively as a 'discursive formation' (Foucault, 1974, p.86) – necessarily underpinned by a discursive episteme - that reflect and reproduce social relations, rather than as fragmented operational and/or procedural documentation that simply prescribe certain practices within discrete contexts (Lövbrand & Stripple, 2015). As a result, rather than attempting to measure and model the independent causal effect of discrete neoliberal policies and/or practices on mental health as propounded by positivist epistemology (see e.g. Becker & Hartwich, 2021), Foucaultian-informed inquiry seeks to examine the collective production and implications of higher educational truth for mental health, as mediated by neoliberal policy discourse.

Presence and Absence in Neoliberal Policy Discourse

Foucaultian (1965; 1966; 1976) genealogical analysis demonstrates how, post-Enlightenment, discursive rules pertaining to enunciative modality endow positivist scientific discourses with ultimate social legitimacy. Since the Enlightenment, Foucault (1963, p.38) writes, 'its [science's] role is that of defining the conditions under which the use of reason is legitimate in order to determine what can be known, what must be done, and what may be hoped …. It is when the legitimate use of reason has been clearly defined in its principles that its autonomy can be assured'. Applying Foucaultian insights then, performativity as a discursive episteme attains legitimacy within

contemporary neoliberal institutions and policy, with reference to scientific epistemology (Lyotard, 1984). In theory that is, the application of scientific method through performativity ensures valid a-posteriori measurement and comparison of standardised performance outcomes, enabling impartial, rational, and reliable calculation, both for individuals and institutions, on the efficiency and effectiveness of performance and relative impact of interventional strategies within evidence-based performance management (ibid).

Crucially, as a discourse, 'science forms its own rules and traditions for designating who is competent to speak, what objects can be spoken of, and in what way' (Rose, 1979, p.6). Once placed in these terms, the conceptual formation underlying neoliberal higher education policy - as imposed by the discursive episteme of performativity - determines the production of higher educational knowledge according to scientific epistemological rules of empirical representation and the horizon of consensus (Lyotard, 1984). As a result, neoliberal policy discourse produces the *present* knowledge of neoliberal higher education as follows; that is, both empirically present, and present within the existing parameters of consensus (Lyotard, 1984).

In explanation, in its exclusion of educational discourses incompatible with scientific representation, performativity necessarily determines that knowledge of higher educational performance is empirically representable (Ball, 2015). That is, the objects of emergence and rules governing the

formation of concepts specify that valid educational outcomes are quantifiably measurable. 'Anything not translatable in this way will be abandoned' (Lyotard, 1984, p.4); 'be operational, that is commensurable, or disappear' (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). In addition, performativity necessarily determines that knowledge of educational performance is standardisable and commensurable within the established parameters of higher educational value (Lyotard, 1984). Its formation of strategies for discursive constellation limit the permissible conceptual and theoretical parameters of higher educational performance, whilst the authorities of delimitation and enunciative modality restrict the speakers authorised to determine new objects within this discursive domain (ibid). Hence, through performativity, the prescriptions for educational practice and associated performance indicators must be already established by expert consensus within the authorities of delimitation, and accepted as legitimate, valid, and meaningful within the educational field. 'It is not easy to say something new' (Foucault, 1974, p.44). 'There are things that should be said and ways of saying them' (Lyotard, 1984, p.17).

Taken together, the discursive epistemic conditions of performativity present higher educational performance as a series of objective outputs according to specified pre-determined neoliberal criteria (Lyotard, 1984). Performativity then is both episteme and outcome of neoliberal higher education policy; it self-cites scientific epistemic rules to reproduce a discursive formation of empirical performance indicators within policy, consistent with neoliberal

objectives (Ward, 2014). Crucially then, whilst these performance indicators are discursively legitimated as objective and neutral to inform evidence-based governance in the neoliberal institution, in Foucaultian terms they function discursively to ensure that production of knowledge regarding educational performance is consistent with the social conditions of neoliberal governance (Lyotard, 1984).

In this way, 'policy provides a vocabulary for thinking about and talking about practice, reflecting on it, and evaluating it … squeezing out other ways of articulating practice' (Ball & Hoskins, 2011, p.618). Its strategies for discursive constellation function as 'a system of exclusion' (Foucault, 1974, p.2) for educational discourses that are incompatible with scientific rationality and, by extension therefore, the neoliberal logic of commensurable information for rational choice within free-market competition (Lyotard, 1984). 'Policies work to exclude statements which they characterise as false and keep in circulation those statements which they characterise as true' (Ball & Hoskins, 2011, p.618). 'The manifest discourse, therefore, is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say' (Foucault, 1972, p.25). As a result, higher education is no longer articulable or imaginable in policy as an individual process of self-growth or personal pleasure, given that these discourses are incompatible with scientific empirical representation and standardisation, and by extension, free-market choice, competition, and managerialism (Smith, 2012). Rather, the discourses excluded from neoliberal policy are (re)configured as 'knowledges inadequate to their task,

disqualified knowledges, naïve knowledges, located beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity' (Foucault, 1980, p.81).

Neoliberal Policy Discourse as Performative of Educational Truth

The exclusion of alternative educational discourses from neoliberal policy is, in Foucaultian terms, performative of educational truth; it re-presents that which it purports to present (Doherty, 2008). Where, that is, the performance indicators that are produced by neoliberal policy purport to represent information demonstrating effective higher educational performance, the elimination of alternative discourses (re)define the parameters of performance efficacy (Ward, 2014; Smith, 2012). 'Emergent discourses were constructed to define the field, articulate the positions, and thus subtly set limits to the possibilities of education policy' (Ball, 1990, p.23). Hence, 'policy discourse constitute rather than reflect social reality' (Ball, 2015, p.307) and 'not only describe, but also help to produce the reality they understand' (Law, 2004, p.5) to 'both create and limit our view of education in practice' (Llewellyn, 2016, p.8). For Foucault (1972, p.49) then, discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak; they do not identify objects, they constitute them, and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention'.

Neoliberal policy discourse is recited, in this way, to (re)produce 'the domains of validity, normativity, and actuality' (Foucault, 1974, p.68) of higher educational truth; 'the institution is written into being' (Ball, 2012, p.13)

according to neoliberal policy discourse. Higher educational reality, in these terms, 'is marked by the articulation of a particular type of discourse and a set of practices; a discourse that, on the one hand, constitutes these practices as a set bound together by an intelligible connection and, on the other hand, legislates and can legislate on these practices in terms of true and false' (Foucault, 2008, p.18). The terms of neoliberal policy discourse thus (re)define the 'familiar, unchallenged modes of thought' (Foucault, 1988, p.154) across higher education to appear natural, normal, and desirable (Doherty, 2008).

Discourse and Power

Given the presences and absences inherent to all discourse, the discursive production of knowledge is 'both an instrument and an effect of power' (Foucault, 1982, p.101); it is both formed by, and formative of, power relations (Davies & Bansel, 2007). 'There is', Foucault writes, 'no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (Foucault, 1979, p.27). 'The subject who knows, the objects to be known, and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power/knowledge and their historical transformations' (ibid). Systems of truth and knowledge are thus invariably linked 'by a circular relation to systems of power which produce it and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which redirect it' (Foucault, 1976, p.114). Accepting this, it is proposed both that 1.) Neoliberal power

determines and produces the discourses that count as truth within policy, and 2.) The neoliberal discourses that count as truth within policy (re)produce neoliberal power relations. Each point is discussed in turn as a necessary pre-requisite to elucidate the subsequent implications of neoliberal power/knowledge on the subject and subjective experience.

Discourse, Power & Knowledge

First, 'power produces knowledge' (Foucault, 1979, p.27); 'power produces, it produces reality' (Foucault, 1979. p.194). 'Each society has its regime of truth' Foucault (1976, pp. 112- 113) writes, entailing: (1) 'The types of discourse it [society] harbours and causes to function as true'; (2) 'The mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements'; (3) "The way in which each [i.e. truth and falsity] is sanctioned'; (4) "The techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth'; and (5) 'The status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true' (Foucault 1976, p. 112; 13). 'An apparatus of power produce statements, discourses, and, consequently, all the forms of representation that may then derive from it'; the apparatus of power is a productive instance of discursive practice' (Foucault, 2006, p.13). Hence, the discursive production of truth is indissociably underpinned by relations of power; the power to determine and dominate the epistemic techniques for obtaining truth 'determine the forms and possible domains of knowledge' (Foucault, 1979, p.28).

Power and the Production of Psychological Knowledge

In particular, Foucault's oeuvre traces how 'the emergence of psychological science [such as psychology, psychiatry, and sociology] was indissociable from the political objective of instrumental calculability to coordinate and regulate human capacities in space, time, and sequence to achieve socio-political goals' (Rose, 1980, p.182). 'It would not be possible to isolate [...] the rise of the social science from the development of the new political technology' (Foucault, 1975, p.813); it 'functions as power well before it functions as knowledge' (Foucault, 2006, p.3). Indeed, for Foucault, the epistemic rules governing the discourses, techniques, and expertise that constitute psychological knowledge are structured by the disciplinary requirements of the state apparatus to organize, simplify, and rationalize domains of human individuality and difference (Hacking, 1991). Psychological disciplinary knowledge was thus 'allocated its power by the state' (Rose, 1986, p.44) and 'organized around social objectives' (Rose, 2008, p.452), namely 'the growing demands that individuals should be administered, or distributed, to particular regimes, tasks, or treatments, according to their abilities' (Rose, 2008, p. 449). 'These new practices were carried out by agents designated competent to pronounce the explanations of the psychology of the individual and utilise its practical skills' (Rose, 1985, p.9), whilst 'the grounding of expertise in claims to scientificity and objectivity distance [this] regulation from political power' (Rose, 1998, p.156).

Power, Psychological Knowledge, and Policy

In Foucaultian terms therefore, given the discursive legitimation of scientific knowledge within performativity, the performative image of higher educational truth within neoliberal policy is 'produced under the control dominant if not exclusive of a few great political and economic apparatus' (Foucault, 1980, pp.131-132). Hence, changes in educational 'knowledge follow advances in power' (Foucault, 1979, p.204) and are 'subject to constant economic and political incitement' (Foucault, 1980, p.131), with Foucaultian genealogical analysis demonstrating how valid and valued discourses of educational purpose evolve relative to changing social and economic trends and ends (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2017; Ball & Exley, 2011).

In particular, as legitimate speakers within the discursive authorities of delimitation and enunciative modality, policymakers and university management inhabit a specific context of political and economic power to determine and change the discourses and indicators that count as truth within policy, consistent with the social and economic demands of the market (Ward, 2014; Ball, 2013; Triantafillou, 2013; Ball & Exley, 2011). Thus neoliberal power relations determine and produce the neoliberal discourses that count as truth in policy, wherein 'the overall exercise of political power can be modelled on the principles of a market economy …. taking the formal principles of a market economy and referring and relating them to, of projecting them on to, a general art of government' (Foucault, 2008, p.131). Crucially however, 'power does not belong to anyone or even to a group'

(Foucault, 2006, p.4). Through discursive relations between power within a given regime of truth, 'a disciplinary system is made so that it works by itself, and the person who is in charge of it, or is its director, is not so much an individual as a function that is exercised by this and that person and that could equally be exercised by someone else' (Foucault, 2006, p.55).

Discourse, Knowledge & Power

Two, policy 'governs by the production of truth' (Foucault, 2003, p.252) 'according to the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault, 1980, p.131). 'Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power' (Foucault, 2003, p.24). Policy thus 'consists in the codification of a whole number of power relations which render its functioning possible' (Foucault, 1976, p.157). It provides an 'ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true' (Foucault 1980, 233); in 'the coupling of a set of practices and a regime of truth form an apparatus of knowledge-power that effectively marks out in reality that which does not exist, and legitimately submits it to the division between true and false' (Foucault, 2008, p.19). These power relations within policy are exercised through an eclectic 'ensemble formed by the institutions, procedures, analyses, and reflections, the calculations and tactics, that allow the exercise of this very specific albeit complex form of power' upon the individual in the state apparatus (Foucault 1979, p. 20). Collectively these power structures constitute a 'dispositif' of higher

education, or 'thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions …. the apparatus itself is the system of relations that can be established between these elements' (Foucault, 1980, p.194).

For Foucault (1982, p.789), 'the exercise of power in the form of government is a set of actions brought to bear upon possible actions'. 'Power is always a way of acting upon other persons' (Foucault, 1982, p.789) and 'a way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed' (Foucault, 1982, p.221); 'in effect, what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others [but] instead it acts upon their actions' (Foucault 1982, p.789).; that is, 'the exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome' (Foucault 1982, p.789). Crucially, 'power relations are distinct from objective abilities and relations of communication, and understood through their logical sequence, their abilities, and their interrelationships' (Foucault, 1982, p.788). Policy produces power relations in Foucaultian terms therefore, insofar as it imposes a 'regime of truth' (Foucault, 1980, p.133) to legitimate systems, practices, and communicational discourses which 'acts upon others' actions' to 'simultaneously maximize certain capacities of individuals and constrain others in accordance with particular knowledges and toward particular ends' (Rose, 1998, p.54).

Psychological Knowledge, Performativity and Power

Neoliberal higher education policy recuperates the truth conditions and techniques of psychological science through performativity to create the ideal conditions and subject for the free market to function (Rose, 1999). 'The psychological sciences enabled human capacities and mental processes to become calculable and provide information and normative knowledge, with the authority of science, for the regulation of individual subjectivity' in the state apparatus (Rose, 1996, p.103). Indeed, the 'intellectual techniques' and techniques of inscription' which underpin psychological discourse are intrinsically bound to 'human technologies' within performativity that 'helped give authority a new legitimacy' (Rose, 2008, p.451) by facilitating technical and practical procedures for identifying, inscribing, and intervening upon subjects (Rose, 1996).

In its effect on individual action and conduct, neoliberal higher education policy constitutes a regulatory technology that underpins a whole 'microphysics of power' relations (Foucault, 2006, p.16) across the institutional 'dispositif' (Foucault, 1979, p.27). Notwithstanding the imposition of power 'universally, in a concentrated or diffused form, does not exist' (Foucault, 1982, p.788), Foucault (1979, p.195) traces how in contemporary 'disciplinary society' (Foucault, 1981, p.339), power relations are progressively centralised through the discursive systems, structures, and technologies held in the state apparatus for the production of knowledge (Olssen, 2014). Therefore, whilst 'the exercise of power is elaborated, transformed, organised, [and] endows

itself with processes which are more or less adjusted to the situation' (Foucault, 1982, p.792), Foucault describes three specific power relations inherent to psychological science which, it is argued here, are manifest in the relationship between neoliberal market discourse, performativity, and managerialism (Spooner, 2017) and which frame subjective experience of living and learning in the neoliberal institution, namely: the examination, surveillance, and disciplinary intervention.

The Examination

The examination enacts neoliberal power/knowledge by situating knowledge of individual performance within neoliberal systems of governance (Raaper, 2016; Doherty, 2008). Through 'a transformation into discourse, a technology of power, and a will to knowledge' (Foucault, 1978, p.12), examination outcomes individualise, reify, and objectify individuals 'as a describable, analysable object' of knowledge (Foucault, 1979, p.181) to be classified, categorised, and made knowable to others according to pre-determined indicators (Raaper, 2017). Crucially, these indicators function outside discourses or experience of self-knowledge (Meadmore, 1993), as an 'inaccessible authority without symmetry or reciprocity which thus functions as the source of power' (Foucault, 2006, p.3). The examination thus 'transform [the] pupil into a whole field of knowledge' (Foucault, 1977, p.186) by recording, measuring, and making representable individual performance according to the aforementioned truth criteria of neoliberal performativity,

'providing the vocabulary, the information, and the regulatory techniques for the government of individuals' (Rose, 1998, p.103).

Surveillance

Through repeated assessment within performativity, educational subjects are subject to a 'permanent, exhaustive, omnipresent surveillance' (Foucault, 1979, p.214) and state of 'compulsory visibility' (Foucault, 1979, p.172) in which they are permanently seen and known according to performance outcomes (Ball, 2012). 'Discipline necessarily resorts to writing as an instrument of control, of the permanent and overall taking charge of the individual' (Foucault, 2006, p.48); through the compulsive recording of performance indicators and outcomes, 'everything the individual does and says is graded and recorded, to then transmit this information from below up through the hierarchical levels, and then, finally, to make this information accessible and thereby assure the principle of omnivisibility' (Foucault, 2006, p.49).

In this way, 'a relation of surveillance, defined and regulated, is inscribed at the heart of teaching' (Foucault, 1979, p.176). Indeed inherent to the examination is 'a hierarchal observation and normalising judgement' (Foucault, 1979, p.184) wherein performativity measures, compares, and differentiates individuals against normal progression that 'measure in quantitative terms and hierarchicalize in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals' (Foucault, 1979, p.183); 'it is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify, and to punish. It

establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them' (Foucault, 1979, p.184). 'It observes and records visible differences in individual capacities, enabling the efficient organisation of tasks, establishing norms of individual conduct, and informing visible judgements of conformity and deviation' (Foucault, 1979, p.184). As a system of commensurable outcomes then, performativity facilitates comparison and ranking of individuals both against each other and against a norm or standard (Ball, 2013).

By means of such surveillance, disciplinary power becomes an `integrated' system, linked from the inside to the economy and to the aims of the mechanism in which it was practised' (Foucault, 1979, p.178) to make it possible 'to classify, categorise, measure gaps, and fix norms' in relation to the performativity of the whole system (Foucault, 1977, p.190). Educational subjects 'are made visible and calculable, intelligible and manageable … [in terms of their] result, position, ranking, and category' (Ball, 2015, p, 299) which 'differentiates individuals from one another … [with] an optimum towards which one must improve' (Foucault, 1979, p.183). In doing so, it establishes 'a collective, permanent competition of individuals being classified in relation to one another' (Foucault, 1979, p.162). Hence, through the hierarchal observation and normalising judgement of performativity, disciplinary power is 'produced by a regular movement of examination [and] competition' (Foucault, 2006 p.52) so that 'competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at every moment and every point … in a general regulation of society by

the market' (Foucault, 2008, p.145) by constructing 'a concrete and real space in which the formal structure of competition could function' in the neoliberal institution (Foucault, 2008, p.132).

Intervention

Where the examination (re)frames educational practice through systems of surveillance and against normative outcomes, it (re)signifies the 'abnormal' educational subject as the object of correction and discipline 'in an optimisation of systems of difference' (Foucault, 2008, p.259). Constructing 'a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it' (Foucault, 1982, p.783), disciplinary knowledge legitimates disciplinary techniques enacted on the individual (Foucault, 1979). In particular, examination categories inform 'dividing practices' in which 'the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others' (Foucault, 1982, p.777) and provides the basis of disciplinary intervention and management as 'a system of differentiations which permit one to act upon the actions of others' (Foucault, 1982, p.792). It constitutes 'techniques of disciplining of human difference: individualising humans through classifying them, calibrating their capacities and conducts, inscribing and recording their attributes and deficiencies, managing and utilising their individuality and variability' (Rose 1996, p.19). In particular, through correlative discursive and structural 'dividing practices', assessment indicators categorise and discipline the 'abnormal individual to brand him and alter him' (Foucault, 1979, p.198) by 'means of making educational investments' (Foucault, 2008, p.229). Thus 'the examination underpins

techniques of visualisation, inscription of difference, and assessment of the individual against normal development, transforming transient and intangible conduct into manageable and calculable traces to calculate, supervise, and maximise individual functioning' in the neoliberal state apparatus (Rose, 1998, p.74).

Thus concludes part one of this chapter. Having identified the relations between scientific discourse, truth, and power underpinning neoliberal higher education policy and manifest through the examination, surveillance, and systems of intervention, part two identifies the biopolitical intersection between scientific disciplinary knowledge of education and mental health within the neoliberal state apparatus. It is argued that, through psycho-scientific disciplinary knowledge, mental health and education form interrelated targets of biopower that discipline the individual and reproduce neoliberal normality and optimality.

Neoliberalism and Mental Health Discourse, Truth, and Power
Psychological Knowledge, Biopower and Biopolitics

The implementation of disciplinary power is enacted through arrangement and intervention on the body in the state apparatus (Foucault, 1976); indeed, 'disciplinary power is a quite specific modality of what could be called the synaptic contact of bodies-power (Foucault, 2006, p.40). In particular, biopower is constitutive of 'the disciplines and associated technologies of power operating upon the bodies of individuals …, [involving] the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness, and its docility' (Foucault, 1978, p.138). Reframing government 'as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem, and as power's problem' (Foucault, 1976, p.245), biopower 'endeavours to administer, optimize, and multiply it [the body], subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations' (Foucault, 1976, p,137).

'An explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marks the beginning of an era of biopower' (Foucault, 1981, p.140). Central to biopower, 'society's control over individuals was accomplished not only through consciousness or ideology, but also in the body and with the body' (Foucault, 1973, p.115); 'there is a direct connection between the body and political power' (Foucault, 2006, p.14). 'What is essential in all power is that ultimately it's point of application is always the body' (Foucault, 2006, p.14); 'The body is the

inscribed surface of events and bares and manifests the effects of regulating discourses' (Foucault, 1977, p.148). 'This bio-power was, without question, an indispensable element in the development of capitalism' which made possible 'the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes' (Foucault, 1978, p.140). 'For capitalist society, it was biopolitics, the biological, the somatic, [and] the corporeal that mattered more than anything else' (Foucault, 1974, p.36). This relation between biopower and (neo)liberal capitalism is grounded in disciplinary technologies of the examination, surveillance, and systems of intervention, facilitated by scientific epistemology, and enacted through the state apparatus in both education and mental health policy (Schee, 2007).

For Foucault (1976, p.139), biopower underpins a system of biopolitics combining 'an anatomo-politics of the human body' with 'a biopolitics of the population', wherein psycho-scientific knowledge of the individual body is used to regulate and (re)direct the social body (Rabinow & Rose, 2006). 'The supervision of the body was effected through an entire series of interventions and regulatory controls: a biopolitics of the whole population (Foucault, 1978, p.139). Biopolitics thus enacts 'pastoral power' (Foucault, 1982, p.784), or 'a form of power which does not look after just the whole community, but each individual in particular during his entire life' (Foucault, 1982, p.783) enacting 'regulation of the population through knowledge of the individual' (Rose, 1979, p. 37). It involves 'transformation in the field of knowledge and

constitutes a complex combination of institutions, mechanisms, techniques, and tactics that facilitate the exercise of power over populations' (Foucault, 2007, p.108).

Situating Mental Health in Relations of Discourse-Truth-Power

Foucault's (1965) genealogy *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason* situates mental health within biopolitical relations of discourse, truth, and power, produced and reproduced through scientific disciplinary technologies of the examination, surveillance, and intervention enacted on the individual body to regulate the social body. Deconstructing bio-psycho-scientific representations of mental ill health as an endogenous essence within the 'abnormal' individual body, Foucault (1965) essentially postulates that mental health is social, discursive, and disciplinary - defined by, produced by, and reproducing biopolitical power to regulate socio-economic normality in (neo)-liberal capitalist society.

In explanation, given that what counts as mental 'illness' demonstrably changes over time, mental 'illness' itself cannot, for Foucault (1965), exist as an endogenous pathology within the individual body, precisely because the exact same individual is (re)defined as ill and non-ill in different social contexts (Smeyers, Smith & Standish, 2007). The mad, the unemployed, and the convict for example, cohabit the seventeenth century houses of confinement; there exists, at that particular social moment, a unity of classification (Foucault, 1965). Hence, changes to what counts as mental

'illness' are indissociable from the dominant discourses and concepts that govern society at a given social moment (Stevenson & Cutcliffe, 2006). Where prior to the age of reason, 'madness' is not 'illness' with its connotations of deficiency or disability but emblematic of the 'truth' of the human condition (Foucault, 1965, p.21), Foucault's (1965) genealogical analysis traces how modern scientific conceptualisations of mental 'illness' emerge during the Enlightenment, through recitation of discursive disciplinary rules of scientific rationality.

For Foucault (1965) then, scientific knowledge of mental 'illness' is inherently discursive and 'persists with its claims of scientificity and efficacy to back up its domination through the exclusion of other forms of knowledge and types of treatment' (Rose, 1986, p.44). 'The concept is fixed not by a new rigour in observation, nor by discovery in realm of causes, but by qualitative transmission proceeding from a cause implied in the designation of a significant perception in the effects' (Foucault, 1965, p.118). 'It was', it follows, 'a result of the reactivation of images' within a new context, 'more than by an improvement of knowledge, that unreason was eventually confronted by medical thought' (Foucault, 1965, p.206). As such, 'if it [mental illness] … assumed the aspects our science knows them by', Foucault (1965, p.130) writes, 'it is not because in the course of centuries we have learned to "open our eyes" to real symptoms … it is because in the experience of madness, these concepts were organized around certain qualitative themes that lent

them their unity, gave them their significant coherence, made them finally perceptible'.

Scientific discourses of mental 'illness' are thus inherently constructed and experienced through the socially dominant qualitative (neo)-liberal discourses of (ir)rationality and associated discourses of morality and labour governing neoliberal society (Foucault, 1965; 1954). 'Social pathology is medicalised, necessitating social regulation and reclamation of the unfit into labour normality' (Rose, 1979, p.34). As such, knowledge of mental ill health is discursively defined in opposition to neoliberal ethico-economic normality, stigmatised as 'the psychological effect of a moral fault' (Foucault, 1965, p.158); 'all the ethical values that are linked to labour ultimately determine the experience of madness' (ibid, p.64). Mental illness is thus (re)imagined and stigmatised in neoliberal society as 'indissociably economic and moral' conditions (Foucault, 1965, p.57) that are both subject and object of individual choice - a lack of resilience that is both an ethico-economic deficiency and responsibility of the individual (Binkley, 2011). 'The strategy which makes possible a psychology of the individual is one formed through a systematic grafting of morality onto economics and a systematic medicalisation of the ethical field' (Rose, 1979, p. 16). Moreover, where 'the body is a biopolitical reality, medicine is a biopolitical strategy' (Foucault, 1977, p.148) in which the mentally 'ill' 'body is identified and invested with moral values' (Foucault, 1965, p.150) to legitimate a series of corrective,

regulatory, and disciplinary ethico-economic 'treatments' exercised on the mentally ill body to optimise productivity (Leoni, 2013).

This discursive concept and presence of mental 'illness' acquires 'an inexhaustible and polymorphous causal power' (Foucault, 1978, p.65) in the social imaginary, reflecting and embodying the dominant power's fears and desires for the subject at a particular social moment (Armstrong, 2002; Roberts, 2005). That is, the attribution of 'mental illness' in the scientific sense forms a central mechanism for regulating, conserving, and (re)producing social normality in capitalist society, by dividing and disciplining the socially deviant subject (Leoni, 2013; Roberts, 2005). 'This mode of conceiving and dividing normality and pathology is a constitutive feature of modern psychological knowledge of the individual and the technologies which it operates' (Rose, 1985, p.6); 'psychology would find its subjects, scrutinize and study them, seek to reform or cure them, and, in the process, elaborate theories of mental pathology and norms of behaviour and thought' (Rose, 1998, p.70). 'These powers borrowed from science only their disguise or at most their justification' (Foucault, 1965, p.271).

Hence, through the psycho-scientific disciplinary technologies of the examination, surveillance, and intervention operant in higher education, bio-psycho-scientific knowledge of mental health is constructed to legitimate ethico-economic intervention on the 'abnormal' individual. These biopolitical relations, it is argued here, are enacted through the neoliberal state

apparatus in both higher education and mental health policy, whereby mental health knowledge permeates the universal production of the ideal ethico-economic educational subject and vice versa.

The Intersection and Implications of Psychological Knowledge, Education Policy, and Mental Health in the Neoliberal State Apparatus

Driven by 'the professional interests of psychiatrists and the economic interests of the state' (Rose, 1986, p.55), the abolition of the asylum in the early twentieth century produced a biopolitical and pastoral shift to universal welfare, wellbeing, and health of each individual across the whole population throughout the state apparatus, including education policy (Besley, 2002). As a result, the disciplinary relations of power manifest in 'madness' are transferred onto the psychological wellbeing of the whole population to reproduce (neo)liberal ethico-economic normality and optimality (Schee, 2008). In particular, each individual is responsibilised, through the mobilisation of psychological expertise, to act upon themselves through education to increase their own ethico-economic wellbeing and productive capacity in alignment with neoliberal principles (Rose, 1998). Thus 'mental health was to be a personal responsibility and a national objective' (Rose, 1986, p.52) within (neo)-liberal capitalist society, through a psychologisation of pedagogy and pedagogisation of psychological health (Rose, 1998).

Given that within a regime of truth 'different disciplinary apparatuses must be able to connect up with each other' (Foucault, 2006, p.53), the mode and

measurement for individual self-improvement in neoliberal society is necessarily constructed in both the educational and psychological discipline (Brown & Carr, 2019; Harwood & Allan, 2014). 'Normal is the term used to designate the scholastic prototype and the state of organic health [so] we should look for the principle of diffusion of psychiatric power in the coupling of health institutions and the system of learning' (Foucault, 2006, p.202). That is, through disciplinary knowledge of educational performance relative to normative psychological and ethico-economic standards, 'you see the appearance of [the] mentally defective when there is school discipline (Foucault, 2006, p.53); examination outputs designate the deficient subject and construct the experience of distress by symbolising ethico-economic abnormality and deficiency that require normative intervention (Brown & Carr, 2019). Hence, through biopolitical psycho-scientific disciplinary technologies in the state apparatus, education and mental health become 'relays, networks, reciprocal support' (Foucault, 2006, p.4) in the identification and discipline of (neo)-liberal normality and optimality.

In particular, psychology becomes 'a project of general public education as to the habits likely to promote mental welfare' and productive performance (Rose, 1986, p.52), legitimating 'a range of new experts of subjectivity' (Rose, 1990, 34) to 'teach the specific techniques' (Binkley, 2011, p.375) and 'technical tools to work on the self' (Rose, 2009, p.53). Indeed, the logic of psycho-educational knowledge of resilience, coping, and self-help interventions exemplify the neoliberal problematisation, responsibilization,

and discipline of the individual to optimise the capacities of the self (Binkley, 2011). Education thus becomes instrumental to enhancing psychological health, whilst mental health is instrumentalised as an ethico-economic investment to enhance educational output in the neoliberal system (Binkley, 2011). As such, 'the individual pursuit of wellbeing is one of calculating self-interest' (Binkley, 2011, p.391) as 'subjects are induced to work on themselves and their emotional states as open-ended problems of self-government' (Binkley, 2011, p.372).

A Whole University Approach in Neoliberal Power Relations

Given this biopolitical interrelation between education and mental health policy in the neoliberal state apparatus, discursive exclusion of the neoliberal context from the existing conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach risks, in Foucaultian terms, recuperation and reproduction of individual and institutional disciplinary technologies inherent to the neoliberal system (Kotouza, Callard, & Garnett, 2019). At an individual level, where existing conceptualisations of a whole university approach foreground 'the relationships between mental health and learning' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p.6) and 'promote self-agency, resilience, and independence' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p.10), it is imperative to acknowledge the neoliberal higher education context to prevent disciplinary individualisation and instrumentalisation of mental health knowle4dge (Saltmarsh, 2016). At an institutional level, where a whole university approach is promoted through charter accreditation, it is imperative to acknowledge

the neoliberal higher education context to prevent reproducing disciplinary power relations of the examination, surveillance and intervention inherent to performativity and neoliberal competition (Ward, 2022).

In Foucaultian terms then, neoliberal power relations rely on particular psychological power/knowledge which infuse and intwine educational and psychological wellbeing in the state apparatus (Brown & Carr, 2019; Harwood & Allan, 2014). Through the examination, surveillance, and intervention, both educational and mental health classifications serve to identify and discipline the 'abnormal' social subject as the target for intervention. Hence, the educationally failing subject is reinscribed as a psychologically pathological subject in which ethico-economic education of the self is necessarily required, 'closely linked to the discourse of neoliberalism and its underpinning concept of the enterprising self' (Orgad, 2009, p.151). Part three demonstrates how the intersecting disciplinary technologies intrinsic to education and mental health infuse subjective experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university.

The WELL Neoliberal Subject

The proposed relation between discourse, truth, and power underpinning both higher education and mental health knowledge encapsulate, for Foucault (1982, pp. 777- 778), the 'three modes of objectification which transform human beings into subjects: the modes of inquiry which try to give themselves the status of sciences; the objectivising of the subject in dividing practices [and] the way a human being turns himself into a subject'. Indeed

'subject', for Foucault, connotes both a state of subjection 'to someone else by control or dependence' (Foucault, 1982, p.212) and the self-configuration of an identity 'by a conscience or self-knowledge' (ibid). Subjects are thus 'both constituted and constitute themselves' (Foucault, 1979, p.49) through the aforementioned relations between discourse, truth, and power wherein neoliberal policy technologies impose both material conditions that 'determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends' (Foucault, 1988, p.18) and psychological conditions that 'provide the terms which make self-recognition possible' (Butler, 2005, p.22).

Neoliberal Policy and the Material Implications for Subjective Wellbeing

The disciplinary technologies within the neoliberal university impose material conditions that 'structure the possible fields of action' (Foucault, 1982, p.341) and legitimate intervention to modify conduct 'by control or dependence' (Foucault, 1982, p.212), 'embodied in the design of institutional space, the arrangements of institutional time and activity, procedures of reward and punishment, and the operation of systems of norms and judgements' (Rose, 1990, pp. 152-153) that 'entail the establishment of limitations, controls, forms of coercion, and obligations relying on threats' (Foucault, 2008, p. 64). In this way, 'disciplinary power is applied and brought to bear on the body [and] on its actions' (Foucault, 2006, p.55) which infuse subjective identity through 'a punitive and continuous action on potential behavior that, behind the body itself, projects something like a psyche' (Foucault, 2006, p.52),

Crucially then, 'policy discourse is not simply a form of empty rhetoric. Rather, it gives rise to real symbolic and concrete consequences and challenges for those it addresses' (Olmedo & Wilkins, 2016, p.574). 'It is not simply a question of sorts of recommendations … there really is a limitation' (Foucault, 2008, p.11). The disciplinary techniques and dividing practices inherent to neoliberal policy have physical consequences for the subject, imposing material limitations on actions and relations 'that operate on the field of possibilities in which the behavior of the acting subjects is able to subscribe itself' (Foucault, 1982, p.789) as 'a form of power which makes individuals subjects' (Foucault, 1982, p.781).

Neoliberal Policy and the Psychological Implications for Subjective Wellbeing

In (neo)-liberal society, 'physical power' (Foucault, 2006, p.14) 'has tended to be no longer the major form of power but merely one element among others' (Foucault, 1976, p.136). As such, contrary to juridico or sovereign power whose 'effects take the form of limit and lack' (Foucault, 1976, p.83), disciplinary power in neoliberal society operates as 'a power bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them (Foucault, 1976, p.136). 'The mechanisms for this new art of government have the function of introducing additional freedom through additional control and intervention (Foucault, 2008, p.67).

Foucault (1997, p.81) specifically coins 'governmentality' to denote this production of regulated freedom 'used to shape subjects and govern at a distance by translating the goals of political, social, and economic authorities into the choices and commitments of individuals' (Rose, 1990 p.165) to 'link the ways we are governed by others and the ways we should govern ourselves' (Rose, 1996, p.154).. Governmentality thus constitutes 'techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour' (Foucault, 1997, p.81) 'through techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed and modified by himself' (Foucault, 1993, p. 204). Conceptualised in these terms, performativity performs a 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1988, p.18) , or a disciplinary technique 'which permits individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls' (ibid). Through governmentality, the biopolitical interrelation between disciplinary technologies of the examination, surveillance, and systems of intervention in education and mental health, position the subject in power relations that internally reproduce the optimal entrepreneurial neoliberal subject (Rose 1996). Specifically, 'multiplication of the "enterprise" form within the social body' (Foucault, 2008, p.148) renders the neoliberal subject 'an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself' (Foucault, 2008, p.225) where 'the self is remade into a sort of permanent and multiple enterprise' (Foucault, 2008, p.241) to invest and improve one's performance indicators.

The (Re)production of Neoliberal Subjects

Placed in these terms, the subjective experience of distress 'is an instrument, and not simply a consequence' (Foucault, 1988, p.158) of the neoliberal system, (re)produced 'as both a symptom and tactic' of neoliberal governmentality and subjectification (Loveday, 2018; Brunila & Valero, 2018; Hall & Bowles, 2016; Berg et al., 2016). These conditions function as an affective (self-) disciplinary mechanism to produce the ideal 'docile and capable' (Foucault, 1979, p.294) ethico-economic subject in neoliberal competition 'who is governed and governs itself through responses to the anxiety precipitated by uncertainty in the neoliberalising higher education sector' (Loveday, 2018, p.163). 'Social critique is increasingly replaced by self-critique' (Saleci, 2010, p.31) and 'desires for change are directed away from the socio-political sphere and 'turned inwards' (Makinen, 2012, p.147; Scharff, 2016), 'Anxiety', Loveday (2018, p.156) writes, 'has an active role to play in the creation of the type of entrepreneurial academic subject who aids competition by taking risks' and responsibilizes, indeed disciplines, themselves for their own competitive performance'. Anxiety then 'is not an unintended consequence or malfunction, but is inherent in the design of a system driven by improving productivity and the potential for the accumulation of capital' (Hall & Bowles, 2016, p.33).

Subjective Freedom

Importantly however, subjectivity, for Foucault, encapsulates the possibility of resisting and critiquing neoliberal subjectification and the implications for

wellbeing (Ball, 2015). Given governmentality through a 'conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982, p.212), 'in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides' (Foucault, 1988, p.194). 'If there were no possibility of resistance, there would be no power relations at all' (Foucault, 1997, p.292). Subject positions are not deterministic; rather, they can be resisted through critical (re)examination of power-knowledge relations (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). 'Critique', Foucault (1997, p.386) writes, 'is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth', 'discover[ing] a new way of governing oneself through a different way of dividing up true and false' (Foucault, 1983, p. 233). 'The main objective of these struggles is to attack not so much such or such institution of power, or group, or elite, or class but rather a technique, a form of power' (Foucault, 1982, p.781). Thus, Foucaultian critique involves 'detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony … within which it operates at the present time' (Foucault 1980, p.133) to challenge both the structural conditions of higher education *and* the terms in which higher education subjects (re)identify themselves (Ball & Olmedo, 2013).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has elucidated the implications of Foucaultian theory for conceptualising student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the context of the neoliberal system. Neoliberal higher education policy discourse is theorised to function as 'a system of exclusion' (Foucault, 1974,

p.2) which intrinsically perform 'the domains of validity, normativity, and actuality' (Foucault, 1974, p.68) of higher education as 'both an instrument and an effect of power' (Foucault, 1982, p.101), to 'act upon the actions' (Foucault 1982, p.789) of subjects which, materially and psychologically, mediate the subject's experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university.

Chapter Four: Narrative Literature Review Method

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the methodological rationale and procedure for the WELL@UNI integrative and interpretative narrative literature review. This review was conducted to critically address the composite research question: 'what are the financial, social, and academic determinants of student wellbeing in a neoliberal higher education context?' Secondary conceptual and practical research questions were also specified in line with the project research aim and to inform the composite research questions one and four. Indeed consistent with Foucaultian theory and pragmatist ontology, the review equally sought to address the secondary research questions 'what are the implications of theoretical and methodological trends across the existing literature for the conceptualisation of student wellbeing in a neoliberal higher education context?' and 'what recommendations for a whole university approach are propounded across the existing literature?

Narrative Literature Review Method

An integrative narrative literature review purposively examines, critiques, and synthesises representative literature to produce an innovative, integrative, and interpretative perspective on a novel research question (Torraco, 2016). Critically combining data from theoretical, empirical, experimental, and non-experimental literature, the integrative narrative review method is well-placed to facilitate: identification of salient concepts relevant to the topic under investigation; identification of influential theoretical, conceptual,

and/or methodological frameworks underpinning a field of study; inference of gaps, inconsistencies, and future directions within the existing literature; interpretative synthesis of existing evidence to inform theoretical re-conceptualisation; and critical evaluation of the strength of existing evidence and its applicability to policy and practice (Torraco, 2016; Hopia, Latvala & Liimatainen, 2016; De Souza, Da Silva & De Carvalho, 2010; Whittermore & Knafl, 2005; Russel, 2005).

The integrative interpretative narrative review method draws on professional expertise, experience, and judgement to conduct a purposive synthesis of relevant findings and illuminative gaps across the field (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018). 'This will require the reviewer to draw on his or her tacit knowledge, derived from experience, and to think about the substantive and methodological issues' (Hammersley, 2001, p.548) to interpret the implications for research, policy, and practice (Snilstveit, Oliver & Vojtkova, 2012; De Souza, Da Silva & De Carvalho, 2010). Inquiry is interpretative rather than aggregative, synthesising different findings using different methodologies, whilst critically reflecting on their validity and relevance to direct future action (Greenhalgh, Thorne, & Malterud, 2018). To maximise the criticality and rigour of interpretation (see Hopia, Latvala, & Liimatainen, 2016; De Souza, Da Silva, & De Carvalho, 2010; Whittemore & Knafl, 2005; Russell, 2005), this review method operationalises Cooper's (1982) five stage integrative review process, constituting: 1. Problem formulation; 2. Data collection; 3. Evaluation of data; 4. Data analysis; 5. interpretation and presentation of results.

Taken together, the interpretative integrative narrative review method is strongly aligned with the core tenets of pragmatist ontology underpinning this study (Connell, 2008) and the specified research questions. In particular, the method presupposes interdisciplinarity and pluralist truths synthesised through 'a pragmatic approach accepting various conceptualisations and measurement approaches' (Mittlemark & Bull, 2012, p.36), that are interpreted with reference to the experience, needs, and challenges of multiple stakeholders, and orientated towards the implications for action (Torraco, 2016). Grounded in a shared pragmatist and Foucaultian epistemological premise that knowledge is plural, partial, and invariably constructed by specific perspectives, purposes, and interests (Koopman, 2011), the integrative interpretative narrative reviews in this study seek to synthesise and critically interpret the existing evidence-base for a specific purpose, namely: to contextualise interdisciplinary etiological evidence pertaining to the academic, social, and financial determinants of student mental health within the neoliberal context of higher education, in order to elucidate new forms of understanding and action in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach (Kumar, 2005; Rorty, 1981). Crucially therefore, consistent with pragmatist theorisation of the complex and multi-dimensional epistemology of mental health, the literature reviews in this study were not conducted to exclusively identify or attribute direct evidence of the effect of neoliberal higher education policy on student mental health in a linear causal relation; rather, it sought to elucidate

the salient determinants of wellbeing and interpret how they have been influenced by the neoliberal system.

Narrative Literature Review Procedure

An initial literature search of six databases was conducted [Durham University Discover, Psych-Articles, ERIC, British Education Index, Web of Science and SCOPUS] using a range of search terms and relevant variations with Boolean operators. The initial search terms utilised in the review strategy were informed by the SPIDER search criteria for mixed method evidence synthesis (Cooke, Smith, & Booth, 2012): namely Sample; Phenomenon of Interest; Design; Evaluation; and Research Type [see Figure 7]. To avoid subjective bias from premature analytic closure or exclusion of pertinent evidence relevant to student experience, the search terms aimed to encompass all potentially relevant academic, social, and financial risk and protective factors in the higher education setting (Baethge, Goldbeck-Wood & Mertens, 2019; Hopia, Latvala & Liimatainen, 2016; Whittermore & Knafl, 2005; Russell, 2005).

Figure 7: Narrative Review Search terms

<table>
<tr><th colspan="4">Narrative Review Search Terms</th></tr>
<tr><td>Sample</td><td colspan="3">'higher education' OR 'undergraduate' OR 'post$secondary'; OR faculty OR exp universities/ OR exp faculty/ Or exp students/ OR universit* OR college*</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2"></td><td colspan="3">'mental health' OR 'well$being' OR 'stress' OR 'anxi*' OR 'depress' OR 'flourishing' OR exp mental disorders/ OR psych* OR exp social problems</td></tr>
<tr><td>('financial' OR 'economic' NEAR/1</td><td>('social' OR 'relation*' NEAR/1</td><td>'Test anxiety' OR 'perfectionism' OR</td></tr>
</table>

Phenomenon of Interest	'needs' OR 'situation' OR 'circumstances' OR 'difficult*' OR 'anxi*' OR 'stress' OR 'hardship') OR 'debt' OR 'employment' OR 'inequality' OR 'tuition fees'.	'Isolation' OR 'loneliness' OR 'exclusion' OR 'integration' OR 'interaction' OR 'isolation' OR 'support' OR 'bonding') OR 'belong*' OR 'communit*' OR 'relation' OR 'friend*' OR 'bullying'	'burnout' OR 'assessment' OR 'curricul*' OR 'workload' OR 'self-efficacy' OR 'pedagog*' OR 'teaching' OR 'learning'.
Design	'focus Groups' OR 'Interviews' OR 'Observation' OR 'Systematic Review' OR 'measure' OR 'survey'.		
Evaluation	'effect*' OR 'outcome' OR 'impact' OR 'experience' OR 'association' OR 'barrier' OR 'report'.		
Research Type	All literature types included.		

Thematic sampling was applied to refine and synthesise the results, wherein emergent themes were used to iteratively direct subsequent literature searching (Vasileiou et al., 2018). To further increase the scope of the search, literature was also identified through practitioner networks and manual searching. The reviewer identified further topics through data collection and analysis conducted as part of the University Mental Health Charter consultations (see e.g. Priestley et al., 2022; 2021) and items raised during stakeholder advisory meetings and networks. The reference lists of all included full texts was also scanned for relevant studies through a process of

'backwards citation chasing' (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020, p.2249). Literature searching was conducted until data saturation was obtained (Aguboshim, 2021).

Given that the purpose of the review aimed to integrate and interpret the existing state of knowledge in the field, both the search and inclusion criteria were intentionally broad (Ferrari, 2015), using a 'combination of electronic database searches and grey literature hand searches to find both theoretical and empirical literature on a given topic' (Hopia, Latvala & Limatainen, 2016, p.667). Both literature reviews and empirical studies were included in line with integrative literature review guidance (Pare & Kitsiou, 2017). Grey literature produced by organisations outside of traditional academic publishing channels was also included in order to understand the knowledge, interests, and challenges of different stakeholder groups in the field (Benzies et al., 2006). The sample population, country of origin, and date of publication was refined to interrogate the potential influence of neoliberal higher education policy reforms on the determinants of student wellbeing. Inclusion criteria were therefore restricted to studies pertaining to higher education students; countries in Europe, North America, or Australia with comparable policy contexts; and publication since 1990 in line with neoliberal policy trends [see figure 3].

Narrative Literature Analysis Method

Data extraction from included texts was systematically conducted using Microsoft Excel, documenting author, country, year, theme, theory, method, sample size and characteristics, and policy/ practice recommendations. The method, themes, and policy recommendations were synthesised through selective coding in alignment with the research questions. Selective coding was used to refine and integrate the dimensions, properties, effects, and context of existing conceptual phenomena in the literature and evaluate the strength and relevance of evidence. Throughout selective coding, the conceptual formation and inclusion of themes and sub-themes was informed through researcher experience and judgement of stakeholder needs and interests. Some tangential themes were excluded where insufficient evidence was found either in the literature or through stakeholder engagement; no themes were excluded on the basis of irrelevance to the neoliberal context. Selective coding was ideally placed to inform subsequent interpretative theory development based on integrative interpretation of existing literature in the neoliberal context. Themes were reported through 'emplotment [which] offers a way of transforming fragmented, scattered, and sometimes contradictive communication into understandable narratives' (Haydon & Riet, 2016, p.87).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological rationale and procedure for the WELL@UNI integrative and interpretative narrative literature reviews in addressing the research question; namely to identify the financial, social, and

academic determinants of student wellbeing in a neoliberal higher education context and the implications of methodology and practice for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach.

Chapter Five: Financial Determinants of Student Mental Health in the Neoliberal System: A Narrative Review

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from a narrative literature review investigating the research question: what are the financial determinants of student mental health and wellbeing outcomes in a neoliberal higher education context? 308 texts were included for review. Taken together, strong evidence is found that neoliberal tuition fee reforms in the UK have increased financial difficulties and financial stress among students; that this has significantly and detrimentally impacted on student mental health, physical health, and academic outcomes; and that these effects are disproportionately experienced by marginalised student communities. The review concludes that the neoliberal higher education context has demonstrably, detrimentally, and differentially impacted on student wellbeing. The review also identifies methodological and theoretical trends and evidence-based policy recommendations to inform the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in a neoliberal context.

Design and Methodological Trends

The review identified an expanding body of research literature, predominantly conducted within the US and UK, exploring the implications of students' financial circumstances at university on both wellbeing and academic performance. Notwithstanding, the review identified relatively few

studies specifically interrogating the effect of 2012 UK tuition fee reforms on student mental health and wellbeing outcomes. In addition, existing studies have often focussed on single institutions, using small, a-typical, and non-random samples, whilst the common omission of response rates limit inference of sampling bias (Cheung et al., 2017). Procedurally, the review identified a disproportionate prevalence of cross-sectional, quantitative, and comparative survey-based research design and methodological approaches. As such, the 'existing literature is compromised by its reliance on cross-sectional research designs, limiting the potential to draw conclusions regarding causality' (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020, p.197). Studies have typically used subjective self-report inventories or proxy indicators to quantitatively measure and model the impact of financial variables on wellbeing outcomes of different student sub-populations, instigating issues of measurement reliability and recall bias (Mackinnon & Wang, 2020; Benson-Egglenton, 2019).

With few exceptions (e.g. Clark, Hordosy & Vickers, 2019; Harrison & Watt, 2012), the review identified a relative lack of qualitative, co-produced, or theoretically-informed research to investigate students' perceptions and lived experience of financial determinants of wellbeing within a university context. Conclusions are often inferred through aggregate survey responses a-priori to student input, wherein 'the diverse lived experience of actual students are in danger of getting lost' (Harrison, Agnew & Serido, 2015, p.4). Relatedly, the review identified inconsistent conceptualisations, operationalisations, and

scales used to measure both wellbeing and financial variables, compromising validity, and preventing comparison and/or coordination of conclusion (Dackehag, 2019; Meltzer et al., 2011). Studies have tended to measure student perceptions as a proxy for financial circumstances, with some studies examining 'household income, students' feelings about coping with their living costs day-to-day, while others have focused on feelings about coping with student debt after graduation' (Benson-Egglenton, 2019, p.903). Moreover, the lack of longitudinal research limits inference of changes in wellbeing over time across the student financial lifecycle and beyond (Richardson et al., 2015).

Theoretical Trends

Overall, the review identified a compromising lack of theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the relationship between financial circumstances and student mental health outcomes. Notwithstanding, social causation theories were identified to structure a causal relationship between socio-economic factors and mental health difficulties (Reiss, 2013). Significantly, social selection theories, which posit that individuals with mental health problems experience poorer financial circumstances as an outcome of their psychopathology, were absent in a student context where debt and financial difficulties are structural and commonplace (Callender & Jackson, 2008), with both Jessop, Reid, and Solomon (2020) and Richardson et al. (2017) finding no evidence (n=337; n=454) that baseline student mental

health in the UK predicts subsequent changes in student financial difficulties or concern.

Transactional stress social causation models (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Wheaton, 1985) have been applied to theorise the effect of financial difficulties on mental health outcomes, as mediated through various individual and social risk and protective factors, such as coping strategies, locus of control, self-efficacy, financial knowledge, social support, and sense of belonging (e.g. Blea et al., 2021; Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020; Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018; Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016; Britt et al., 2016; Heckman, Lim & Montalto., 2014; Lincoln & Chae, 2010; Norvilitis & MacLean, 2010; Robb & Sharpe, 2009; Norvilitis et al., 2006). For example, Britt et al. (2016) apply a double ABC stress theoretical framework, where both an individual's perception of a financial stressor and the resources available to react to the stressor ultimately determine stress outcome (McCubbin & Patterson, 1981). Potter, Jayne, and Britt (2020) similarly use the Roy (2009) Adaption Model to theorise financial stress as an outcome of financial coping, mediated by physiologic need, self-concept, role function, and interdependence. Neuroscientific theories have also been applied to theorise the psychological and cognitive consequences of debt on wellbeing and academic performance (Frydman & Carnerer, 2016; Bemel et al., 2016; Mani et al., 2013; Owens et al., 2012; Northern, O'Brien & Goertz, 2010). A range of theoretical models, including 'the COM-B model' (Michie, van Stralen, & West, 2011) and 'Financial Wellness Taxonomy' (Joo, 2008)

have been used to theorise the imperative of financial knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, motivations, and resources within financial interventions (see e.g. Schmidtke et al., 2020).

Most studies differentiate between stressors related to 'the objective inability to meet current financial needs' and the subjective 'perceived inadequacy of the financial situation' (Sinclair & Cheung, 2016, p.2). By extension, several studies applied a Stress Process Model (Pearlin et al., 1981) or Self Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1995) to differentiate and/or synthesise the direct material risks of financial difficulties to mental health and the indirect risks via erosion of personal, psychological, and social coping resources (e.g. Deckard, Goosby & Cheadle, 2022; Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020; Jones, Park & Lefevor, 2018; Reid, Jessop & Miles, 2017; Sweet et al., 2013; Dossey, 2007; Roberts et al., 2000; 1999). To support this theoretical pathway, systematic review found that, in 14 of 26 international studies, the independent psychological variable was either eroded by financial hardship to increase vulnerability to mental health difficulties, or protected mental health by remaining unchanged (Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020).

Taken together, the review identified a clear tendency towards stress theoretical models that frame the relationship between financial circumstances and mental health as the outcome of interacting material and psychosocial risk and protective factors. These theoretical trends arguably foreground individual-level explanations for financial impacts on

mental health, with emphasis on individual stress coping and adaptation (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020). Structuralist theories were strikingly lacking, although socio-ecological theories (e.g. Bronfenbrenner, 1977; 1974) have been applied to situate individual financial circumstances, beliefs, and behaviours in relation to macro socio-economic policy (Hammarstrom & Vitanen, 2019), whilst the 'identity-relevant stress hypothesis' (Thoits, 1995), 'time allocation model' (Becker, 1965) and Bourdieusian theory of capital (Bourdieu, 1986) were found to theorise the impact of financial inequalities on mental health (Hunt, Lincoln & Walker, 2004; Hesketh, 1999). The methodological and theoretical characteristics of the existing research literature arguably substantiate the rationale for integrative theoretical synthesis and mixed-methodological examination of student experiences of financial determinants of wellbeing within the neoliberal policy context.

Financial Circumstances and Mental Health in the General Population

Across Europe, existing research conducted in the general population has found that, controlling for psychological, physical, and demographic factors, economic recession (Kirsch et al., 2019; Karanikolos et al., 2016; Frasquilho et al., 2016; Drydakis, 2015), low socio-economic status (Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020; Marmot & Goldblatt, 2010; Fryers, Melzer & Jenkins, 2003), unemployment (Almasi et al., 2009; Anderson, 2009; Paul & Moser, 2009), debt (Sweet et al., 2013; Meltzer et al., 2013; 2011; 2010; Clark et al., 2012), low income (Sareen et al., 2011; Anderson, 2009; Jenkins et al., 2008), and financial difficulties (Kiely et al., 2015; Butterworth, Rodgers & Windsor, 2009)

are all significantly related to mental and physical ill health and increased suicide risk during the life course. Moreover, systematic review conducted by Reiss (2013) found that 52 of 55 international studies reported an inverse association between at least one indicator of socio-economic status and mental health problems among children and adolescents.

Systematic review (Richardson et al., 2013) examining the relationship between unsecured debt and mental health in the UK general population found that more severe debt was significantly associated with depression, suicidality, substance dependence, physical health difficulties, and both neurotic and psychotic mental health disorders. Specifically Richardson et al. (2013) report that 78.5% of studies (n = 51) found that debt was related to worse mental and/or physical health outcomes, with pooled ratio analysis suggesting that debt increases the risk of mental disorder by 300% and risk of suicide by 800%. In particular, strong evidence was found of association between debt and depression (Kiely et al. 2015; Meltzer et al., 2013, 2010; Stuhldreher et al., 2007) and self-harm and/or suicidality (Barnes et al. 2016; Branas et al. 2015), with evidence of a weaker relationship with anxiety (Meltzer et al., 2013; Drentea & Reynolds, 2012) and psychosis (Jenkins et al., 2008). Richardson et al. (2013) also found strong evidence of a dose-response effect where the risk to mental health increases as debt amount increases (Meltzer et al, 2013; 2011; Jenkins et al., 2008).

Whilst the relationship between physical and mental health difficulties is well established (see e.g. Jansen et al., 2022; Augustus, Bold & Williams, 2019), debt has also been linked to poorer physical health outcomes and behaviours, including obesity (Bambra & Schrecker, 2016), immunocompromisation (Matthews & Gallo, 2011), and high blood pressure (Sweet et al., 2013), mediated through by poor diet (Nelson et al., 2008), drug (Meltzer et al., 2013), and alcohol misuse (Adams & Moore, 2007).

Neoliberal Higher Education Financial Policy Context

Students consistently and increasingly report financial circumstances as one of the most significant stressors at university (Jones, Parker & Lefevor, 2018; Adams, Meyers & Beidas, 2016; Rogers, Creed & Searle, 2016; Heckman, Lim & Montalto, 2014). 'Reviewing funding changes in higher education provides some context for understanding why a student's financial circumstances have the potential to play a bigger role in their wellbeing than ever before' (Benson-Egglenton, 2019, p.3).

Due to government legislation passed in 2010 following the Browne Review, tuition fees for students from England and Wales increased from £3,375 a year in 2011 to £6–9, 000 a year in 2012 (with a further increase to £9,250 in 2017), the largest one-year increase and highest overall cost of higher education in the world (Clark, Hordosy & Vickers, 2019; Bolton, 2012). Students from Scotland and Northern Ireland pay £0 and £3,800 respectively if they study in their home country, but up to £9,000 if they study elsewhere in the UK (Lewis,

Bolton & Lewis, 2022). International students pay higher tuition fees and are ineligible for both tuition and maintenance loans (Marginson, 2018).

This 'current system of higher education funding in England means that many students accrue substantial debt over the course of their studies' (Crawford & Jin, 2014, p.8). The Institute of Fiscal Studies estimate that current UK undergraduate students will graduate with an average debt in excess of £50,000 compared to £24,750 under the previous system (Belfield, Britton, & van der Erve, 2017) - figures compounded over time by the implementation of new repayment terms entailing interest rates equivalent to Retail Price Index Inflation (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020; Clark, Hordosy, & Vickers, 2019). Most students pay tuition fees retrospectively rather than in advance, alongside maintenance loan repayments as part of an income contingent loan once a minimum salary level is attained upon graduation (Belfield, Britton, & van der Erve, 2017). Student debt is waived if not repaid within thirty years (Mazhari & Atherton, 2020), with the UK government paying institutions remaining tuition costs incurred as tuition debt on students' behalf (Bolton, 2012). In 2016, the UK repayment threshold was an annual income of £21,000, compared to median gross annual earnings for full-time employees of £27,600 (Marginson, 2018). In 2015, income-contingent tuition loans of up to £25, 000 were extended to postgraduate education in England (Gov, 2015).

In 2015, bursaries and maintenance grants for low-income students were disbanded and replaced with maintenance loans, furthering increasing the

debt amount students are required to pay back (Mazhari & Atherton, 2020) and meaning that 'the average debt on graduation will be highest among poorest students' at around £53,000 (Bolton 2012, p.22). In addition, UK universities have no statutory requirement to offer financial assistance to support students with living costs (House of Commons, 2022). Successive governments have justified these changes with reference to low interest paid on loans, and the advantageous position of graduates in the job market (Harding, 2011).

Student Financial Circumstances

Given that current UK university tuition and maintenance is predicated on student debt, students occupy a unique financial position that is characterised by financial difficulties, behaviours, and stress according to the following seven trends.

Debt

Average student debt amount and prevalence has increased alongside student finance reforms in the UK (Hartlep et al., 2017; Crawford & Jin, 2014; Harding, 2011; Hunt, Lincoln & Walker, 2004). Whilst the majority of student debt is owed to the government in the form of student loans, approximately a third of students - particularly students from low income backgrounds and ethnic minorities (Baker, Andrews & McDaniel, 2017; Harding, 2011; Ferreire & Farkas, 2009; Oosterbeek & Van Den Broek, 2009; Callender & Jackson, 2008; Nora, Barlow & Crisp, 2006) - are additionally and increasingly indebted

through overdrafts, credit cards, commercial loans, or loans to family and friends (Harding, 2011). The national NatWest Student Living Index (2019) found that 25% of UK undergraduate students (n=2, 964) use a bank overdraft to pay for rent and household bills, with Felicity (2019) similarly finding that 20% of students use payday loans - a 136% increase since 2009. NUS (2014) also found that 37% of undergraduate students in Northern Ireland use a bank overdraft; 24% owe money to family and friends; and 5% had withdrawn payday loans (n=3245).

Financial Difficulties and Stress

A large proportion of students experience financial difficulties meeting basic living expenses, inducing stress regarding their financial situation (Heckman, Lim, & Montalto, 2014). Interestingly however, there is evidence that this concern predates tuition fee reforms in 2010, 2004, and even 1998 (see e.g. Stradling, 2001; Roberts et al., 2000; 1998; Edmundson & Carpenter, 1995; Berry, 1995; Rickinson & Rutherford, 1995; Frazier & Schauben, 1994; Tyrell, 1992; Dunkel-Schetter & Lobel, 1990) and is consistent across different higher education policy contexts outside of the UK and Europe, such as the US, Canada, and New Zealand (e.g. Nissen, Hayward, & McManus, 2019; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010). It is also worth noting that a small minority of studies (e.g. Harrison et al., 2015; Harding, 2011), have found that UK students largely maintain a stable financial position during university and experience minimal financial concern.

Notwithstanding, the general trend is clearly demonstrative of significant and increasing student financial stress over time, both within-person during the university years (Jessop, Reid, & Solomon, 2020; Brennan et al. 2005; Cooke et al. 2004), and in comparison to other groups in the general population (Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018). The Student Money Survey (2018) indicates, for example, that 60% of UK students (n= 3,167) worry about paying back their loan; 84% worry about having enough money to live on; and 50% believe that their mental health has suffered as a result of financial difficulties. Similarly in Northern Ireland, NUS (2014) found that 58% of students regularly worry about not having enough money to meet basic living expenses such as rent or utility bills, and 70% express concern regarding future levels of debt (n=3245). Evidence was found that students' financial stress is compounded by increased competition for employment within a saturated graduate job market, attributed in part to neoliberal expansion of the higher education sector (Green & Henseke, 2016) and significantly predicting increased depressive symptomology (Larcombe & Fethers, 2013).

Increased Cost of Living

Students' financial difficulties have ostensibly been compounded by increasing student accommodation and living costs, parallel to the privatisation and deregulation of social housing (Kenna & Murphy, 2021), particularly as student numbers increase (Chatterton, 2010) and during the post-pandemic cost of living crisis (NatWest, 2021; Save the Student, 2021; Zeldin-O'Neill, 2022;). In 2018, Save the Student campaign reported that the

average rent for student accommodation totals £131 a week, leaving a student on a typical maintenance loan with a remaining £8 per week for all other essential living costs (Save the Student, 2018). As a result, 50% of students in the UK (n=1, 300) regularly struggle to pay rent (Save the Student, 2021).

The 2022 cost of living crisis has exacerbated these trends, with average UK student living costs (n= 2337) increasing by 7% (NatWest, 2021) and the average UK student maintenance loan £340 less per month than average UK living costs (Save the Student, 2022). This has resulted in 96% of UK students (n=3417) further reducing expenditure on essentials (ibid), 11% reporting using foodbanks (NUS, 2022a) and 35% considering dropping out of university for financial reasons (NUS, 2022b). Moreover, 10-14% of students (n= 3,528; n=1,330; n= 32765) are estimated to have experienced homelessness since commencing their studies (rising to 29% among estranged and care-experienced students) (NUS, 2022a; Haskett et al., 2021; Broton & Goldrick-Rab, 2018), with homelessness and housing insecurity found to negatively impact on student (n=16) emotional wellbeing, academic performance, and social relationships (Broton, 2020; Mulrenan, Atkins, & Cox, 2018). Existing evidence also demonstrates high levels of food insecurity across the student population (≈11-47%), disproportionately experienced by minority student groups, and negatively associated with mental and physical health outcomes [Hagedorn et al., 2021; Coffino et al., 2020; Diamond, Stebleton & Delmas, 2020; Leung et al., 2020; Martinez et al., 2020; Nazmi et al., 2019; Knol

et al., 2018; Phillips, McDaniel & Croft, 2018; Bruening et al., 2017; Goldrick-Rab et al., 2016; Hughes et al., 2011).

Part-Time Employment

Parallel to changes in student funding, students have increasingly become employed for longer hours during term time in order to maintain viable living standards (Pollard et al., 2019; Harding, 2011; Callender & Wilkinson 2003). Indeed, Hunt, Lincoln, & Walker (2004, p.15) unequivocally conclude that 'the rise [in part time employment] is associated with changes in funding arrangements for student maintenance'. Existing evidence consistently indicates that approximately 50% of students are employed during term time for an average of 11-15 hours a week, with materially and educationally disadvantaged students both most likely to engage in term-time employment and work longer hours (Larcombe et al. 2016; Adams, Meyers & Beidas, 2016; Gbadamosi et al. 2015; NUS, 2014; Purcell & Elias, 2010; Callender, 2008).

There is strong evidence that UK students' primary motivation for working during term time is to pay for living essentials such as food and rent, and to avoid private debt (Save the Student, 2021; NUS, 2014; Harding, 2011; Purcell & Elias 2010; Rochford, Connolly & Drennan, 2009; Callender, 2008; Martin & McCabe, 2007; Robotham & Julian 2006; Brennan et al., 2005; Manthel & Gilmore, 2005; Carney et al., 2005; Hunt, Lincoln & Walker, 2004). Whilst there are multi-faceted socio-educational benefits of term-time working (Creed, French & Hood, 2015), these are likely to be offset by students' concentration within precarious low skill low wage retail and catering employment

(Callender, 2008), with Hunt, Lincoln & Walker (2004) finding 92% of students (n=879) work in low-paid zero-hour employment unconnected to their studies or future career prospects. In addition, 71% of students earn significantly below the national average wage (Callender, 2008), with strong evidence of mental and physical health risks associated with low-pay precarious employment in both the general (Keely, 2021; Bambra & Schrecker, 2016) and student population (Rydzik, 2022).

Illicit Income

The review identified emerging evidence that, alongside changes in student finance, students are increasingly engaging in illicit and high-risk financial behaviours. Save the Student (2021) found, for example, that 3% of students in the UK (n= 3,161) engage in sex work, 6% in gambling, 6% in cryptocurrency, and 2% in drug trials. Ernst et al. (2021), Sagar et al. (2015), Betzler et al. (2015), and Roberts, Jones, and Sanders (2013) similarly found that between 5 and 7% of UK students (n= 4386; n=6773; n= 4,386; n=200) – disproportionately female students - engage in sex work, with between 17% and 22% having considered sex work as a source of income (ibid). Existing evidence consistently identifies primarily financial motives for engaging in sex work (Ernst et al., 2021; Sagar et al., 2015; Sanders & Hardy, 2014; Roberts, Jones & Sanders, 2013; Roberts et al., 2010), with 54% (n=6, 773) of student sex workers doing so to fund their education, 56% to cover basic living expenses, 45% to avoid getting into debt, and 39% to reduce debt upon graduation (Sagar et al., 2015). Indeed Roberts, Jones, & Sanders (2013, p.349)

unequivocally conclude that 'available evidence suggests that changes in the funding of UK higher education in recent years have been accompanied by an increased student presence in the sex industry, ostensibly for financial reasons, and to make ends meet' with 'student engagement in the sex industry suggested to go hand in hand with rising tuition fees and consequential student impoverishment' (Sagar et al., 2015, p.7). Engagement in sex work for financial reasons is associated with poorer mental health outcomes (Macioti, Geymonat, & Mai, 2021; Krumrei-Mancuso, 2017; Betzer, Kohler, & Schlemm, 2015).

Similarly, 'to lessen the burden of loans and overdrafts, or simply to survive, many students are prepared to take risks and sell drugs' [Anonymous, 2014), with 30% of UK students (n=2618; n=512) estimated to have sold drugs at least once (Bennett & Holloway, 2019; Patton, 2018) for a combination of social and economic motives (Moyle & Coomber, 2019; Bennett & Holloway, 2019). It has also been estimated that college students have the highest prevalence rates of problem (≈10%) and pathological (≈6%) gambling [Nowak & Aloe,, 2018], attributed to financial circumstances (Esparza-Reig et al., 2022), with evidence that problem gambling is associated with depression and a twofold increase in suicidal ideation in a student population (Cook et al., 2015; Stuhldreher et al., 2007; Petry & Weinstock, 2007).

Financial Literacy and Attitudes

The review identified some evidence that student's financial concerns and difficulties may be exacerbated by relatively poor financial literacy, understanding, and budgeting (Bachan, 2014; Harding, 2011; Norvilitis & Maclean, 2010; Norvilitis, 2006; Collard, 2001; Scott, Lewis & Lea, 2001). Students in the UK consistently demonstrate poor understanding of eligibility for financial support, the amount of debt they are likely to accumulate, and the point at which they will be charged interest (Pollard et al., 2019; Save the Student, 2018). Indeed, focus groups with 217 prospective students from 11 state schools across the UK found that students report little to no guidance on student finance from student loan companies, schools, teachers, or parents, with virtually no understanding of tuition fees in terms of amount to be paid, who they were paid to, when/ how they would be re-paid, and what the payment covered (Mazhari & Atherton, 2020). Notwithstanding however, Archuleta, Dale, & Spann (2013) found no relationship between financial knowledge and financial anxiety in a US student population (n=180).

There is mixed evidence regarding students' attitudes towards tuition fee reforms in the UK. Ostensibly most students demonstrate 'debt-resignation', accepting large-scale indebtedness as 'normal' (Harrison et al., 2015). Mazhari & Atherton (2020) even found that some students advocate higher tuition fees to ensure high quality teaching and to maintain the competitive value of their degree within the labour market. There is evidence that young people from low-income backgrounds may be particularly debt positive as means to higher-level careers (Harrison et al, 2015), with some evidence that

debt aversion is less likely to deter students from applying to university since the 2012 tuition fee reforms (Callender & Mason, 2017; Callender & Jackson, 2008).

Taken together, these findings affirm that the neoliberal privatisation of higher education has resulted in a large proportion of UK students experiencing high levels of debt, financial difficulties, and financial stress, alongside financial resignation, low levels of financial literacy, and a necessity of part-time - often precarious and/or illicit - employment to fund living maintenance at university.

Financial Circumstances and Mental Health in the Student Population

Included studies investigating financial circumstances and mental health within a student population were thematised into three categories depending on the conceptualisation of finance used: debt amount; financial difficulties paying for essential living expenses; or subjective financial stress (McCloud & Bann, 2019). Whilst there is a strong interrelationship between student debt, financial difficulties, and financial stress (Walsemann, Gee & Gentile, 2015; Perna, 2008; Grable & Joo, 2006; Norvilitis et al., 2006; Joo, Grable & Bagwell, 2003; Norvilitis, Szablicki, & Wilson, 2003), these concepts are not synonymous (Montalto et al., 2019; Selenko & Batinic, 2011). For example, higher tuition-based debt amount may not result in immediate financial difficulties or stress given that repayment is income contingent (Clark, Hordosy & Vickers, 2019; Richardson et al., 2018), students may have

alternative sources of income (Borg, Borg, & Stranahan, 2019) and/or attitudes to debt (Mazhari & Atherton, 2020; Richardson et al., 2017). Taken together the review found substantial evidence that financial circumstances impact on student mental health, with strong evidence that financial difficulties and financial stress mediate the relationship between debt amount and mental health in a student population (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020; Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020; McCloud & Bann, 2019; Richardson et al., 2018; 2017; 2015a; 2015b; Selenko & Batinic, 2011; Jessop, Herberts & Solomon, 2005). Hence it has been argued that 'student perceptions of debt are more important in terms of mental wellbeing impact than actual levels of debt' (Nissen, Hayward, & McManus, 2019, p. 248).

Student Debt and Mental Health

The review found inconclusive evidence as to whether debt amount significantly impacts on student mental health in isolation, depending largely on whether debt is used as the only measure of financial circumstances, or whether additional objective and subjective measures of debt are used. Systematic review (Richardson et al., 2013) found that debt was related to higher scores on the SF-36 measure of physical and mental health in a UK student population in four studies (Carney, McNeish & McColl, 2005; Jessop et al., 2005; Roberts et al., 2000; 1999). Benson-Egglenton (2019) similarly found debt amount to be significantly inversely associated with wellbeing among UK students (n=1171), corroborating NUS (2012) findings (n=14,404) that 'even relatively small levels of debt are strongly associated with poor student

wellbeing'. Using data taken from the US National Youth Longitudinal Survey [n= 4643], Walsemann, Gee, and Gentile (2015) similarly found that student loans were negatively associated with wellbeing both within and between persons. Likewise, meta-analysis has shown debt amount to be positively associated with anxiety among medical students (Pisaniello et al., 2019; Nissen, Hayward & McManus, 2019), whilst a comparative study in Canada (n=7795) reported lower stress among medical students in regions where tuition remained stable compared to where it had risen significantly (Merani et al., 2010). In the US, higher debt levels have been associated with higher levels of student anxiety (Grable & Joo, 2006; Grable & Bagwell, 2003; Norvilitis et al., 2006; Perna, 2008; Norvilitis, Szablicki, & Wilson, 2003).

However, Richardson et al (2015) found no significant difference in mental health outcomes between groups with different tuition fee debt amounts in Scotland, England, and Wales over two years (n=390), with no evidence that debt amount is associated with psychosis risk in a student population (Richardson et al., 2018). Archuleta, Dale, & Spann (2013) found debt amount was not a significant predictor of student (n=180) anxiety, and similarly Cooke et al., (2004) found no association between anticipated debt and mental health among final year students from one UK university (n=2146).

Student Financial Difficulties and Mental Health

The review found strong evidence that financial difficulties are significantly associated with poor student mental health outcomes. Taken together,

existing research has demonstrated a significant association between financial difficulties and symptoms of depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, psychosis, alcohol dependency, and disordered eating among students (Hertz-Palmor et al. 2021; Shanahan et al., 2020; Bemel et al., 2016; Richardson et al. 2013; 2016; 2018; Benson-Egglenton, 2019; Nelson et al, 2008; Eisenberg et al., 2007; Roberts, 2000; 1999; 1998). Indicatively, Richardson et al. (2017) found that financial difficulties predict greater student depression and stress cross-sectionally, and poorer anxiety, global mental health, and alcohol dependence over time in a longitudinal single-site non-random survey (n=454). Likewise, Richardson et all. (2015) found that financial difficulties significantly predict severe eating attitudes among female students in the UK over time (n=444), after controlling for baseline eating attitudes and demographic variables. Indeed, Wege et al. (2016) found that financial difficulties are associated with a two-fold increase in mental health difficulties.

Student Financial Stress and Mental Health

The review found strong evidence that financial stress and concern is significantly associated with poorer student mental health and wellbeing, including depression, anxiety, psychosis, and alcohol dependence (Sheldon et al., 2021; Porru et al., 2021; Deckard, Goosby & Cheadle, 2021; Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018; Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018; Richardson et al. 2017; Robb et al., 2017; Mukherjee et al., 2017; Rogers, Creed & Searle, 2016; Walsemann, Gee & Gentile, 2015; McPherson, 2012; Eisenberg et al. 2007; Joo., 2008; Jessop,

Herberts, & Solomon, 2005; Carney, McNeish & McColl, 2005; Andrew & Wildings, 2004; Cooke et al., 2004). A longitudinal study at one UK university (n=337) found that greater financial concern at baseline was associated with subsequent deterioration in mental health, physical health, and social functioning (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020), whilst financial concern has been associated with a two-fold increase in mental illness (Stallman, 2010) and attributed to 78% of suicidal intentionality among students (Westefeld et al., 2005). Richardson et al. (2017) similarly found that greater subjective debt stress exacerbated anxiety, depression, stress, and global mental health over time whilst, controlling for demographic variables, financial stress, and worry about future employment predict between 6.2% & 9.6% of the variance in student (n=4575) wellbeing scores (Larcombe, Baik & Finch, 2022),

Financial Difficulties and Mental Health Inequalities

Existing evidence indicates 'clear associations between financial support policy and practice, student wellbeing, [and] socio-economic background' (NUS, 2014, p.14). Indeed, student demographics that experience economic difficulty prior to attending university tend to be disproportionately exposed to debt, financial difficulties, and financial stress and thus the associated mental health implications (Callender & Jackson, 2008; Roberts et al., 2000; 1998), including female (Potter, Jayne & Brett, 2020; Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018; Hinton-Smith 2016), ethnic minorities (Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018; Houle & Addo, 2018; Addo et al. 2016; Huelsman, 2015; Jackson & Reynolds 2013; Grable & Joo, 2006), poorer socio-economic households (Callender & Mason 2017;

NUS, 2014; Callender & Jackson, 2008), estranged students (Spacey & Sanderson, 2021; Costa et al., 2020; Bland, 2018) and students with caring responsibilities (NUS, 2014; Marandet & Wainwright, 2010). Indeed where family support has been found to mediate the relationship between student (n=14, 404; n = 304) financial stress and wellbeing in the UK and US (NUS, 2014; Tran, Lam & Legg, 2018), the 'assumed parental contribution embedded in post-2012 changes necessarily reproduce those [financial and mental health] inequalities that already exist between students' (Clark, Hordosy & Vickers, 2019).

Factors Mediating the Relationship Between Financial Circumstances and Wellbeing

Whilst the available evidence collectively demonstrates that financial difficulties and stress are significantly associated with poorer student mental health and wellbeing, the review found a lack of consensus regarding the specific causal mechanisms underpinning this relationship (McCloud & Bann, 2019). Echoing evidence from the UK general population (Frankham, Richardson & Maguire, 2020; Sweet et al., 2018), shame, negative self-comparison, perceived personal deficiency and responsibility have been found to significantly mediate the relationship between financial difficulties and student depression and anxiety (Blea et al., 2021; Potter, Jayne & Brett, 2020), compounded by 'internalisation of neoliberal ideology around personal debt (Sweet, 2018, p.187).

Financial stress can also significantly impact on student wellbeing via academic difficulties and stress (Deckard, Goosby & Cheadle, 2022; Moore et al., 2021; Benson-Egglenton, 2019; Reid, Jessop & Miles, 2017; Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016; Smyth et al. 2008). Financial difficulties may negatively impact on wellbeing by reducing social integration, identification, and belonging, mediated by long working hours and living away from campus in the family home (Nissen, Hayward & McManus, 2019; Elahi et al., 2018; Adams, Meyers & Beidas 2016; Boatman & Long, 2016; Bernel et al., 2016; Mrozinske, 2016; McGregor, 2015; Quadlin & Rudel 2015; Harrison et al., 2015; Mehta, Newbold, & O'Rourke, 2011; Engle & Tinto 2008; Manthei & Gilmore, 2005; Elling & Elling, 2000; Roberts et al., 2000; 1999). Indicatively, 36% and 65% of UK students (n=2038) report that financial difficulties negatively impact on their close personal relationships and wider social life respectively (Save the Student, 2021).

In addition, whilst there is strong evidence that, in the general population, employment positively effects mental health (e.g. Paul & Moser, 2009), part-time employment may partially mediate the relationship between financial difficulties and mental health difficulties in a student population. Indeed, Potter, Jayne, and Brett (2020), Larcombe et al. (2016), NUS (2014, Mounsey, Vandehey and Diekhoff (2013) and Carney, McNeish and McColl (2005) all found that longer part-time working hours were associated with poorer wellbeing outcomes among students in the US (n=3, 339), Australia (n=5061), Northern Ireland (n=3245), Germany (n=110) and the UK (n=756) respectively.

Alternatively however, Benson-Egglenton (2019) found part-time employment and number of hours worked has no significant impact on wellbeing (n=11, 171), whilst Moxham et al. (2018) found that part-time employment was a significant predictor of better mental health, lower psychological distress, anxiety, and depression among Australian nursing students (n=920).

Where the relationship between physical and mental health is well-established (see e.g. Jansen et al., 2022; Augustus, Bold & Williams, 2019), financial difficulties and stress can both directly and indirectly impact on student physical health leading to detrimental mental health outcomes, via sleep disruption (Yang & Shim, 2021); immune and neuroendocrine suppression (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020); poor diet (Aceijas et al., 2016) smoking (Richardson et al., 2013), binge drinking (Jackson et al., 2016; Nelson et al., 2008), and illicit drug use (Berg et al., 2010). Over-crowding, damp, pest infestation, and fuel poverty in privately rented student accommodation have also been linked to both physical and mental health difficulties among students in the UK (Kousis et al., 2020; NUS, 2019; Mulrenan, Atkins & Cox, 2018).

Financial Circumstances and Academic Performance

Overall, whilst there is mixed evidence as to whether debt amount has a direct impact on academic performance depending on the measure used, strong evidence was found that financial difficulties and financial stress negatively impact on academic performance and retention**, mediated** by

part-time employment. Indicatively whilst Ross et al (2006) found no direct association between debt amount and examination results in the UK (n=352), systematic review and cross-temporal meta-analysis has shown a negative relationship between debt amount and grade point average in the US (Pisanello et al., 2019; Stoddard, Urban & Schmeiser, 2018; Andriole & Jeffe, 2010). Financial difficulties and stress have consistently been found to negatively impact on student perceived and actual academic performance, retention, motivation, and cognition in the UK (Save the Student, 2021; Reid, Jessop & Miles, 2017; NUS, 2014; 2012; Harding, 2011; Miller, Danner & Staten, 2008; Ross et al., 2006) and in the US (Baker & Montalto, 2019; Baker, Andrews & McDaniel, 2017; Britt et al., 2016; Dwyer, Hodson, & McCloud, 2013; Robb, Moody, & Abdel-Ghany, 2012; Northern, O'Brien, & Goetz, 2010; Joo, Durband & Grable, 2009). In addition, whilst Mounsey, Vandehey, and Diekhoff (2013) found no significant differences in grade point average between employed and unemployed students (n=110),overall consistent and significant evidence in the UK (Rochford, Connolly & Drennan, 2009; Callender, 2008; Miller, Donner & Staten, 2008; Purcell et al., 2005; Carney, et al., 2005; Dyke, Little & Callender, 2005; Hunt, Lincoln & Walker, 2004), the US (Logan, Hughes & logan, 2016) and Australia (Salamonson et al., 2018; 2012) has found that financial difficulties can negatively impact on academic performance via part-time employment relative to number of hours worked. A cross-sectional survey of 1012 students across six universities found that, controlling for academic attainment on entry to higher education, gender, institution, subject studied and age, term-

time working had an increasingly significant detrimental effect on both student's academic marks and final degree classification with the more hours students worked (Callender, 2008).

Policy Recommendations

Few studies were found to advocate specific recommendations for policy or practice. Where 'it is assumed that providing a higher level of financial support to students is not a realistic option' (Harding, 2011, p.496), existing recommendations have tended to emphasise individual-level psycho-educational and/or financial skills interventions to mitigate the impact of financial stress on student mental health and academic performance (see e.g. Baker & Montalto, 2019; Adams, Meyers & Beidas, 2016; NUS, 2014; Harding, 2011; Marriott, 2007; Carney et al., 2005). Whilst systematic review found limited evidence for the effectiveness of psycho-educational interventions in isolation (Hathaway & Khatiwada, 2008), psycho-educational interventions coupled with guided practice and motivational resources have been found to improve student (n=177) subjective financial satisfaction (but not objective financial situation) in randomized control trials (Schmidtke et al., 2020).

Information and advice on budgeting and financial management in schools, colleges, and through the University and Colleges Admission Service [UCAS] has been recommended (Mazhari & Atherton, 2020; Pollard, 2019; Atherton et al., 2015). Financial education interventions have been found (n=4,731) to

increase student financial self-efficacy and help-seeking (Heckman, Lim & Montalto., 2014). Tailored financial counselling services have also been recommended (Potter, Jayne & Britt, 2020; Choi et al., 2016; Reed & Hurd, 2016), with preliminary evidence of acceptability and effectiveness in a student population (Peeters et al., 2018; Ali, Bourova & Ramsay, 2017; Britt et al., 2016).

The review identified evidence across the US and UK of beneficial effects of financial bursaries on student mental health and wellbeing, academic performance, and retention (see e.g. Moores & Burgess, 2022; Baker, Andrews, & McDaniel, 2017; Adams, Meyers, & Beidas, 2016; Boatman & Long, 2016; Bryne & Cushing, 2015; Nora, Barlow & Crisp, 2006). Student finance policy reforms in New Zealand involving one year of tertiary education without tuition fees was shown to improve student (n=955) wellbeing, adjustment to university, and grade point average (Sotardi, Thompson & Maguire, 2020; Sotardi, Thompson, & Brogt, 2019).

Chapter Summary

This integrative and interdisciplinary narrative review has found strong evidence that neoliberal tuition fee reforms in the UK have increased financial difficulties and financial stress among students, detrimentally impacting on student mental and physical health and academic outcomes, particularly among marginalised student communities. Indeed 'the financial burden imposed by the current system of university funding in England may

be contributing to or exacerbating students' particular vulnerability to mental health problems' (Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020, p.204). Whilst the review identified a lack of theoretical frameworks to interrogate students' financial experiences in the context of the neoliberal system, the evidence presented substantiates the proposed material and psychological consequences of neoliberal higher education policy which mediate exposure to financial determinants of student mental health.

Chapter Six: Social Determinants of Student Mental Health in the Neoliberal System: A Narrative Review

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from a narrative review investigating the research question: what are the academic determinants of student mental health and wellbeing outcomes in a neoliberal higher education context? 457 texts were included for review. Overall, the review found strong evidence that social integration, belonging, and support positively enrich student mental health, wellbeing, and academic outcomes. In contrast, social discord, distance, or discrimination in students' relationships with peers, university staff, family, and/or the local community can all have negative impacts on student mental health and wellbeing, academic performance, and retention. Evidence is also found that marginalised student communities experience additional barriers and challenges to developing social relationships at university, and consequently experience disproportionate risks to mental wellbeing. It is ultimately concluded that the socio-relational consequences of neoliberal higher education policy increase student exposure to the social determinants of mental health at university, with negative and unequal implications for student wellbeing and academic performance. The review further highlights methodological and theoretical trends, and evidence-based policy recommendations, to inform the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in a neoliberal context.

Design and Methodological Trends

Overall, the review identified a relative lack of relevant, rigorous, UK-based research conducted in a higher educational context. Existing studies have typically focused on single institutions using relatively small and self-selective samples, with common omission of survey response rates limiting inference of sampling bias (Riffenburgh, 2012). Procedurally, the review identified a predominance of cross-sectional and quantitative survey-based research design and methodological approaches, with a tendency for self-report inventories to measure discrete independent relational variables, and statistically model the relative mediatory effect on wellbeing outcomes across different student sub-populations. In addition, the review identified inconsistent conceptualisations, operationalisations, and scales to quantitatively measure student mental health, wellbeing, and socio-relational constructs, with a tendency towards self-report or proxy measures such as 'student experience' outcomes.

With few exceptions (e.g. Priestley et al., 2022; Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009), the review identified a compromising lack of qualitative interpretative research to interrogate student's lived experience of the threats and opportunities for wellbeing-enhancing social relationships at university. Little work has been done to establish how student friendship groups form, how and why students become socially isolated, how student loneliness can be prevented, or the impact of conflictual relationships and/or relationships with

academic staff on belonging and wellbeing, with 'much work to support social integration and the creation of friendship groups within universities often ad hoc and unevaluated' (Hughes & Spanner, 2019, p. 58). The majority of studies do not differentiate between the quantity and quality of social connections, students' emotional and practical appraisal of social relationships, and/or the structure (e.g. density and homophily) of social networks. In addition, the lack of longitudinal research can make causality and directionality difficult to establish (e.g. does mental health symptomology predict social isolation or vice versa), whilst obfuscating the multiplexity, multi-dimensionality, and dynamicity of socio-relational processes over time across different contexts in different cohorts (Matthews et al., 2022).

Theoretical Trends

The review identified a compromising lack of applied theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the impact of socio-relational variables on student mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Notwithstanding, the influence of social relationships on mental health and wellbeing was most commonly theorised through 'direct effect' and/or 'buffering' hypotheses (House & Kahn, 1985; House, 1981) wherein social relationships provide structural, functional, emotional, instrumental, informational, and/or appraisive support that enhances wellbeing and/or mitigates stress via coping resources (Cohen & Wills, 1985).

Existing literature has also applied 'the belongingness hypothesis' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), 'hierarchy of needs' (Maslow, 1970 1968; 1943), 'social identity theory' (Tajfel 1979, 1978; Tajfel & Turner 1979), 'social reinforcement and conformity motivational model' (Cooper, 1994), 'attachment theory' (Bowlby, 1980; 1974; 1952) and 'self-determination theory' (Ryan & Deci, 2000) both to explain students' social behaviours (e.g. Morris, 2021; Roberts & Meredith, 2020; Bowman et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2017; Iarovici, 2014; Groves, Griggs & Leflay, 2012; Masi et al., 2011; Mattanah et al., 2011; Gentzier et al., 2011), and/or to frame the positive and negative impacts of inclusion, exclusion, integration, and isolation on wellbeing (e.g. Pedler et al., 2021; Gillen-O'Neill, 2021; Kiltz et al., 2020; Gomez-Lopez et al., 2019; Reed, Tolman & Safyer, 2015; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Kershaw, 2013; Brannan et al., 2012; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011). A range of theoretical models have also been developed to specifically conceptualise socio-relational processes during student transition, including the student retention model (Tinto, 1993; 1975), student involvement theory (Astin, 1984), situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), the Bridges Transition Model (Bridges, 2009), and U-curve theory of adjustment (Lysgaard, 1955).

Applications of positive psychology paradigms (Diener & Seligman, 2002) were found to frame a bi-directional relationship between social interaction and individual psychological processes and functioning (e.g. Brannan et al., 2012), whilst personality theories of 'emerging adulthood' (Arnett, 2000; e.g. Sica et al., 2018; Shulman & Connolly, 2013) and neurocognitive theories of

functional development (e.g. Baker et al., 2015; Braams et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2014; Peake et al., 2013; Blakemore, 2012; Guyer et al., 2012; 2009) were commonly applied to frame changes in social, romantic, and familial relationships over time (e.g. Lopez Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Iarovici, 2014; Sandberg-Thoma & Dush, 2014; Kershaw, 2013; Gilbert & Sifers, 2011; Braithwaite et al., 2010).

Loneliness was most commonly theorised through a 'cognitive discrepancy model' (Peplau & Perlman, 1982) as disparity between desired and actual social connection (Mansfield et al, 2019; Vasileiou et al. 2019; NUS, 2014; Masi et al., 2011), with theoretical distinction (see e.g., Weiss, 1973) between social loneliness entailing absence of social interaction, emotional loneliness entailing absence of attachment, and existential loneliness entailing alienation from socio-cultural norms (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) and theories of social capital (Putnam, 1993; Bourdieu, 1984) were also frequently used to conceptualise the cumulative impact of additional relational stressors and barriers experienced by minority student groups, particularly during the transition into university.

Taken together, these theoretical trends arguably demonstrate conceptual bias towards individual-level behavioural explanations for the formation and implications of social relationships at university, foregrounding individual choice and personality attributes with little qualitative or theoretical interrogation of how students' social identity and relationships are shaped by

discursive and material forces within the neoliberal institution (Morris, 2021; Pijpers, 2017; Mallman & Lee, 2014; Vaarala, Uusiautti, & Määttä, 2013). Thus, the methodological and theoretical characteristics of the existing research literature arguably substantiate the rationale for integrative theoretical synthesis and mixed-methodological examination of student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal policy context conducted in this study.

Social Determinants of Student Wellbeing

In the general population, existing evidence has consistently demonstrated that strong positive social connections have beneficial consequences for both mental and physical health outcomes, health-related behaviours, and cognitive functioning (see e.g. Ma et al., 2019; Mansfield et al., 2019; Pescheny et al., 2019; Richardson et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Holt-Lunstad et al; 2015; Siedlecki et al., 2014; Mushtaq et al., 2014; Masi et al., 2011; Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010), with meta-analysis finding the effect size of social support on mental health outcomes to be higher among university students than other general sub-populations (Harandi et al., 2017).

Existing evidence has consistently indicated that the quality and quantity of students' social relationships is a stronger predictor of student mental health outcomes than financial or academic factors (Broglia, Millings & Barkham, 2021; Jackson et al., 2019; McIntyre et al., 2018; Bowman et al., 2018; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Wilcox, Winn & Fyvie-Gauld, 2006). Narrative review of 40

qualitative studies found that family, romantic, peer, and faculty relationships were the most commonly reported source of stress among university students (Hurst et al., 2013). In particular, a single-site cross-sectional UK-based study (n=1135) found that connection with student peers was a more significant predictor of student mental health outcomes than relationships with faculty, family, or the local community (McIntyre et al., 2018), with Alsubaie et al. (2019) similarly finding that peer social support is a stronger predictor of student quality of life in the UK (n=461) than social support from family or significant others.

Peer Relationships
Peer Social Support

In a UK student population, existing evidence indicates that social integration, connection, and sense of belonging are significantly positively associated with mental health outcomes. Both Alsubaie et al. (2019) [n=461] and McIntyre et al. (2018) [n= 1135] found that peer social support significantly predicts lower depressive and anxiety symptoms and higher quality of life in a UK student population, whilst Eisenberg & Hefner (2009) (n=1, 378) and Lee (2020) (n=184) similarly found that higher perceived quality of social support is strongly negatively associated with depression, anxiety, suicidality, and disordered eating in US students. Supportive peer relationships also predict physical health outcomes (Klaiber, Whillans & Chen, 2018; Gouin, Zhou, & Fitz-Patrick, 2015) and academic outcomes in a student population,

including engagement, retention, and grade point average (Graham, Powell & Truscott, 2016; Hausmann et al., 2009).

This relationship between peer social support and subjective wellbeing has been replicated in student populations in Spain (Yubero et al., 2018; Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006), France (Bouteyre et al., 2007), Germany (Worfel et al., 2015), Portugal (Imaginario, 2013), Turkey (Karaman & Tarim, 2018), Malaysia (Awang, Kutty & Ahmed, 2014; Yasin & Dzulkifli, 2010), China (Kong, Zhao & You, 2012), Japan (Abe, 2004), India (Jaisoorya et al., 2017); Pakistan (Bukhari & Afzal, 2017), Iran (Peyravi, Ahmad & Leili, 2010; Bakhshipour, Peyravi & Abedian, 2005), Sudan (Dafaalla et al., 2016), Ghana (Kugbey, 2015), and Jordan (Brannan et al., 2012; Hamdan-Mansour & Dawani, 2008).

Belonging

The review found evidence that the relationship between supportive peer social relations and mental health outcomes is strongly mediated by sense of belonging (Maunders, 2018; Bowman et al., 2018; Meehan & Howells, 2018; Iarovici, 2014; France, Finney, & Swerdzewski 2010; Pitman & Richmond, 2008; Buote et al., 2007). 'A sense of belonging can be conceptualised as students' perception of feeling valued and respected by other students and feeling like a valued part of the university context' (Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2019, p.376). Belonging fluctuates over time (Gillen O 'Neill, 2021; Bowman et al., 2018) and responsively predicts wellbeing and life satisfaction in a student population (Morris, 2021; Moeller, Seehuus & Peisch, 2020; Pittman

& Richmond, 2008), whilst the absence of belonging has been associated with psychological distress, including increased stress, burnout, depression, social anxiety, and suicidality (McIntyre et al., 2018; Peltonen et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2015; Stebleton, Soria, & Huesman, 2014). Belonging also predicts academic self-efficacy, engagement, motivation, retention, and achievement (Pedler et al., 2021; Gillen-O'Neel, 2021; Picton, Kahu, & Nelson, 2018; Masika & Jones 2016; O'Keefe, 2013; Thomas, 2012).

Loneliness

Loneliness was found to be relatively prevalent among UK students, and bi-directionally associated with poorer mental health and wellbeing outcomes (Diehl et al., 2018; Neale et al., 2016; NUS, 2014). It is estimated that the prevalence of student loneliness is double that of the age-equivalent non-student population (Jopling & Valtorta, 2018), with between 15% and 26% of UK students (n= 2004; n= 1615; n=10,163) reporting feeling lonely every day (Dickinson, 2019; Jobling & Valtorta, 2018; Neves & Stephenson, 2023). Sexual minority students (Gorczynski & Fasoli, 2022; Burch, Nelson & Wilson, 2021; Wilson & Cariola, 2019; Smithies & Byrom, 2018; Kirsch, Conley & Riley, 2015), international students (Frampton, Smith & Smithies, 2022; Maleku et al. 2021; Wawera & McCamley, 2020), BAME students (Dickinson, 2019), disabled students (Kotero et al., 2021) and working class students (Jopling & Valtorta, 2018; Rubin, Evans & Wilkinson, 2016; Rubin, 2012) report higher prevalence of social isolation and loneliness at university.

Social loneliness and isolation at university is significantly associated with increased risk of mental health difficulties (Brett, Mathieson & Rowley, 2022; McIntyre et al., 2018; Diehl et al., 2018), including a 600% and 300% increase in student depression and anxiety respectively (Eisenberg & Hefner, 2009). Controlling for demographic and baseline mental health, loneliness has been found to predict higher anxiety, stress, and depression in UK undergraduate students (n=454) over time (Richardson, Roberts & Jansen, 2016), whilst students experiencing mental health difficulties are more than twice as likely to report feeling lonely (Neale et al., 2016). 74% of UK students (n=2,000) report challenges making friends upon entry to university (Jopling & Valtorta, 2018), with isolation during transition significantly predicting subsequent loneliness (Fiori & Consedine, 2013); decreased mental wellbeing (Bowman et al., 2018; Hughes & Smail, 2015; Wrench, Garrett, & King 2014). Loneliness is also associated with increased physical health risk behaviours such as alcohol abuse, physical inactivity, and sleep deprivation (Matthews et al., 2019; Richard et al., 2017) and academic under-performance (Coile et al., 2021; Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020; Hunley, 2010) including drop out (Mansfield et al, 2019; Yorke & Longden 2008).

Romantic and Sexual Relationships

Whilst the wide range of intervening variables make definitive conclusions challenging (Kansky, 2018), existing research has generally associated student romantic relationships with positive physical and mental wellbeing outcomes, including self-esteem, life satisfaction, and positive affect (Lopez,

Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Diehl et al., 2018; Kansky, 2018; Davilla et al., 2017). Indicatively, both Whitton et al. (2012) and Braithwaite, Delevi & Fincham (2010) found that US students (n= 1,621; n=889) in committed romantic relationships report higher wellbeing and lower substance misuse compared to single peers. However, controlling, conflictual, and/or violent romantic relationships have been associated with negative mental health outcomes, including depression, anxiety, and lower life satisfaction (Lopez, Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Kansky, 2018; Marcum et al., 2016; Soller, 2014; Miller, 2014; Boyle et al., 2013; Shorey et al., 2011). In addition, approximately 40% (n= 1295) of young adults report at least one romantic break-up over a 20-month period (Rhoades et al., 2011) and following a recent break-up, university students (n=192) report higher depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance, substance use, and intrusive thoughts (Field et al., 2011) with a statistically significant negative impact on student (n=283) academic performance (Field et al., 2012).

Approximately 24-26% of UK students (n=1,004; n=1985) have been found to engage in causal sexual relationships (Hillman, 2021; South & Lei, 2021), with mixed impacts on wellbeing (Iarovici, 2014; Vrangalova, 2014). Whilst some studies have found little to no evidence of long-term negative impacts (Lopez, Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Collibee & Furman, 2014; Vrangalova, 2014; Garcia, Soriano Arriaza, 2014), Sandberg-Thoma and Dush (2014) found that, controlling for mental health status, casual sexual relationships were positively associated with suicidality and depressive symptomology among

adolescents in the US (n=12, 401). 'Despite the proliferation of online dating opportunities, the impact on relationships is poorly understood' (Kansky, 2018, p.11). Approximately 10% of undergraduate students in the US (n=1316) use swipe-based dating apps, with both male and female student users reporting lower body satisfaction, and male users reporting lower self-esteem (Strubel & Petrie, 2017). Increased frequency and duration of use has been associated with greater psychological distress and depression (Holtzhausen et al., 2020; Reed, Tolman & Ward, 2016).

Approximately 23% and 12% of female and male students respectively have experienced non-consensual sexual contact, with 7% and 3% respectively experiencing this since starting university (Conley et al., 2017; Fedina, Holmes, & Backes 2016). Regardless of gender, sexual assault victimisation is consistently associated with substantially increased odds of depression, anxiety, disordered eating, non-suicidal self-injury, suicidal ideation, and post-traumatic stress disorder in a student population (Blanco et al., 2021; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Parr, 2020; Ganson et al., 2020; Klein & Martin, 2019; Assari & Lankarani, 2018; Carey et al., 2018; Mellins et al., 2017; Schrag, 2017; Cantor et al., 2015; Hossain, Memiah & Adeyinka, 2014; Romito & Grassi, 2007; Gross et al., 2006).

Relationships with Housemates

Approximately 70% of UK students live with peers (Bowen, 2019), and relationships with housemates have been identified to have a significant

impact on wellbeing (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021a). 49% and 86% of UK students (n=90) report positive relationships with all or at least one housemate respectively (Foulkes et al., 2021) and 'strong social groups formed within shared accommodation support wellbeing, increase sense of belonging' (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021b, p.6) and protect against loneliness (Valtorta & Jopling, 2018; Henninger et al., 2016). However, as students transfer different independent living habits, behaviours, and expectations into a single environment, tension and conflict amongst housemates is common (Foulkes et al., 2021; Foulkes, McMillan, & Gregory 2019; Walsh, Taylor, & Brennick 2018; Holton, 2016), which can be detrimental to student wellbeing (Foulkes et al., 2021; Neale et al., 2016; Erb et al. 2014). It is estimated that 44% of students live with at least one person with whom they had a negative relationship (Foulkes et al., 2021) which has been associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and loneliness among UK students (n=904) (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021a; 2021b; Foulkes et al., 2021).

Peer Conflict and Bullying

Conflictual peer relationships emerged as a potential, yet poorly understood, risk to student mental health and wellbeing in a university environment (Harrison, Hulme & Fox, 2022; Myers & Cowie, 2016; 2015; Cowie et al., 2013; Romito & Grassi, 2007) with an estimated 8-21% of students reporting being (cyber)bullied at university (Maguire & Cameron, 2021; Maunder, 2018; Sinkkonen, Puhakka & Meriläinen, 2014; McDonald & Roberts-Pittman, 2010, Schenk & Fremouw, 2012). Bullying in higher education has been found to

resemble school and workplace bullying (Harrison, Hulme & Fox, 2021), with extensive literature from both a school context (e.g., Hase et al., 2015; Coggan et al., 2012) and various workplaces (e.g. Verkuil, Atasayi & Molendjik, 2015; Neilson & Einarsen, 2012) demonstrating a negative impact on mental health, wellbeing, and performance outcomes. Bullying victimisation at university predicts lower self-esteem and wellbeing, higher stress, and lower academic motivation and competence (Lin et al., 2020; Young-Jones et al. 2015). Cyberbullying is similarly associated with depression, anxiety, paranoia, and suicidality in a student population (Watts et al., 2017; Faucher, Jackson & Cassidy, 2014; Schenk & Fremouw, 2012; Brewer et al., 2012), and negatively associated with academic performance and retention (Mishna et al., 2018; Faucher, Jackson & Cassidy, 2014). Sexual minority students (Walker, 2021; Hinduja & Patchin, 2020; Gooch & Bachmann, 2018; Woodford et al., 2014; Blosnich & Bossarte, 2012) and ethnic minority students (Rowan-Kenyon et al., 2021; Jochman et al.,2019) are significantly more likely to experience bullying and discrimination at university.

Alcohol and Substance Misuse

Internationally, university students have consistently been found to consume more alcohol than the age-equivalent non-student population (Henderson et al., 2019; Schulenberg et al., 2019; Said et al., 2013; Rickwood et al., 2011; Reifman et al., 2010; Blanco et al., 2008), attributed to social motives (Penny & Armstrong, 2010; Pauley & Hesse, 2009; Crawford & Novak, 2006). It is estimated that between 37 and 48% of students engage in regular binge

drinking (Tembo, Burns & Kalembo, 2017; Hallett et al., 2012; Saltz et al., 2009), whilst 11% meet clinical criteria for alcohol use disorder (Leshner & Layne, 2021). Higher alcohol consumption has consistently been associated with increased risk of mental and physical health difficulties both in the general population (e.g., Boden & Fergusson, 2011) and in a student population (Saether et al., 2019; Geisner et al., 2012; Pauley & Hesse, 2009). Indeed, Tembo, Burns, and Kalembo (2017) found that students (n= 2518) who consume hazardous levels of alcohol were 1.2 times more likely to report psychological distress, whilst students who experience mentally ill health are more likely to consume greater alcohol levels (Lo et al., 2013; Paul & Hesse, 2009).

Whilst prevalence estimates vary significantly depending on type and frequency of use, a sizeable proportion of the student population have been estimated to engage in illicit drug use, especially cannabis (≈38%) and stimulant 'study' drugs (≈10%) (see Johnston et al., 2016 for overview; Walters et al., 2018; Marconi et al., 2016; Keith et al., 2015; Buckner et al., 2010). Prescription and recreational drug misuse is associated with increased risk of self-harm, suicidality, psychosis, and disordered eating in a US student population (n= 42, 618) (Ganson, Murray & Ngata, 2021; see also Ganson et al., 2022; Gobbi et al., 2019; Walters et al., 2018) and negatively associated with academic achievement (Jeynes, 2021). In addition, approximately 18% of young adults in the US (n=1564) are characterised as 'social smokers', using tobacco mainly, or exclusively, in social situations (Villanti et al., 2017), with

some evidence that social student smokers experience increased risk of depression (Cai et al., 2015).

Social Media

The review found mixed evidence regarding the impact of social media use on mental health depending on amount, type, platform, and motive for use (Seabrook, Kern & Richard, 2016). Some evidence was found that social media use is positively associated with anxiety, depression, compulsive disorders, alcohol abuse, loneliness, body image dissatisfaction, and disordered eating in a student population (Twenge et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2018; Tromholt, 2016; Frost & Rickwood, 2016; Andreassen et al., 2016; Song et al., 2014; Kross et al., 2013). However, other evidence (e.g., Orben & Przybylski, 2019; Berryman et al., 2017) found no association between social media use and mental health, with some research indicating benefits of social media for social connectivity (Ryan et al., 2017; Pittman & Reich, 2016), especially among minority groups (Glazzard & Stones, 2019).

Staff Relationships

The review found a compromising lack of robust and theoretically informed evidence pertaining to how staff relationships with students in a UK university context can impact on student mental health and wellbeing (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014). Notwithstanding, international evidence in a school context has demonstrated that teacher-student relationships can positively or negatively impact on both student mental health and wellbeing (e.g. Maelan et al.,

2018; Harding et al., 2018; Littlecott, Moore & Murphy, 2018; Graham, Powell & Truscott, 2016; Kidger et al., 2012) and academic engagement and outcomes (e.g. Roorda et al., 2011; Komarraju et al., 2010). Indeed, it has between estimated that perceived teacher support accounts for between 11% and 16% of variance in pupils' subjective wellbeing (Suldo et al., 2009; Van Petegem et al., 2007).

In a university context, available evidence indicates that positive and personally supportive pastoral and pedagogical staff-student relationships can impact positively on student's sense of belonging, wellbeing, retention, and academic outcomes, particularly during academic transition (Payne, 2022; Brunsting et al., 2019; Kotter et al., 2019; Meehan & Howells, 2018; 2017; Hughes & Smail, 2015; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Wynaden, 2014; O'Keefe, 2013; Carmeli, Brueller & Dutton, 2009; Tinklin, Riddle & Wilson, 2005; Lähteenoja & Pirttilä-Backman, 2005). By contrast, distant or conflictual staff-student relationships negatively impact on wellbeing (Rakow et al., under review; Naylor, Bird & Butler, 2021; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013), with Blackman (2020) finding that students who experience few or no helpful teacher interactions are 146% more likely to report a high level of life dissatisfaction and 65% more likely to report a high level of anxiety than students who report all or most teachers as helpful (n=14,000).

Family and Community Relationships

The review found evidence that student wellbeing is influenced by familial relationships (Yubero et al. 2018; Mattanah, Lopez & Govern, 2011; Eisenberg & Hefner, 2009; Wang & Castaneda-Sound, 2008), including family support (Alsubaie et al.2019; Torre et al., 2019; Bowman, 2018; Jones, Park & Lefevor, 2018), family conflict or breakdown (Ross & Wynne, 2010; Eisenberg & Hefner, 2009; Hannum & Dvorak, 2004; McIntyre et al. 2003), familial pressure (Casaburo et al., 2010), parenting style (Covarrubias, Romero Trivelli, 2015; Rubin & Kelly, 2015; Love & Thomas, 2014; Barton, 2012), parental abuse and/or neglect (Davies, Read & Shevlin, 2022; Husky et al., 2022; Bhargav & Swords, 2022; Watt et al., 2020; Karatekin & Ahluwalia, 2020; McLafferty et al., 2019; Hinjosa, 2019; McIntyre et al., 2018; Karatekin, 2017; Khrapatine & Berman, 2017), and caring responsibilities (Runacres et al. 2021; Misca & Thornton, 2021; Waterhouse, Samra & Lucassen, 2020; Giancola, 2009). In addition, the review found preliminary evidence that relationships with local residents and sense of belonging in the local community impact on student wellbeing (Priestley et al., 2022; McIntyre et al. 2018; Woldoff & Weiss, 2018).

Exposure to Social Determinants of Mental Health in the Neoliberal University

Notwithstanding the relative lack of theoretical interrogation of students' social relationships in the context of the neoliberal university, preliminary evidence was found that the core tenets of neoliberal higher education policy arguably increase (unequal) student exposure to various social determinants of mental health and wellbeing identified in this review.

Neoliberal Policy, Individualism, and Isolation

Preliminary evidence was identified that the 'individualism promoted by neoliberalism undermines the maintenance of social relations' (Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2020, p.247), compounding student experience of exclusion, isolation, and loneliness (Desierto & Maio, 2020). Indeed 'the possessive individualism which ideologically underpins neoliberalism … rejects the idea that humans are essentially social beings, for whom belonging to entities larger than the self is essential to identity and wellbeing' (Ruskin, 2014, p.145). Indicatively, parallel to the neoliberalisation of social policy, cross-temporal meta-analysis has identified a significant and linear increase in loneliness between 1976 and 2019 among young adults (n=124, 855) in the US (Buecker et al., 2021) corresponding with cross-temporal meta-analytic evidence that young adults (n= 41,641) 'spend more time doing individual activities for instrumental value or sense of personal achievement (Curran & Hill, 2019, p.412). Indeed, it has been argued that 'with its strong emphasis on individual responsibility and non-reliance on others, neoliberalism denies people access to the curative potential of social connections [and so] … might be expected to have deleterious consequences for health and wellbeing' (Becker & Hartwich, 2021, pp.3-4).

In particular, individualised neoliberal performance measurement and management systems have been identified to structurally inhibit caring, wellbeing-facilitative, social relationships (Brunella, 2019; Keddie, 2016; Ball, 2015; Morrissey, 2015), Indeed, performativity demonstrably incentivises and

rewards individualism and freedom from dependent caring responsibilities which inhibit flexible labour capacities (Sims, 2019; Ball, 2012; McRobbie, 2011; Lynch, 2010; 2006). Moreover, the necessity of enterprise in competitive systems of performance output have been shown to reduce the perceived time available for social interaction (Bergin & Pakenham, 2014; Kyndt et al. 2014; Robotham & Julian, 2008). Thus 'neoliberalism's way of dissociating the individual from society, and of demanding self-reliance and maximization of self-interest, produce withdrawal' and isolation (Layton, 2013, p. 163).

Neoliberal Policy, Competition, and Conflict

Preliminary evidence was found that 'the highly individualised entrepreneurialism at the heart of the new academy has allowed a particular care-less form of competitive individualism to flourish' (Lynch, 2010, p.57), exacerbating the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions for loneliness, socio-relational conflict, bullying, and abuse (Morris, 2021l; Zabrodska et al., 2011). Bullying among university students is compounded by competitive university cultures, systems, and environments (Leshner & Layne, 2021; Myers & Cowie, 2016; Pörhöla et al., 2016; Groves, Griggs & Leflay, 2012; Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2005). Indeed, where Harrison, Hulme, and Fox (2021 concluded that bullying at UK universities (n=40) is intentional, goal-directed, and motivated by the attainment of social and/ or personal gain in a competitive environment, 'the neoliberal university seems to be fertile ground for bullying' (Zawadzki & Jensen, 2020, p.400). Phipps & Young (2015) have likewise drawn convincing parallels between the socio-sexual practices of

'lad culture' (p.305) and the neoliberal principles of self-interested individualism, instrumentalism, free-choice, consumerism, performativity, and competition. The authors conclude that 'sexual harassment and violence is framed by the structures, cultures, and practices of the neoliberal university' (Phipps, 2017, p.227) where, in the promotion of individualised self-interest and relational instrumentalism, 'the neoliberal university provides an environment in which it [sexual harassment] can both flourish and be normalized' (Phipps & Young 2015, p.13).

Competitive cultures and relations have been further identified as a barrier to socialisation, social identification, and belonging (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016; Alon, 2009), with students describing how comparison of academic outcomes produce fear, mistrust, and lack of openness towards others (Priestley et al., 2022). Lewis et al. (2022) similairly found belonging and social relationships are undermined by 'enterprise culture', the need for self-promotion, and competition for academic opportunities in the neoliberal institution (n=34). In this way, 'neoliberalism makes people feel lonely because it encourages them to see others as a source of competition' (Becker & Hartwich, 2021, p.4).

Neoliberal Policy, Commodification, and Relationships with Academic Staff & The Local Community

Preliminary evidence was found that the neoliberal privatisation and commodification of higher education substantively change students'

relationships with academic staff and the local community (Sage, Smith & Hubbard, 2012). Qualitative evidence from UK students (n=65) and staff (n=41) suggest that neoliberal tuition fee reforms have increased student expectations and demands for personalised pedagogical and pastoral support from academic staff, precisely whilst neoliberal conditions of massification, intensification, and casualisation compromise staff capacity to respond to individual student socio-relational needs (Brewster et al., 2022; Priestley et al., 2022; Scanion et al., 2010).

Qualitative UK-based evidence similarly indicates that the neoliberal marketisation and commodification of the student experience promotes unrealistic expectations of the quality and quantity of social relationships at university, which can contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and alienation once unfulfilled (BPF, 2019; Jackson et al., 2019; Palmer, O'Kane & Owen, 2009). In the context of commercially driven idealisation of the student social experience, Worsley, Harrison, and Corcoran (2021a, p.579) conclude, for example, that 'many students did not form close relationships with others as quickly as they were expecting to, and a mismatch between the quantity and the quality of the relationships that students had and those that they expected to have enhanced feelings of loneliness'.

In addition, the architectural consequences of privatised commodification of purpose-built student accommodation have been shown to impact on the presence, strength, and type of student's social interactions with peers and

the local community (Morris, 2021; Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Foulkes et al., 2021; Trawalter, Hoffman, & Palmer, 2021; Dickinson, 2019; Holton, 2017; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2016 Brown, Volk & Spratto, 2019; Jackson et al., 2019; McClure et al., 2017; Easterbrook & Vignoles 2015; Evans et al., 2003). In particular, consumer preference for luxury individualised studio apartments over socialising corridor-style residence have reduced opportunities for homophilic social interaction, and sense of belonging (Brown, Volk & Spratto, 2019; Barros et al., 2019; Jackson et al., 2019; Pojani & Buka, 2015; Chambliss & Takacs, 2014; Kitchen et al., 2012; Gibson et al, 2011). Qualitative evidence was also found that deregulated market-driven expansion of higher education, the privatisation of social housing, and the subsequent studentification of traditional residential communities has compounded existing economic, social, and cultural tensions with local residents (Long, 2016; Sage, Smith & Hubbard, 2013; 2012; 2011; Chatterton, 2010; Hubbard, 2009; Smith, 2009; Crawford & Flint, 2009; Munroe et al., 2009; Hubbard, 2008; Allinson, 2006), with demonstrable impact on student wellbeing and sense of belonging (Priestley et al. 2022; Kenna & Murphy, 2021; Sage, Smith, & Hubbard, 2013; 2012; Chatterton, 2010).

Policy Recommendations

With few exceptions (e.g., Priestley et al., 2022), the review identified a relative lack of specific co-produced and/or rigorously evaluated policy or practice recommendations to improve student social relationships within a university setting - particularly romantic, familial, staff-student, or local community relationships. Moreover, reflecting dominant theoretical trends or

lack thereof, recommendations tended to advocate isolated interventions to address specific individual behavioural and relational outcomes (Reavley & Jorm, 2010), rather than holistic structural and cultural change to the university context (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Myers & Cowie, 2017). Notwithstanding, five recommendations for policy and practice were thematically identified.

Recommendation One: Social Activities

Provision of inclusive social activities have been propounded to promote healthy peer and staff-student relationships, sense of belonging, and wellbeing during transition and throughout the student lifecycle (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Leese, 2010), both digitally and online (Thomas, Orme & Kerrigan, 2020). A variety of social prescribing and community-building events and/or strategies have been advocated across curricula, extra-curricular, and/or accommodation provision including student buddy schemes, peer mentoring, and/ or inclusive student-led social events and interventions such as arts or exercise programmes, bibliotherapy, ecotherapy, gardening, and volunteering (Wallace et al., 2022; Cage et al., 2021; Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Crisp et al., 2020; Dickinson, 2019; Vasileiou et al., 2019; Chatterjee et al., 2018; Hughes & Smail, 2015; Menzies & Baron, 2014; Collings et al., 2014; Clatworthy, Hinds & Camic, 2013; Morse & Schulze, 2013). Sports clubs, societies, and extra-curricular activities have been found to be particularly effective in fostering student's social connections, sense of belonging, and wellbeing (Buckley & Lee, 2021; Ahn & Davies, 2020; Brereton

& Mistry, 2019; Gijn-Grosvenor & Huisman, 2019; Knifsend, 2018; Pijpers, 2017; Brooks, 2007). Students involved in extracurricular activities are twice as likely (29% vs 14%) to report having a large group of friends (Dickinson, 2019); report greater belonging and identification with the university (Lower-Hoppe et al., 2020; Winstone et al., 2020; Bowman et al., 2018); and higher wellbeing, including personal growth and purpose in life (Griffiths, Dickinson & Day, 2021; Budzynski-Seymour et al., 2020; Kilgo et al., 2016; Bowman, 2010).

In particular, a series of targeted pre-entry and induction interventions have been found to effectively support peer relations, staff-student relations, and sense of belonging during transition into university (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Foulkes et al., 2021; Pennington et al., 2018; Thomas, 2012). In addition, targeted social interventions have been found to increase social connection, belonging, and transition among marginalised student communities, including international students (Smith & Khawaja, 2015; Menzies & Baron, 2014), LGBTQ+ students (Smithies & Byrom, 2018), students with autism (Lei et al., 2018), and Black students (Richardson et al., 2021).

Recommendation Two: Psycho-education

A series of individual psychological and psycho-educational interventions have been advocated to target a range of social mental health risks, including loneliness (e.g. Richardson, Roberts & Jansen, 2016; Masi et al., 2011), social skills (e.g. Lovell & Webber, 2023; Masi et al., 2011), social media behaviours (O'Reilly et al., 2018), alcohol and drug related behaviours

(Walters et al., 2018; Tanner-Smith & Lipsey, 2015; Hallet et al., 2012) and sexual violence (Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020; Klein & Martin, 2019; Labhardt et al, 2017; Coker et al. 2015; Elias-Lambert & Black, 2010).

Recommendation Three: Curricular Reform

Pedagogical and curricula reform has been advocated to increase peer interaction, build belonging, and support positive staff-student relationships (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Dickinson, 2019; Masika & Jones, 2016; Van Petegem, 2007; Tinklin, Riddell & Wilson, 2005), such as: collaborative pedagogy and assessment (Picton, Kahu & Nelson, 2018; Meehan & Howells, 2017; Stanton et al., 2016; Thomas, 2012), peer mentoring (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Carragher & McGaughey, 2016; Douglass, Smith & Smith, 2013), virtual discussion boards (Masika & Jones, 2016), and regular meetings with academic advisers (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; O'Keefe, 2013).

Recommendation Four: Staff Training

Institutional guidance and training interventions have been promoted to equip academic and residential staff to appropriately identify and support students experiencing mental health difficulties (Spear, Morey & Van Steen, 2020; Gulliver et al., 2017; Margrove, Gustowska & Grove, 2014; Massey, Brooks & Burrow, 2014), identify and prevent conflict and (cyber)-bullying (e.g. Dickinson, 2019; Luca, Nocentini, & Menesini, 2019; Myers & Cowie, 2016; Faucher, Jackson & Cassidy, 2014), and respond to the needs of marginalised communities (e.g. Snapp et al., 2015; Jones & Hillier, 2013).

Recommendation Five: Community Integration

Recommendations to increase student-community integration have included community engagement initiatives; student, resident, and police liaison officers; a neighbourhood helpline; volunteering; and local political representation of students (UUP, 2018; Long, 2016; Hubbard, 2008).

Chapter Summary

Taken together, this found preliminary evidence that the central tenets and manifestations of neoliberal higher education policy increase (unequal) exposure to various social determinants of student mental health and wellbeing, including isolation, loneliness, exclusion, conflict, and abuse. The review identified a compromising lack of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and mixed-methodological models to interrogate students' lived experience of social relationships in the context of the neoliberal system, substantiating the rationale for the theoretical synthesis in this thesis.

Chapter Seven: Academic Determinants of Student Mental Health in the Neoliberal System: A Narrative Review

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from a narrative literature review investigating the research question: what are the academic determinants of student mental health and wellbeing in a neoliberal higher education context? 378 texts were included for review. Taken together, the review found evidence of a bi-directional relationship between student mental wellbeing and academic performance, wherein wellbeing supports or impedes cognitive, emotional, and behavioural processes underpinning academic learning. Certain pedagogical, curricula, and assessment conditions were identified to positively and/or negatively impact on student mental wellbeing and academic performance, with evidence found that neoliberal higher education policies mediate material and psychological exposure to these factors. The review also identified methodological and theoretical trends, and evidence-based policy recommendations, to inform the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in a neoliberal higher education context.

Design and Methodological Approaches

The review identified a lack of relevant, rigorous, UK-based research conducted in a higher educational context. Existing evidence has tended to focus on school-based populations, and/or in North America, Australia, and

Asia. In addition, existing studies have often focussed on single institutions, using small, a-typical, and non-random samples from a limited range of health-based disciplines with limited generalisability to the wider student population (see Elani et al., 2014), such as dentistry, medicine, veterinary science, and nursing. Procedurally, the review identified a disproportionate prevalence of cross-sectional, quantitative, and comparative survey-based research design and methodological approaches. Studies typically utilised self-report inventories to quantitatively measure and model the impact of independent academic variables on wellbeing outcomes in different student sub-populations. Quasi-experimental and/or intervention designs were also commonly used to evaluate the effectiveness of curricula programs on self-reported wellbeing outcomes.

The review identified a relative lack of qualitative or theoretically-informed research to investigate how students perceive pedagogy and assessment, and the interconnections with wellbeing. Relatedly, the review identified inconsistent conceptualisation, operationalisation, and scales used to measure both student wellbeing and academic variables, with a tendency toward subjective self-report or proxy measures. The review further identified a relative lack of longitudinal research to examine causality, changes to students' experience of academic factors during an academic course of study, and the long-term effectiveness of curricula and/or assessment interventions.

Theoretical Trends

The review identified a relative dearth of theoretical frameworks to conceptualise the impact of academic stressors on student mental health and wellbeing. Indeed, the well-documented under-theorisation and neglect of affective dimensions within the academic process (e.g., Leathwood & Hey 2009; Christie et al. 2008; Pekrun et al, 2002) were found to translate to wellbeing. Notwithstanding however, transactional stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) were identified (e.g., Harper & Neubauer, 2020) to frame inter-individual stress responses to academic 'situation(s) in which internal demands, external demands, or both, are appraised as taxing or exceeding the adaptive or coping resources of an individual or group' (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.19). By extension, the Yerkes-Dodson (1908) hypothesis was applied to frame the relationship between mental wellbeing and academic performance, positing that academic performance increases with mental arousal, mediated by perceived task difficulty and coping, to a threshold at which performance then declines (Zeidner & Mathews, 2005).

A plethora of theoretical models for test anxiety were identified, including the drive model (Mandler & Sarason, 1952), cognitive attentional models (Sarason, 1972; Wine, 1971), control-value theoretical models (Pekrun, 2006), skill deficit models (Benjamin et al., 1981; Culler & Holahan, 1980; Kirkland & Hollandsworth, 1980), self-regulation models (Carver & Scheier, 1984), self-worth models (Covington, 1992), attributional models (Weiner, 1985), and

transactional models (Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Trait and/or intra-individual personality theories (Tett & Guterman, 2000; Eysenck & Eysenck, 1985) were identified to conceptualise cognitive and behavioural responses to academic stressors (e.g. Kotter et al., 2019; Bergmann, Muth & Loerbroks, 2019; Moir et al., 2018; Tyssen et al., 2007). However, none of these theoretical frameworks were found to have been applied consistently or cohesively, or in relation to macro higher education policy.

The review further identified application of both positive psychology (Seligman, 2002) and self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2011; Deci & Ryan, 1985) to rationalise and structure curricular interventions (e.g. Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Duffy et al., 2016; McLellan et al., 2015; Slavin, Schindler & Chibnall, 2011; Field, Duffy & Huggins, 2014; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013; Larcombe, Malkin & Nicholson, 2012; Slavin et al., 2011). Effort-reward-imbalance (Siegrist, 1996) and jobs-resources-support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) theoretical models have also been applied to conceptualise relationships between objective and/or perceived student workload and burnout (Slack & Priestley, 2022; Williams, Dziurawiec, & Heritage, 2018; Hahn et al., 2017), whilst Bourdieusian theories of cultural capital and institutional habitus have been applied periodically to conceptualise unequal exposure to academic stressors across the student body (e.g. Cramp et al., 2012).

Taken together, these findings arguably demonstrate a bias towards individual-level theoretical explanations for responses to academic distress,

enacting a presupposition that 'it is how a student copes or responds to a situational stressor which negatively impacts on wellbeing and performance, rather than tackle stress in a wider organisational context (Robotham & Julian, 2006, p.113). Hence it is commonly postulated that 'the harmful effects of stress result from the individual's perceptions of these demands, not necessarily the demands themselves' (Robotham & Julian, 2006, 108), precluding theoretically informed interrogation of structural and systemic academic stressors within the university environment. Curricular-based student wellbeing interventions have thus tended towards 'making space' in the curriculum for individual-level behaviour modification through mindfulness-based, cognitive-behavioural, resilience, relaxation, socio-emotional, or psycho-educational interventions, rather than modification to curricular, pedagogical, or assessment design, delivery, and structure (Larcombe, Baik & Brooker, 2019; Slavin et al., 2011). These theoretical and methodological trends arguably substantiate the imperative for theoretical synthesis and mixed-methodological interrogation to critically contextualise academic determinants of student wellbeing within the neoliberal higher education policy context. Having defined and delineated salient academic concepts, constructs, and processes in the existing literature, this chapter thematises existing evidence of mediating curricular, assessment, and pedagogical factors impacting on student wellbeing and academic performance, before situating these within the context of the neoliberal higher education system.

Salient Theoretical Concepts and Constructs

Academic experience has been found to account for 21% of variance in student wellbeing (Larcombe, Baik & Finch, 2022), whilst student wellbeing has been found to account for approximately 5% of variability in examination scores (Monrad et al., 2021). It has been estimated that 43% of US students (n=2, 843) report experiencing psychological distress levels which impede their academic performance, missing an average of eight study days per month whilst experiencing academic impairment 60% of the time (Stallman, 2008). Taken together, the review identified several interrelated constructs inherent to both student wellbeing and academic performance, namely; academic stress; test anxiety; burnout; perfectionism; imposter syndrome; academic affect; flow; self-efficacy; coping; and resilience.

Academic Stress and Anxiety

Academic stress is a psychological and physiological reaction to pedagogical demands, situations, or events within the past, present, or future which are perceived to exceed individual capacity to cope (Robotham & Julian, 2006; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Unresolved or multiple academic stressors are considered to precipitate and predict academic anxiety (Zhang et al., 2022; Stankovska et a., 2018; Kumaraswamy, 2013). However, where stress tends to dissipate once the environmental demand has been resolved, academic anxiety is perceived, often anticipatory, and may persist longer-term (Howard, 2020; Sotardi & Brogt, 2018).

Whilst mild to moderate academic stress and anxiety can act as a cognitive and emotional stimuli to support optimal intellectual functioning and academic performance (Rudland, Golding, & Wilkinson, 2019; Bamber & Schneider, 2015), intensive and/or extensive stress and anxiety have been found to stimulate cognitive, emotional, behavioural, and physiological stress responses, with negative implications for academic performance, attendance, retention, and mental wellbeing (Labrague, 2013; Elani et al., 2014; Robotham & Julian, 2006). It is not, therefore, that universities should necessarily seek to prevent student exposure to stress and academically challenging situations but work to address excessive and/or unnecessary structural and systemically imposed stressors, whilst supporting students to manage stress productively (Tang & Ferguson, 2014).

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety, by extension, encapsulates the specific cognitive, affective, physiological, and behavioural responses to evaluative situations that are perceived as an existential or material threat, manifest during preparation, completion, or subsequent to assessment (Zeidner, 1998; Spielberger & Vagg, 1995). Test anxiety has been identified as the most common type of academic anxiety (Von der Embse et al., 2018) and is associated with negative academic outcomes and attrition (Pate et al., 2021; Von der Embse, 2018; Duty et al., 2016; Elani et al., 2014; Richardson, Abraham, and Bond 2012), as well as mental health difficulties such as depression, anxiety, disordered eating, self-harm, panic attacks, burn out, and suicidal ideation

(Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2019; Ribeiro et al., 2018; Jacobson & Newman, 2017; Hutchings, 2015; Moylan et al., 2013; Leadbeater et al., 2012; Robotham & Julian, 2006). Social evaluative situations compound test anxiety, manifest in fear of failure and comparison of performance to peers (Lowe & Ang 2012; Lowe et al, 2008).

Academic Burnout

Burnout is characterised by a triad of physical, psychological, and emotional exhaustion; depersonalisation and disengagement; and decreased sense of accomplishment (Ishak et al., 2013; Maroco & Campos, 2012). 'Academic burnout refers to a multidimensional syndrome of exhaustion from studying, cynicism directed to one's study, and reduced efficacy in relation to academic work' (Madigan & Curran, 2020, p.389), predicted by prolonged academic stress, test anxiety, isolation, poor work-life balance, and number of hours worked per week (Gaston-Hawkins et al., 2020; Schweden et al., 2018). Academic burnout is strongly associated with lower quality of life, depression, suicidal ideation, and intention to drop out (Dyrbye et al., 2011; 2010; 2008), alongside decreased academic achievement (Madigan & Curran, 2020).

Perfectionism

Perfectionism in academic settings encapsulates an intrapersonal process in which individuals set excessively high or unrealistic academic standards, appraising performance against those standards as 'all or nothing' (Giusti et

al., 2020, p.1), wherein perceived 'imperfection' is internalised as evidence of personal defect (Rice, Richardson & Ray, 2016; Greenspon, 2014; Eum & Rice, 2011). Socially prescribed perfectionism is characterised by a belief that others expect extremely high standards and are critical of one's failures, with adoption of highly competitive attitudes to achievement, fear of failure, and/or negative social evaluation, with self-worth conditional upon successfully achieving progressively higher standards (Starley, 2019). Perfectionism is positively associated with academic stress and depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, disordered eating, sleep disorder, burnout, and suicidality in a student population (Hu, Chibnall & Slavin, 2019; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013; O'Connor, 2008). Although some perfectionist behaviours have been linked to enhanced academic achievement and engagement (Madigan 2019; Jowett et al., 2016), perfectionism is strongly correlated with avoidance, procrastination, low self-efficacy, and intrusive imagery which demonstrably impede optimal academic performance (Flett et al., 2012).

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome (Clance & Imes, 1978) is prevalent in higher education settings and strongly associated with socially prescribed perfectionism, academic stress, low self-efficacy, and burnout (Holden et al., 2021; Parkman, 2016). Success is attributed to external locus of control such as luck or assistance from others, whilst setbacks are internalised as evidence of inadequacy, resulting in fear of failure and maladaptive impression management behaviours such as long working hours (Bravata et al., 2020).

Imposter syndrome is associated with depression and anxiety in a student population (Bravata et al., 2020; Cokely et al., 2013) and predictive of attendance, attrition, and academic performance (Canning et al., 2019).

Academic Emotions/ Affect

Academic emotions, or 'emotions that are directly linked to academic learning, classroom instruction, and achievement' (Pekrun et al., 2002, p.92), are both a stimulus and consequence of academic learning that influence students' cognitive and motivational processes, persistence, performance, and psychological and physical wellbeing (Strack et al., 2017; Tyng et al., 2017; Boekaerts & Pekrun, 2016; Trigwell, 2012; Pekrun et al, 2002). Although academic emotions have been largely neglected or narrowly focused on outcome-orientated achievement emotions such as test anxiety, a rich complexity and diversity of emotions are experienced during the pedagogical process, categorised according to valence and activation, informed by cognitions about task quantity, difficulty, and relevance; perceived mastery, and the learning environment (Pekrun, 2006; 2002). Crucially, academic emotions are intrinsic to the learning process and should not be conflated with mental health symptomology (Ecclestone, 2016; Folkman, 2008). Many educationalists have identified a state of liminality and uncertainty that emotionally disorientates, problematises, and challenges learners' existing beliefs and identity as inherent to transformational learning (Cigman, 2012; Smith, Smeyers & Standish, 2006; Meyer & Land, 2005; Smith,

2002); 'to construct this as an emotional problem is to undermine and compromise the purpose of education' (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019, p.102).

Flow

Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998) is an autotelic state characterised by deep enjoyment, motivation, purpose, and optimal cognitive functioning whilst immersed in a challenging engaging activity (Hughes et al., 2020). Students with high self-efficacy, growth mind set, deep learning, intrinsic motivation, and long-term goal-setting can achieve flow when suitably challenged, which, in turn, can improve performance and wellbeing (Hughes et al., 2022; Hughes, 2020).

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy refers to personal beliefs regarding individual competency and capability to organize and execute a course of action required to produce a given outcome in a task-specific situation (Bandura, 1997), informed by previous accomplishments, vicarious learning, encouragement, and affective arousal while completing a task (Bandura, 1986), academic self-efficacy has been found to mediate the relationship between threat appraisal, academic anxiety, persistence, effort, self-regulation, and performance (Grotan, Sund, & Bjerkeset, 2019; Zumbrunn et al., 2019; Freire et al., 2018; Roick & Ringeisen, 2017; Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Ritchie, 2016; Schunk & Pajares, 2010). High self-efficacy individuals are more likely to evaluate potentially stressful situations as challenges rather than as threats

(Freire et al, 2018), persisting in the pursuit of a given outcome by adopting active and flexible coping strategies (Freire et al., 2018). Hence, 'self-efficacy is a protective factor against the impact of day-to-day stressors at university (ibid, p.2).

Resilience, Coping and Goal Setting

'Resilience equips students with the capacity to adapt skilfully and cope with stressors unique to university life, manage academic demands, and prevent psychological distress' (Stallman, 2011, p.122). Resilience has an indirect effect on both academic performance and test anxiety, mediated by self-efficacy and coping, accounting for unique variance in subjective wellbeing in a student (n=141) population (Etherton et al., 2020). Coping encapsulates the cognitive and behavioural mechanisms an individual employs to: eliminate or reduce stressors in their environment; alter their appraisal of these stressors; or minimize the impact of these stressors on their wellbeing (Robotham & Julian, 2006). Problem-focused strategies aim to actively manage or resolve a situation and include seeking information, increasing effort, planning, and managing priorities (Strack & Esteves, 2015; Carroll, 2013). Emotion-focused coping aims to regulate or deal with emotional distress and include reframing, venting, acceptance, and avoidance (Baker & Berenbaum, 2007). Problem-focused coping has been found to reduce academic stress, test anxiety, and increase wellbeing in a student population (Kotter et al., 2019; von der Embse et al., 2018; Freire et al., 2018; Hjeltnes et al., 2015; Bamuhair et al., 2015), whilst emotional coping strategies have been

positively correlated with academic stress, test anxiety, and depressive symptomology (Howard, 2020; Shin et al., 2014). Coping strategies encapsulate achievement goal orientations wherein mastery goals seek intrinsically motivated comprehension of course content, whilst performance orientated goals aim to outperform others and/or avoid low grades or unfavourable social evaluation (Long & Neff, 2018; Neff et al., 2005; Dweck & Legget, 1988).

The Relationship Between Student Wellbeing and Academic Performance

Taken together, these concepts underpin a strong bi-directional relationship between student mental wellbeing and academic performance (Kotter et al., 2019; McArdle et al., 2014; Walburg, 2014; Esch et al., 2014; Reschly et al., 2008). 'There is increasing evidence that there is a clear, two-way link between student wellbeing and learning; wellbeing can impact on how well students learn; but how students engage in learning and how effective their learning is, can also impact on their wellbeing' (Hughes, 2020. p.2). It follows therefore that 'the learning and teaching context should be central to efforts to support and promote student mental wellbeing and that this can be achieved without compromising the academic goals of higher education' (Houghton & Anderson, 2017, p.14).

Prevalence and Trends of Student Academic Distress

Existing international evidence has identified elevated and increasing levels of academic stress, test anxiety, burnout, and perfectionism among students

in evaluative settings (Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2019). Indeed, between 35% and 55% of students internationally screen positive for burnout (Rosales-Ricardo et al., 2021; Armstrong & Reynolds, 2020; Frajerman et al., 2019; Erschens et al., 2019) whilst prevalence estimates of imposter syndrome in the US, UK, Austria, Australia, and New Zealand range between 23% and 78% (Fassl, Yanagida & Kollmayer., 2020; Sullivan & Ryba, 2020; Thomas & Bigatti, 2020; Hu, Chibnall & Slavin, 2019; Patzak et al., 2019; Christensen et al., 2016). Perfectionism estimates range from to 25% to 70% (Alanna, Keddy & Hill, 2021; Dobos, Piko & Mellor, 2021; Thomas & Bigatti, 2020; Hu, Chibnall & Slavin, 2019; Patzak et al., 2019; Christensen et al., 2016) and have increased significantly since 1989 (Curran & Hill, 2019), whilst between 19% and 39% of students screen positive for test anxiety (Pate et al., 2021; Bischofsberger et al., 2021; Macauley et al., 2018; Gerwing et al., 2016) with significant increases in prevalence since 2010 (Sivertsen et al., 2018). Academic distress is unequally distributed in the student population, with female students reporting higher prevalence of burnout (Armstrong & Reynolds, 2020) and imposter syndrome (Thomas & Bigatti, 2020; Patzak et al., 2019) and test anxiety (Pate et al., 2021; Sivertsen et al., 2018; Macauley et al., 2018; Gerwing et al., 2016), whilst ethnic minority students equally report a higher prevalence of burnout (Armstrong & Reynolds, 2020) and test anxiety (Pate et al., 2021).

Assessment and Student Wellbeing

Whilst academic assessment persistently emerges as one of the most commonly self-reported sources of student stress (Larcombe, Baik & Finch,

2022; Zhang & Henderson, 2019; Jones, Park & Lefevor, 2018; Labrague et al., 2016; Beiter et al., 2015; Elani et al., 2014; Markoulakis & Kirsch, 2013; Divaris et al. 2008), relatively little is known about the effect of assessment practices and policies on student mental health and wellbeing (Howard, 2020; Baik, 2019; Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2019; Roberts & Simpson, 2016). Notwithstanding, the review identified preliminary evidence that assessment type, timeframe, environment, culture, and evaluation strategy may all mediate the relationship between assessment and student mental health and wellbeing (Howard, 2020).

Assessment Type

The review found a relative lack of evidence regarding the differential positive and negative impacts of different assessment types on student wellbeing, namely: formative and summative assessment; traditional and authentic assessment; online and paper-based assessment; written and oral assessment; collaborative and individual assessment; and open and closed book assessment (Jones et al., 2021). Notwithstanding, available evidence indicates that high-stakes assessment (Molin et al, 2019; Sotardi & Brogt, 2018; Von der Embse, 2018); traditional closed-book and time-constrained assessment (Ewell, Josefson & Ballen., 2022; Jones et al., 2021; Buckley et al., 2021; Bengtsson, 2019; Gharib, Phillips & Mathew, 2012; Richardson et al., 2012; Rich, 2011); unfamiliar and/or unclear assessment tasks (Duret et al., 2022; Merrick et al., 2021; Jenkins et al., 2019); and oral and/or collaborative assessment (Grieve et al., 2021; Hillard et al., 2020; Cooper, Downing &

Brownell, 2018; Donelan & Kear, 2018; Fournier et al., 2017; Laurin-Barantke et al., 2016; Russell & Topham, 2012; Dwyer & Davidson, 2012; Capdeferro & Romero, 2012; Preuss et al., 2010) can all compound academic stress, test anxiety, and burnout, and negatively impact on self-efficacy and academic performance.

Assessment Conditions

The review found preliminary evidence that the timing, frequency, weighting, environment, and flexibility of assessment impact on academic stress, test anxiety, and burnout (Jones et al., 2021; Howard, 2020; Von der Embse, 2018). Indeed, the number of assessments and time spent completing assessments has been found to increase stress (Hagemeier et al., 2020), emotional exhaustion (Reed et al., 2011) and withdrawal intention (Webb & Cotton, 2018), whilst extended assessments has been found to increase test anxiety (Buckley et al., 2020; Robertson & Da Silva, 2020; Schwartz, Evans & Agur, 2014) and deadline bunching also increasing perceived workload, stress, test anxiety and reduced wellbeing (Hughes et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2021; Pigden & Jegede, 2020; Barut et al., 2019; Jayakumar, Lapin & Kogan, 2016). Higher assessment weighting relative to overall course grade and no opportunity for resit have consistently been found to increase test anxiety among students in the US (Templeton et al., 2022), Netherlands (Baars et al., 2021; Kickert et al., 2019), Germany (McClenny, 2018) and UK (Putwain, 2008). Choice between assessment type is associated with marginal benefit5s to student wellbeing with no detrimental impact on performance (MacNaul et

al. 2021; Jopp & Cohen, 2020; Rideout, 2018; Hanewicz, Platt & Arendt, 2017; Ackerman, Gross & Celly, 2014), whilst control over the assessment environment and flexibility to take breaks have been found to reduce test anxiety (Buckley et al., 2021; Stowell & Bennett, 2010).

Evaluation Strategy

The review found evidence that assessment-based performance pressures are compounded by high stakes testing and comparative and/or hierarchal grading, which can increase academic stress, test anxiety, perfectionism, and burnout (Abeles, 2015; Beiter et al., 2015; Segool et al., 2013; Larcombe et al., 2012; Slavin et al., 2011; Townes et al., 2011). 'Comparison of performance with peers has a direct impact on perceived stress' (Merrick et al., 2021, p.252), mediated by fear of failure (Pekrun, 2016) and has been found to predict moderate depression, severe stress, and threefold increase in anxiety (Larcombe & Fethers, 2013).

By extension, the review found preliminary evidence that norm-referenced evaluation based on comparative performance is associated with higher test anxiety than criterion-referenced assessment. Indeed, changing from a hierarchal grading system to a binary pass or fail grading system has been found to support student mental health and wellbeing in the US, Canada, and New Zealand [Walden et al., 2022; Chamberlin, Yasue & Chiang, 2018; Moir et al., 2018; Jham, Cannella & Adibi, 2018; Wasson et al., 2016; Slavin, Schindler & Chibnall, 2011; Spring et al., 2011; Reed et al., 2011; White &

Fantone, 2010; Bloodgood et al., 2009; Wilkinson, Wells & Bushnell, 2007; Rohe et al., 2006; Vosti & Jacobs, 1999; Robbins et al., 1995), with no evidence of decreased academic performance (Ange et al., 2018; Spring et al., 2011; Bloodgood et al., 2009; White & Fantone, 2009; Rohe et al., 2006). Self-assessment methods have been found to increase student self-efficacy (Double, McGrane & Hopfenbeck, 2020) and academic performance (Panaderoa, Jonsson & Botella, 2017), whilst peer assessment methods have been associated with peer conflict, test anxiety, and negative academic emotions (Adachi, Tai & Dawson, 2017; Kaufman & Schunn, 2011).

Assessment Criteria

Unclear, vague, or convoluted assessment criteria with lack of clear guidance or feedback have been found to exacerbate students' anxieties and feelings of stress (Slack & Priestley, 2022; Arindra & Ardi, 2020; Lister, Seale & Douce, 2021; Glazzard & Stones, 2019; Pekrun, 2016; Townes et al., 2011). 'Uncertainty about assessment causes student anxiety' (Field & Kift, 2010, p.68) and 'assessments which are confusing in design, for which students haven't been prepared and without clear outcomes can be unhelpfully anxiety inducing' (Hughes, 2020, p.3).

Curriculum and Student Wellbeing

The review found preliminary evidence that curricula factors can impact both positively and negatively on student mental health and wellbeing, with growing emphasis on integrating wellbeing concerns holistically within the

design and delivery of the curriculum (Brooker, McKague & Phillips, 2019; Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Thorley, 2017; Larcombe, Baik & Brooker, 2015; Slavin et al., 2011; Stallman, 2011).

Curricula Design and Workload

The review found evidence that curricula design, density, difficulty, order, and relevance can all impact on perceived workload (Hughes et al., 2022; Lister, Seale & Douce, 2021; Hughes, 2020; Ajjawi et al., 2019; Postareff et al., 2017; Kyndt et al., 2014) which, in turn, increase risk of academic stress, anxiety, low mood, and burnout (Porru et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Guys, Lesener & Wolter, 2021; Bowyer, 2019; Larcombe et al., 2016; Körner, Rigotti & Rieder, 2021; Smith, 2019; Naylor, Baik, & Arkoudis, 2018; Shankland et al., 2018; Meriläinen, 2014; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013). Available evidence suggests this relationship is mediated by locus of control, motivation, and self-efficacy (Dermont & Vailes, 2020; Kyndt et al., 2014; Scully & Kerr, 2014; Huggins, 2012).

Curricula Interventions

The review identified numerous examples of effective curricula-based interventions integrating discrete mental health content and/or skills as a formal curricular component or concurrent to traditional activity, including mindfulness-based interventions (Kinsella et al., 2020; MacLean et al., 2020; Hoover, Butaney, & Stoehr, 2020; Strait et al., 2020; Carsley & Heath, 2020; Soulakova et al., 2019; McConville, McAleer & Hahne, 2017; Daya & Hearn,

2017; Wasson et al., 2016; Erogul et al., 2014), psychoeducational interventions (Hategan & Riddell, 2020; Pipas et al., 2020; Fernandes et al., 2020; Quinn et al., 2020; Worobetz et al., 2020; McCarthy et al., 2018; Morton et al., 2017; McSharry & Timmins, 2016), resilience and coping interventions (Cheung et al., 2021; Kulman-Lipsey et al., 2019; Meyer-Parsons, Etten & Shaw, 2017; Moffett & Bartram, 2017; Baghurst & Kelley, 2014; Stallman, 2011), relaxation interventions (Keech, Hagger & Hamilton, 2021; Galal et al., 2021; Allison et al., 2020; Manansingh, Tatum & Morote, 2019; Grammatica, 2018; Scholz et al., 2016) and multi-component curricula interventions (Seppala et al., 2020; Lavadera, Millon & Shors, 2020; Aggarwal et al., 2017) . Notwithstanding, systematic review has previously rated the majority of curricular-based intervention studies methodologically 'poor' (Upsher et al., 2021), whilst many curricular interventions have been found to have no, or even adverse, effects on wellbeing outcomes (e.g., Myers, Davis & Chan, 2021; O'Driscoll et al., 2019; Dyrbye et al., 2017; Prato & Yucha, 2013).

In addition, the review identified several examples of curriculum infusion approaches, integrating mental health-based content within curricula content and assessment 'in a manner that enhances and reinforces the intellectual content of the course' (Olson and Riley 2009, p 28) across different disciplines and levels of study (Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2012). Benefits to mental health awareness, resilience, help-seeking, and self-care have been reported (Toledo-Rodriguez & Lister, 2022; Jenkins et al., 2019; Mitchell et al., 2012), particularly when the mental health

component is integrated, compulsory, and assessed (Mitchell et al., 2012; Stallman, 2011; 2009).

Curricular Content

Trauma-informed pedagogy recommends that 'educators should aim to reduce the risk of retraumatization and secondary traumatization when exposing students to potentially sensitive material' (Davidson 2017, p. 17), with 39% of students in the US (n=259) reporting receiving 'trigger warnings' to identify potentially sensitive curricular content (Beverly et al., 2017). Existing evidence for the effectiveness of trigger warnings is conflicted [see Appendix 3] with some critics arguing that trigger warnings position students in 'vulnerability discourses' that undermine resilience (Ecclestone, 2013).

Skills Support

The review identified preliminarily evidence of academic skills-based curricular interventions, including test enhanced learning interventions (Messineo, Gentile & Allegra, 2017; Green, Angoff, Encandela, 2016); coaching interventions (Shorey et al., 2022); presentation skills interventions (Elahemer & Said, 2022; Nash, Crimmins & Oprescu, 2015; Hunter, Westwick & Haleta, 2014) and self-management interventions (Asikainen & Katajavuori, 2021; Huntley et al., 2019), which effectively mitigate the impact of academic-related stress and test anxiety on mental health, mediated by self-efficacy and problem-focused coping (Saethern et al., 2022; Miguel,

Robertson & McDavid, 2022; Ibaraki, 2022; Dunne et al., 2018; Damer & Melendres, 2011).

Pedagogy and Student Wellbeing

The review found strong evidence that pedagogical approaches can impact both positively and negatively on student mental health and wellbeing (Hughes et al., 2022; Hughes, 2020). 'Sound learning and teaching practices that relate to engagement, active learning, [and] transition will potentially also have positive flow-on consequences for student wellbeing' (Field, Duffy & Huggins, 2015, p.2).

Independent Learning

The review found that 'the transition for many school-leaver novice students from highly structured, directed, learning environments to higher education settings where they are expected to be independent and autonomous learners is complex and highly stressful' (Field & Kift, 2010, p.70; see also; Sotardi & Brogt, 2018; Christie et al., 2013). Indeed, 'there is a complex interplay of emotions, self-efficacy and identity during the transition to unfamiliar learning, which may result in stress, anxiety, and fears of failure' (Davenport et al., 2017, p.48). Students often experience uncertainty, anxiety, overwhelm, procrastination, and lack of motivation when engaging in independent learning (Wilbraham et al., in press; Hockings, 2018; Cramp et al., 2012). By extension, the review found evidence that unclear, non-specific, and/or negative academic feedback can undermine student academic

self-efficacy and result in academic stress and test anxiety (Ryan & Henderson, 2018; Pekrun, 2016; Fong et al., 2016; Elani et al., 2014; Cramp et al., 2012) mediated by decreased self-efficacy and sense of belonging, (Glazzard & Stones, 2019; Hadden & Frisby, 2019; Molloy, Borrell-Carrio & Epstein, 2012; Manning, 2012; Townes et al., 2011).

Active, Problem-Based, and Experiential Pedagogy

The review found insubstantial evidence to determine whether active problem-based pedagogical approaches improve student wellbeing relative to traditional didactic pedagogy (Ribiero-Silva et al., 2022). Preliminary evidence was found that students' experience active pedagogy as both anxiety inducing (Cohen et al., 2019; England et al., 2017; Broeckelman-Post, Johnson Schwebach, 2016; Tucker et al., 2015) and beneficial to wellbeing-facilitative deep learning (Ribeiro-Silva et al., 2022; Merrick et al. 2021; Kariippanon et al., 2018), mediated by familiarity, instructor interaction, coping strategies, and perceived benefice (Downing et al., 2020; Brigati, England & Schussler , 2020; Speed, Kim & Macaulay, 2019; Cooper, Downing & Brownell, 2018; Baepler, 2018; Lyndon et al.,2017; Tang & Ferguson, 2014; Cooper & Carver, 2012).

Experiential pedagogy however, has been associated with lower levels of depressive symptomology and enhanced wellbeing (Kador, Chatterjee & Thompson, 2021; Mahatmya, Thurston, & Lynch, 2018; Townes et al. 2011). In particular, work-Integrated learning [WIL] 'which combine and integrate

learning and its workplace application, regardless of whether this is real or simulated' (Atchison et al., 2002, p.3) has been found to improve student self-efficacy (Doolan et al., 2019; Grant-Smith & Gillett-Swan, 2017; Drysdale et al., 2016; Freudenberg, Cameron, & Brimble, 2010). Notwithstanding, significant evidence was found that conditions during a professional placement, such as financial stress, social isolation, mentor/supervisor relationships, workload, and poor work-life balance can negatively impact on wellbeing (Hodge et al., 2021; Gillet-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018; McBeath, Drysdale & Bohn, 2018; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2018; Jackson, 2017; Drysdale et al., 2016; Johnstone et al., 2016).

Deep and Surface Learning

The review found preliminary evidence that deep learning and engagement can support student wellbeing (Cipra & Müller-Hilke, 2019; Postareff et al., 2017; 2016; Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Hughes & Wilson, 2017; Stanton et al., 2016), whilst surface learning, or 'focus on external goals such as getting a particular grade' (Hughes & Kirkman, 2020), is associated with anxiety, burnout, and poorer academic performance, although directionality is unclear (Hughes, 2020; Cipra & Müller-Hilke, 2019; Postareff et al., 2017; 2016; Trigwell et al., 2012; Dettmers et al., 2011). Deep learning, or strategic deep level understanding and critical interpretation (Hughes & Kirkman, 2020),, is associated with positive emotions such as pride and enjoyment, self-efficacy, improved wellbeing, lower test anxiety, and improved academic outcomes (Larcombe, Baik & Finch, 2022; von der Embse et al., 2018; Postareff et al.,

2017; Cigman, 2012; Trigwell et al., 2012; Dettmers et al., 2011; Townes et al., 2011), although may involve anxiety, frustration, and overload in the short-term (Cipra & Müller-Hilke, 2019; Postareff et al., 2017), particularly for students with perfectionist traits (Howard, 2020).

Collaborative Pedagogy

The review found mixed evidence regarding the impact of collaborative pedagogy and peer mentoring on student wellbeing; some evidence indicated collaborative pedagogy facilitates wellbeing-facilitative social connection and deep learning (Larcombe, Baik & Finch, 2022; Baepler, 2021; Hill et al. 2021; Pye, Williams & Dunne, 2020; Akinla, Hagan & Atiomo, 2018; Stanton et al., 2016), whilst other evidence suggested that collaborative pedagogy can stimulate social evaluation anxiety and fear of failure (Cebula, Macleod & Stone, 2022; Hood et al., 2021; Downing et al. 2020; Falkner, Falkner & Vivian, 2013). By extension, psychological safety in the learning environment is associated with alleviation of academic stress and anxiety and increased creativity (Spitzer & Aronson, 2015; Rania et al., 2014), particularly for minority student groups (Stoll et al., 2022). Conversely students with negative perceptions of the social learning environment have been found to report increased odds of academic stress, burnout, depression, and anxiety (Stormon et al., 2021; Franzen et al., 2021; Le-Bucklin et al., 2020; Daniels, Sheahan, & MacNeela, 2020; Dyrbye et al., 2009).

Creative Pedagogy

The review identified preliminary evidence that 'good wellbeing boosts creativity and creativity seems to benefit wellbeing' (Hughes & Wilson, 2017, p.14; see also Acar, Tadik & Myers, 2020). Indeed, 'little-c' creative pedagogical approaches that promote 'everyday production of novel solutions to minor problems' (Gilhooly & Gilhooly, 2021, p.1) have been associated with positive affect, autonomy, flourishing, self-expression, sense of purpose, competence, optimism, personal growth, self-confidence, cognitive flexibility, and coping (Acar, Tadik, & Myers, 2020; Secker et al., 2018; Cropley & Gleaves, 2015; Wright & Pasco, 2015; Dolan & Metcalfe, 2012; McLellan et al., 2012). Notwithstanding, Hernandez, Mendez, & Garber (2010) found no significant relationship between creativity and student (n=113) psycho-pathological symptomology.

Technology-Enhanced and Online Learning

Whilst the additional accessibility, autonomy, flexibility, inclusivity, anonymity, and efficiency afforded by Technology-Enhanced and online pedagogy have been identified by some students as beneficial to wellbeing and learning, several additional stressors have been found to negatively impact on student wellbeing including isolation; information overload; increase in perceived workload; self-regulatory challenges, and technical difficulties, [see Priestley & Slack, 2022].

Exposure to Academic Determinants of Mental Health in the Neoliberal University

Notwithstanding the relative lack of theoretical interrogation of academic determinants of student wellbeing in the context of the neoliberal university, preliminary evidence was found to indicate that the core tenets of neoliberal higher education policy increase (unequal) exposure to several academic determinants of student mental health and wellbeing.

Performativity and Test Anxiety

Preliminary evidence was found that the neoliberal emphasis on assessment and monitored performance compounds the socio-psychological conditions for test anxiety and maladaptive perfectionism (Blazek & Stenning, 2022; Keddie, 2016; Evans, 2015; Levine, 2008). Indeed, through the privatisation and instrumentalisation of higher education, 'the desire to secure a professional job on graduation tends to increase the importance attributed to assessment' (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009, p.282) and the perceived material and existential threat of 'failure' (Feigenbaum, 2021; Whittle et al., 2020; Torrance, 2017; Singh, 2017). Hence the salience of assessment outcome in instrumental and competitive systems of performativity heighten academic stress and test anxiety in the neoliberal university (Berg, Huijbens & Larsen, 2016). Moreover, 'the doctrine of neoliberal meritocracy insidiously connects the principles of educational achievement with innate personal value' (Curran & Hill, 2019, 413) whereby students 'interpret feedback relating to failure at task as failure of self' (Molloy, Borrell-Carrio & Epstein. 2013, p.59). The socio-symbolic implications of assessment in the neoliberal system can

thus intensify anxiety around perceived failure and magnify perfectionist tendencies, constructing self-worth as conditional upon successfully achieving progressively higher standards (Rice, Richardson, & Ray, 2016). In this way, 'increasing levels of perfectionism might be considered symptomatic of neoliberalism's culture of competitive individualism' (Curran & Hill, 2019, p.413).

Performativity and Burnout

Preliminary evidence was found that panoptical neoliberal systems of individualised and competitive performance outcomes 'impose over-involvement in work and work under emergency or high-stress conditions' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.1) which increase the risk of burnout (Singh, 2017). Indeed, neoliberal performativity 'systems depend on overwork at every level in order to function as a site for the production of relative surplus value' (Hall & Bowles, 2016, p.38). 'The unrelenting pressure to succeed in ever more competitive and unforgiving performance-fixated environments' (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016, p.203) instil overwork by driving a material and psychological imperative to optimise the value of academic outputs, promoting 'isolated, individualised, working practices; intense workloads and time pressures; long hours; and the elision of barriers between work and home' (Horton & Tucker, 2014, p.85). 'When the priority is grades, it manifests itself in excessive hours of focused studying, and in negative coping behaviours (such as reduced sleep, physical activity, and social interaction)

which could detrimentally effect the wellbeing of the student (Nair & Otaki, 2021, p.2).

Instrumentalism and Surface learning

Preliminary evidence was found that the neoliberal instrumentalisation, commodification, and consumerism of higher education in systems of performativity incentivise surface learning (Troiani & Dutson, 2021; Desierto & Maio, 2020; Humberstone, Beard & Clayton, 2013). Indeed, contrary to the liberal educational emphasis on intellectual creativity, autonomy, criticality, and civic participation, 'instrumentalised and individualised practices dominate and are given value' in neoliberal systems of performance (Danvers, 2021, p.652). As a result, students become 'highly utilitarian and credentialist' (Barabasch & Rauner, 2011, p.112); utilitarian in that education is conceptualised as the means to an economic end, and credentialist in that they focus on assessment outputs and 'accumulating the credentials they think necessary, rather than the learning that credentials are supposed to present' (Gonon et al., 2012, p.121). As such, transactional consumer-based and instrumentalist conceptions of higher education as knowledge capital in the neoliberal system can encourage surface learning' (Wilbraham et al., in press; Winstone, 2020), with 'educational tasks constructed in terms of an implicit entrepreneurial norm in which participation necessitates the strategic assessment of probable costs, benefits, and outcomes of success' (Wilkins, 2012, p.773). 'The turning of higher education into a commercial transaction and culture of student consumerism has deleterious pedagogical

implications manifest in surface learning' (Watermeyer & Tomlinson, 2018, p.95) where 'the focus on grades in education has reduced students' ability to engage in deep, active, learning (Hughes & Wilson, 2017, p. 45).

Competition and Learning Environment

Evidence was found that the inherent emphasis on competition within neoliberal higher education policy creates a competitive environment that promotes anxiety and peer competition rather than collaborative learning (Dyrbye et al., 2006, p. 1617). Within the competitive free-market for knowledge capital, universities 'appear to structure aspects of learning and teaching within the vocabulary of competition and autonomy' (Wilkins, 2012, p.772) with 'learning strategies based on competition and zero-sum thinking inscribed into the dynamics of classroom interaction (Wilkins, 2012, p.766). 'Learning and personal development are formulated and evaluated within a field of judgement that privileges competitiveness and adversarial tendencies based on attitudes of point-scoring, one-upmanship, and entrepreneurialism. …. designat[ing] an orientation to learning motivated by market-driven prerogatives, values, and incentives in which one person's 'success' necessities another's relative failure' (Wilkins, 2012, p.773). In a competitive learning environment, 'other students symbolise a direct threat to personal achievement', sense of competence, and self-worth, resulting in avoidance and isolation from peers, socially prescribed perfectionism, and academic intensification and burnout (Priestley et al., 2022, p.5). Likewise, commensurable hierarchal performativity systems have been found to

undermine student wellbeing by increasing assessment anxiety, competition, and fear of failure, promoting extrinsic motivation and surface learning strategies, and discouraging collaborative and cooperative relationships with peers and academic staff (Moir et al., 2018; Jham, Cannella & Adibi, 2018; Larcombe, Finch & Sore, 2015; Slavin et al., 2011; Spring et al., 2011; White & Fantone, 2009; Robins et al., 1995).

Policy Recommendations

A series of recurring recommendations for policy and practice were thematically identified. Reflecting dominant theoretical trends or lack thereof, recommendations tended to advocate isolated interventions to develop individual skills and qualities, although a proactive multi-dimensional approach is increasingly advocated to address the structural and cultural academic stressors within the university environment (Moir et al., 2018; Wasson et al., 2016).

Recommendation One: Curricular Interventions

Integration of wellbeing related content and/ or interventions into the curriculum have been advocated (Soulakova et al. 2019; Thomas & Asselin, 2018; Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Dundas et al., 2015; Slavin, Schindler & Chibnall, 2011; Stallman, 2011), aligned with transitional and pressure points in the academic year (Hopkins et al., 2019), consistent with existing principles of best practice (Crowther, Robertson & Anderson, 2020; Penwell-Waines et al.,

2019), and flexible to individual needs (Priestley & Cowley, 2022; Priestley et al., 2021).

Recommendation Two: Collaborative Pedagogy

Embedding collaborative pedagogical and peer support approaches into the curriculum have been advocated in order to 'encourage development and maintenance of strong relationships' (Slavin et al., 2011, p.15) and develop cohort identity and belonging (e.g., Moir et al., 2018; Baik et al., 2017; Houghton & Anderson, 2017 Parkman, 2016; Wasson et al., 2016; Larcombe, Malkin & Nicholson, 2013; 2011; Cramp et al., 2012).

Recommendation Three: Experiential Learning

Curricular opportunities for practical and experiential learning have been advocated, including electives and service learning (Baik et al., 2017; Larcombe, Malkin & Nicholson, 2013; Slavin et al., 2011; Divaris et al., 2008), alongside targeted support for students on professional placements (Hughes & Spanner, 2019; McBeath, Drysdale & Bohn, 2018; Gillet-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2017).

Recommendation Four: Skills Interventions

Curricular study skills interventions have been advocated to support students to understand the expectations and requirements of learning and assessment in higher education, particularly during academic transitions (Beaumont, O'Doherty & Shannon, 2011; Divaris et al., 2008). 'Supporting students'

understanding of the assessment methods used in higher education is crucial in promoting positive mental health' (Glazzard & Stones, 2019, p.21) with recommendations including clear assessment briefs and criteria, exemplar responses, and self and/or peer assessment (Hughes, 2020; Kift & Moody, 2009)

Recommendation Five: Transition Pedagogy

'Assessment in the first year, and particularly in the first semester of the first year, should be designed intentionally to help students to become independent and self-managing learners and alleviate foreseeable student anxiety' (Field & Kift, 2010, p.71). 'By facilitating student development in this way, assessment and feedback design strategies have significant potential to alleviate student anxiety about their studies' (Field & Kift, 2010, p.71). Grounded in the premise that 'the teaching of independent learning skills is important for university student learning success and for the promotion of student wellbeing' (Field, Duffy & Huggins, 2014, p.8) because student wellbeing can be supported if students are equipped with independent learning skills that allow them to be self-regulated, autonomous, and motivated' (Field, Duffy & Huggins, 2014, p.7), transition pedagogy (Kift, 2015; 2009; Kift, Nelson & Clarke, 2010) explicitly embeds transition support into curricular, assessment, and feedback practices whilst holistically integrating institutional, administrative, and support policies, practices, and processes in order to alleviate transitional challenges and create a sense of belonging (see Nelson et al., 2014).

Recommendation Six: Curricular Design

Curricular and pedagogical design has been advocated, using universal design principles (Seok, DeCosta & Hodges, 2018; Boothe, 2018; Miller & Lang, 2016; Smith, 2012), to reduce perceived workload, promote deep learning, and foreground self-care and work-life balance (Gaston-Hawkins, 2020; Baik et al., 2017; Morgan & Houghton, 2017; Thomas & Revell, 2015; Kyndt et al., 2014; Huggins, 2012; Slavin et al., 2011). 'Considering which curriculum elements may cause stress or undue difficulties for particular students at the design stage enables course designers to structure modules and programmes in ways that will minimise the need for individual reasonable adjustments' (Morgan & Houghton 2011, p. 2). 'Universities should endeavour to ensure that curricula content is engaging and that challenges such as collaborative activities and distressing content are scaffolded with suitable support' (Lister, Seale & Douce, 2021, p.11). Threshold concepts (Meyer & Land, 2005) have been proposed, in particular, to ensure curricular content is scaffolded and sequential, avoiding information overload and unmanageable workloads (Sotardi & Brogt, 2018) with 'narrative coherence' and relevance within and between modules through a spiral curriculum that revisits content in increasing depth and complexity (Hughes, 2020; Baik et al., 2017; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013).

Recommendation Seven: Assessment Diversity & Flexibility

Diversity and flexibility regarding assessment type and conditions in response to individual preferences and choice has been recommended (Jones et al., 2021; Baik et al., 2017; Houghton & Anderson, 2017; Pekrun, 2016; Wasson, 2016; Brown, 2016; Divaris et al., 2008), whilst ensuring assessment criteria and feedback processes are clear and consistent (Lister, Seale & Douce, 2021). Structured formative and self-assessment (Kift & Moddy, 2009; Divaris et al., 2008) and authentic assessment have been advocated in particular, to reduce test anxiety and support independent deep learning conducive to wellbeing (Field & Kift, 2010; Kift & Moddy, 2009; Divaris et al., 2008). In addition, competency-based pass/fail systems have been advocated 'so as to not create additional, meaningless, and unneeded stress' [Gaston & Hawkins, 2020; p.93) and to 'reduce unneeded competition and promote collaborative learning' (Slavin, Schindler & Chibnall, 2014, p.575) whilst 'spacing out assessments and considering workload' (Baik et al., 2017, p.16).

Recommendation Eight: Feedback

Intentional personalised and task-specific feedback and guidance has been recommended to align the timing, type, purpose, and process of feedback provision with student expectations, so that 'feedback can alleviate anxieties' (Field & Kift, 2010, p. 66), and promote autonomy, mastery, and deep learning (Henderson et al, 2019; Baik et al., 2017; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013). Existing evidence suggests that 1-1 individualised, dialogic, culturally competent, and task-specific feedforward activities can support student self-

efficacy, growth mindset, and shift feedback from a perceived threat or criticism to a challenge (Adams et al., 2020; Henderson et al, 2019).

Recommendation Nine: Inclusive Learning

'Ensure a friendly and inclusive educational environment for all students, regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, or religious beliefs' (Divaris et al., 2008, p.14) that supports psychological safety and confidential disclosure of mental health difficulties (Penwell-Waines et al., 2019). Embedding curricular content on diversity, inclusivity, and race has been shown to increase belonging and wellbeing of ethnic minority students (Stoll et al., 2022; Bunce et al., 2019; Akel, 2019). In addition, development of 'relationships between faculty and students, fostered by mentoring, advising and small group interaction' have been advocated (Divaris et al., 2008, p.125; Dunham et al., 2017; Larcombe et al., 2013; Slavin et al., 2011) with pastoral support for students experiencing personal issues (Baik et al., 2017). 'It is important for educators to foster a safe, inclusive, respectful, and positive learning environment …. through professional role modelling, careful planning, and implementation of cooperative learning strategies' (Clearly et al., 2012, p.953).

Recommendation Ten: A Multi-Dimensional Approach

'Addressing specific aspects of this issue in isolation is less likely to be successful' (Moir et al., 2018, p.328). Rather 'comprehensive reform of the learning environment that incorporates many of these interventions is likely

required' (Wasson et al., 2016, p.9). 'Because academic stressors are multifactorial and different for different individuals, an approach that include multiple interventions, rather than unifocal change, would have a better chance of improving student mental health' (Slavin et al., 2014, p.574). In particular, given evidence that 'only a small fraction of assessment-related anxieties are attributable to personality-based factors' (Sotardi & Brogt, 2018, p.1), 'the focus might be better placed on reducing the elements that contribute to psychological distress' in the teaching and learning environment rather than individual-level intervention (Moir et al., 2018, p.328). For example, a multidimensional curricula intervention involving reduction in curricular hours and content volume by 10%; change to pass/fail grading; active elective and volunteer activities; establishment of learning communities; and embedding a resilience and mindfulness intervention resulted in an 85% and 75% decrease in the depression and anxiety respectively in first-year medical students, with corresponding increases in quality of life, group cohesion, student satisfaction, and exam scores by developing deep learning, problem-focused coping, reducing cognitive load (Slavin, 2019; Slavin, 2016; Slavin, Schindler, & Chibnall, 2014; 2011).

Chapter Summary

Taken together, this review has identified preliminary evidence that the central tenets and manifestations of neoliberal higher education policy materially and psychologically increase (unequal) exposure to several academic determinants of student mental health and wellbeing, namely:

test anxiety, perceived workload, and a competitive learning environment. Notwithstanding, the review identified a compromising lack of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and qualitative methodological models to interrogate and interpret student experience of curricular, pedagogy, and assessment in the context of the neoliberal higher education system, substantiating the rationale of the theoretical synthesis in this thesis.

Chapter Eight: Survey Methods

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological rationale and procedure for the WELL@UNI cross-sectional survey with regard to survey design, sample, and analytic procedure. This method was selected to address the research question 'what is the prevalence, variance, and associations of salient social, academic, and financial determinants of student wellbeing within the context of the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal university?' The research question was informed by Foucaultian theory and sought to interrogate the findings from the WELL@UNI narrative literature review.

Survey Method

A cross-sectional self-administered online survey was selected to examine the prevalence, variance, and associations of multiple mental health determinants simultaneously across the diverse student population. As an observational research method that analyses data across a sample population at a specific time point (Setia, 2016), cross-sectional survey designs have been advocated in population health and wellbeing research (Rothman, Greenland & Lash, 2008). Notwithstanding Foucaultian critique of survey-based epistemology (Rose, 1990), use of survey method in this study is consistent with pluralist pragmatist ontology (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019) and fundamental to mixed methodological research designs that aim to understand complex multi-dimensional phenomena in context (Doyle, Brady

& Byrne, 2009), with practical utility in policy and practice (Broglia et al., 2021). In addition, where online focus groups can be self-selective (Wei et al., 2016), 'generally favour those better able to express their opinions, leaving the more vulnerable and less confident without a voice' (Powell, Single & Lloyd, 1996, p.204) and risk suppressing conflicting, contentious, and non-normative views (Smithson, 2000), the anonymity of the online survey also sought to ameliorate potential sampling bias and measurement error (Kekkonen et al., 2015; Woodall et al., 2010).

Survey Procedure

Survey Design

The WELL@UNI survey consisted of four sections, namely: demographic and lifestyle information; mental health and wellbeing information; academic, social, and financial experiences, and neoliberal socio-material and socio-psychological conditions [see Appendix 4]. This survey structure was selected to obtain data relevant to the research question on the prevalence, variance, and associations of salient social, academic, and financial determinants of student wellbeing within the context of the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal university. To ensure data quality, attention check items were included (Shamon & Berning, 2020). To minimise risk of missing data, forced responses to all questions were ensured (Kang, 2013) , with a 'prefer not to say' option where applicable (Krosnick et al., 2002).

Demographic and Lifestyle Information

During narrative literature review, the following demographic factors were identified to effect student wellbeing outcomes, namely: **gender** (Deng et al., 2021; Lee Jeong & Kim, 2021; Shaffique et al., 2020; Grotan, Sund & Bjerkeset, 2019; Sivertsen et al., 2019; Mortier et al., 2018; Saleh, Camart & Romo, 2017; Rickwood et al., 2016; Puthran et al., 2016; Pedrelli et al., 2016; Beiter et al., 2015; Macaskill, 2013; Houghton et al., 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2011; Leahy et al., 2010; Verger et al., 2009); **age** (Ward et al., 2022; McLafferty et al., 2021; Larcombe et al., 2016; Cvetkovski et al., 2012; Bayram & Bilgel, 2008); **ethnicity** (Bennett et al., 2022; Stoll et al., 2022; Arday, 2021; Mushonga, 2021; Insight Network & Dig-In, 2018; McIntyre et al., 2018; Arday, 2018; Lipson et al., 2018; Arday & Mirza, 2017; Eisenberg, Hunt & Speer, 2012; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2007); **sexuality** (Sheldon et al., 2021; Satinsky et al., 2021; Wilson & Cariola, 2020; Auerbach et al., 2018; Horgan et al., 2018; McIntyre et al., 2018; ; Smithies & Byrom, 2018; McLafferty et al., 2017; YouGov, 2016; Lindsey, Fabiano & Stark, 2009); **disability** (Larcombe et al., 2022; Office for Students, 2020; Fleming et al., 2018; Kotero et al., 2018; McMillan & Jarvis, 2013; Holloway, 2010); **religion** (Forouhari et al., 2019; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Mahmoud et al., 2012; Eisenberg, Hunt & Speer, 2012); **household income** (McLafferty et al., 2017; Unite Students, 2016; Ibrahim et al., 2013; Said, Kypri & Bowman., 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2007); **care experience** (Office for Students, 2021; Hopwood, 2020; Miller, Blakeslee & Ison, 2020; Root, Unrau & Kyles, 2020;), **caring responsibilities** (Larcombe et al., 2022; Spacey, Sanderson &

Zile, 2022; Dent, 2021), and **family estrangement** (Marvell & Child, 2022; Spacey & Sanderson, 2021; Costa et al., 2020; Taylor, Costa & Singh, 2019).

The following higher education specific factors were identified to effect student wellbeing outcomes, namely: **academic program** (Lipson et al., 2016; Larcombe, Finch & Sore, 2015; Skead & Rogers, 2015; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013; Keik, Medlow & Hickie, 2010) **international student status** (Bi et al., 2022; Frampton, Smith & Smithies, 2022; Maleku et al., 2021; Slaten et al., 2016; Zhang & Goodson, 2011; Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010), **part-time status** (Frampton & Thompson, 2023; Butcher, 2020; Higher Education Statistics, 2019; Callender & Thompson, 2018), **first generation scholar** (Rockwell & Kimel, 2023; Schuyler, Childs & Poynton, 2021; House, Neal & Kolb, 2020; Holinka, 2015; Stebleton, Soria & Huesman, 2014), and **professional placement** (Hodge et al., 2021; Gillet-Swan & Grant-Smith, 2018; McBeath, Drysdale & Bohn, 2018; Gair & Baglow, 2018; Grant-Smith & McDonald, 2018; Jackson, 2017; Drysdale et al., 2016; Johnstone et al., 2016).

The following lifestyle factors were identified to effect student wellbeing outcomes, namely: **physical health** (Wilson et al.., 2021; Budzynski-Seymour et al ., 2020; Stroebele-Benschop, Dieze & Hilzendegen, 2019; Ferrara, Nobrega & Dulfan , 2013; Ansari, 2011); **term-time employment** (Peltz et al ., 2021; Potter, Jayne, & Brett, 2020; Benson Egglenton, 2019; Moxham et al., 2018; Larcombe et al., 2016; McGregor, 2015; Mounsey, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2013; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013); **relationship status** (Eisenberg, Hunt & Speer,

2012; Lopez, Viejo & Ortega-Ruiz, 2019; Diehl et al., 2018; Kansky, 2018; Davilla et al., 2017; Marcum et al., 2016; Soller, 2014; Miller, 2014; Boyle et al., 2013; Shorey et al., 2011) and **living status** (Foulkes et al., 2021; Foulkes, McMillan, & Gregory 2019; Walsh, Taylor, & Brennick 2018; Holton, 2016; Eisenberg, Hunt & Speer, 2012; Barros et al., 2019; Gibson et al, 2011; Kitchen et al., 2012; Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021; Trawalter, Hoffman, & Palmer, 2021; Brown, Volk & Spratto, 2019; Holton, 2016; Brooks, Byford & Sela, 2016; Easterbrook & Vignoles 2015). The following adverse events at university were also identified to effect student wellbeing outcomes, namely: **bereavement** (Tureluren, Claes & Andriessen, 2022), **bullying** (Myers & Cowie, 2016; Cushwa, 2013), **burglary** (Morrall et al., 2010), **debt** (Benson-Egglenton, 2019; Walsemann, Gee & Gentile, 2015), **domestic abuse** (Romito & Grassi, 2007), **family conflict** (Bhargav & Swords, 2022; Eisenberg & Hefner, 2009), **hate crime** (Clement et al., 2011), **eviction** (Acharya, Bhatta & Dhakal, 2022; Vasquez-VBera et al., 2017), **physical assault** (Elbogen & Johnson, 2009), **relationship break-up** (Field et al., 2011), **serious illness or injury** (O'Donnell et al., 2012), **sexual assault** (Blanco et al., 2021; Bondestam & Lundqvist, 2020) and **verbal abuse** (Yun, Shim & Jeong, 2019).

Each of these constructs were operationalised in section one of the survey as independent variables to account for individual variance in wellbeing outcomes [Grant, Hickey & Head, 2018]. items operationalising these variables adhered to inclusive survey design principles (Langdon et al., 2015)

and were informed by existing survey measures to enable data comparison [see Appendix 4].

Mental Health and Wellbeing Information

Data on student wellbeing were obtained using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS); a psychometrically validated self-report, 5-point, seven-item Likert measure scale of mental wellbeing with strong content validity and high internal consistency (Stewart-Brown et al., 2009; Tennant et al, 2007). The selection of a non-clinical self-report population measure of subjective wellbeing is consistent with the dual continua theorisation of wellbeing propounded in this thesis (Shah et al., 2021), acceptable to a UK student population (Dodd & Byrom, 2022) and has high data comparison across the sector (Dodd et al., 2021). Self-report items on mental health diagnosis and help-seeking were also included, alongside items on the duration of diagnosis and perceived impact of both university and the Covid-19 pandemic to account for external influences on mental health (SMaRteN, 2020) .

Academic, Social, and Financial Experience

Data on academic, social, and financial experiences of higher education were obtained through twenty one constructed seven-point self-report Likert scale items to measure unobservable individual characteristics or experiences that have no objective measurement (Jebb, Ng & Tay, 2021). Seven point likert scales have been shown to demonstrate increased validity

and sensitivity to variability (Finstad, 2019). A multiple choice question containing a pre-defined list of wellbeing determinants was also used to measure students' perceived prominence and prioritisation of a range of variables identified in the literature review (Demetriou, Ozer, & Essau, 2015). An optional free text open question to elucidate recommendations for changes to policy and practice was also included to triangulate focus group findings and address the research aim.

Relevant constructs were identified during the narrative literature review. The relevant academic variables identified and included in the survey were: **test anxiety** (Pate et al., 2021; Macauley et al., 2018; Von der Embse et al., 2018; Elani et al., 2014; Labrague, 2013); **perceived workload** (Porru et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Guys, Lesener & Wolter, 2021; Bowyer, 2019; Dyrbye et al., 2009); and **deep learning** (Hughes, 2022; 2020; Cipra & Müller-Hilke, 2019; Postareff et al., 2017; Hughes & Wilson, 2017; Postareff et al., 2017; 2016; Stanton et al., 2016; Trigwell et al., 2012). The relevant social variables identified and included in the survey were: **isolation and loneliness** (Alsubaie et al. (2019; Vasileiou et al., 2019; Richardson, Roberts, & Jansen, 2016); **inclusion and belonging** (Maunders, 2018; Bowman et al., 2018; Meehan & Howells, 2018); **relationships with peers** (McIntyre et al., 2018; Jobling & Valtorta, 2018); **relationships with academic staff** (Priestley et al., 2022; Blackman, 2020; Hagenauer & Volet, 2014) and **relationships with the local community** (Priestley et al., 2022; McIntyre et al. 2018; Woldoff & Weiss, 2018). The relevant financial variables identified and included in the survey were **financial**

anxiety (Porru et al., 2021; Deckard, Goosby & Cheadle, 2022; Jessop, Reid & Solomon, 2020; Jones, Park, & Lefevor, 2018); **financial difficulties** (Benson-Egglenton., 2019; Richardson et al. 2018; 2017; 2015); and **debt** (Benson-Egglenton, 2019; Pisaniello et al., 2019; Nissen, Hayward & McManus, 2018; Walsemann, Gee & Gentile, 2015).

To operationalise each variable, single items were constructed as proxy measures of the relevant construct. Single-item measures have been shown to be preferable to participants (Wanous et al., 1997) and acceptable when constructs are unidimensional, clearly defined, and narrow in scope (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2009). Item wording was informed by good practice guidance on item dimensionality and difficulty (Wolfe & Smith, 2007) and existing survey measures of these constructs such as the University Mental Health Charter Student Survey, Education for Mental Health Survey, Wellbeing Thesis Survey[7] and National Union of Students Wellbeing Survey (NUS, 2014) . Items were designed to ensure face validity and immediate and accurate comprehension, whilst minimising construct multidimensionality and construct irrelevant variance (Nemoto & Beglar, 2014).

Neoliberal Socio-material and Socio-psychological Conditions

Data on socio-material and socio-psychological neoliberal conditions were obtained through eighteen items using a seven-point self-report Likert scale

[7] The researcher accessed these surveys as a participant; they are not available ion the public domain at the time of writing.

to measure the association between neoliberal policy discourse, truth and subjectivity, and academic, financial, and social beliefs and behaviours, consistent with theorisation in chapter three . Items were designed to operationalise the neoliberal principles identified in chapter one found to mediate exposure to social, academic, and financial determinants of wellbeing in chapters five to seven, namely: **instrumentalism** (Ward, 2016; Noonan & Coral, 2015), **privatisation** (Marginson, 2018; Bolton 2017), **competition** (Olssen, 2021Wilkins, 2012), **consumerism** (Tomlinson, 2017; Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion , 2009), and **performativity** (Spooner, 2017; Ball, 2012). Items were informed by national neoliberal policy documentation such as the *Putting Students at the Heart of Higher Education White Paper* (GOV, 2011), *Fulfilling Our Potential Green Paper* (GOV, 2015), and *Success as a Knowledge Economy White Paper* (GOV, 2016).

The survey instrument and mode of analysis was piloted for feasibility, acceptability, and suitability. Pilot survey data were obtained from ninety three participants. Of these, eight provided detailed written feedback. The survey took 15 minutes to complete. Following pilot, minor changes were made to survey design, terminology, and items to ensure clarity, inclusivity, accessibility, and nuance of circumstance during the pandemic. Changes were also made to variable categorisations following pilot analysis.

Survey Sample

The online survey sample population (n=815) comprised a self-selective purposive sample of the UK undergraduate and postgraduate student population. Post-hoc power analysis revealed that 0.5 two-tailed independent mean co-efficient effect size could be detected at the 0.05 significance level with a power of 1. Inclusion criteria encompassed any current part or full-time undergraduate or postgraduate student in any year of study enrolled at a UK higher education institution during the 2020/ 2021 academic year. Academic staff, practitioners, policy makers, recent graduates, further and secondary education students, non-UK based students, and parents of students were all excluded from participating in the survey.

Participants were recruited during November and December 2020 through a purposive self-selective convenience sampling method. To increase the response rate (Abdelazeem et al., 2022), participants were incentivised through the option to enter a £50 voucher prize draw. Given that random sampling was not feasible for the target population (Badu, O'Brien & Mitchell, 2019), the survey recruitment strategy drew on Watters' (1989) 'targeted sampling' methodology to identify and recruit an approximate proportionally representative sample of the different socio-demographic subpopulations within the target student population. This involved iteratively reviewing demographics in the sample population and targeting appropriate

recruitment channels to reach under-represented groups (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006.

The sample population (n=815) was largely representative of the target UK undergraduate and postgraduate student population according to age, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, disability, religion, household income, and liberation groups [see figure 8]. 108 or 71% of UK universities were represented (HESA, 2021). However, consistent with previous literature (Woodall et al., 2010), students from the host institution were significantly over-represented (47% vs 0.8%) whilst male students were significantly under-represented (18% vs 43%).

Figure 8: Survey Sample Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	National Average	
Age	18-24	639	78%	69%	HESA, 2021
	25-29	96	12%	11%	
	30-34	34	4%	20%	
	35-39	23	3%		
	40+	23	3%		
Gender	Cisgender Woman	623	76.4%	57%	HESA, 2021
	Cisgender Man	148	**18.2%**	**43%**	
	Transgender Woman	1	0.1%	NA	
	Transgender Man	7	0.9%		
	Non-Binary	15	1.8%		
Sexual Orientation	Asexual	19	2.5%	0.5%	Office for National Statistics, 2021
	Bisexual	130	17%	2%	
	Heterosexual	560	**72%**	95%	
	Homosexual	46	6%	2%	
	Pansexual	20	2.5%	2.5%	
Ethnicity	Asian	90	11%	11%	HESA, 2021
	Black	25	3%	7%	
	White British	542	67%	76%	

	White European	93	11%		
	Mixed	35	4%	4%	
Religion	Atheist	530	69%	25%	Office for National Statistics, 2020
	Buddhist	12	2%	1%	
	Christian	188	24%	59%	
	Hindu	12	2%	2%	
	Jewish	3	0.5%	1%	
	Muslim	24	4%	5%	
	Sikh	3	0.5%	1%	
Household Income	Less than £20,000	212	32%	30%	HESA, 2021[8]
	£29, 000 to £39, 999	183	28%	29%	
	£40,000 to £49, 999	91	14%	17%	
	More than £50, 000	168	26%	24%	
Liberation Group	First-Generation Scholar	272	**27%**	≈ 18%	IZA Institute, 2019
	Care-Experienced	21	2%	≈12%	ONS, 2020
	Mature	158	**16%**	≈31%	UUK, 2019
	Estranged	29	3%	≈1%	UCAS, 2021
	Caring Responsibilities	63	6%	≈ 8%	Wong, 2017
	Professional Placement	137	14%	≈ 9%	HEPI, 2019
	None	330	33%	NA	NA
Year of Study	UG 1	192	24%	76%	HESA, 2021
	UG 2	105	13%		
	UG 3	220	27%		
	UG 4	70	9%		
	PGT 1	90	11%	24%	
	PGT 2	20	3%		
	PGR 1	29	4%		
	PGR 2+	77	10%		
Enrolment	Full-Time	777	95%	79%	HESA, 2021
	Part-Time	38	**5%**	21%	
Status	Home	652	80%	80%	HESA, 2021
	International [EU]	70	9%	20%	
	International [Outside EU]	87	11%		
Faculty	Science	403	49%	46%	HESA, 2021
	Arts & Humanities	119	15%	54%	
	Social Sciences	291	36%		

[8] Adjusted analysis using English Indices of Deprivation

Participants were recruited by disseminating the study online via an extensive national network of third-sector organisations, including Students against Depression; the Student Mental Health Research Network [SMaRteN]; Student Minds; the National Union of Students; If U Care Share Foundation; It's Our Day; ManHealth; and MQ Mental Health. All universities and Student Unions in the UK were also invited to disseminate the survey through their communication channels. In addition, student communication channels were used, including the Student Room; The Tab; Palatinate Student News; and Overheard at University. Blogs, Vlogs, and recruitment posters were disseminated on Twitter; Facebook; Instagram; and Reddit. The MP for Durham City, Mary Foy, also promoted the study.

Survey Analysis Method

Survey data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). Basic descriptive statistics were used to estimate both the relative prevalence, significance, and variability of given mental health outcomes and determinants among different student subgroups within the student population. In particular, measures of frequency (namely count and percent), measures of central tendency (namely mean, median and mode) and measures of variation (namely range and standard deviation) were used to report the prevalence of mental wellbeing determinants and outcomes (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). Inferential statistics were used to infer the existence, direction, and magnitude of association between wellbeing outcomes, wellbeing determinants, and particular higher education

conditions, beliefs, and experiences among different groups in the neoliberal higher education system. The inferential statistical tools used were chi-square tests of independence, t-tests, and analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests (Cohen, 1988).

Two-tailed t-tests were used to analyse the association between a dependent quantitative variable and independent categorical variable such as variance in wellbeing scores (continuous variable) according to demographic characteristics (categorical variable) or academic, social or financial determinants (categorical variable). T tests have been found to be effective in cases where experimental subjects are divided into two independent groups to compare variance (Kyun-Kim, 2015). To identify associations between academic, social, and financial determinants and wellbeing, categorical data obtained through likert scale responses was converted into binary agree and disagree variables (Kass, 1980). The confidence level was 0.05 in line with good practice guidance (Flechner & Tseng, 2011). Chi-squared tests of independence were used to analyse two categorical variables such as the association between demographic characteristics (categorical variable) and academic, social or financial determinants (categorical variable). To identify differences in determinants across demographic groups, categorical data from likert scale responses was converted into continuous interval data (Lee & Kim, 2010). Three factor one-way ANOVA analysis was used to analyse the difference between outcome means of more than two demographic group (such as age, operationalised

as 18-24, 25-30; 30-40; 40+]. A series of sequential statistical tests were used to identify the association between each factor in isolation to test each hypothesis separately in the first instance to remove potential co-founding variables (Goldman, 2008). Content analysis was used to analyse free text responses to determine and quantify the presence of certain concepts and themes to determine the relative prevalence and significance of recommendations (Stemler, 2001).

Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the WELL@UNI survey methodological rationale and procedure to identify the prevalence, variance, and associations of salient social, academic, and financial determinants of student wellbeing within the context of the socio-material and psycho-social conditions of the neoliberal system.

Chapter Nine: Student Wellbeing and Experiences of Living and Learning at UK Universities: Survey Findings

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from the WELL@UNI survey, examining the prevalence, variance, and determinants of student wellbeing in the neoliberal higher educational context. Taken together, the findings affirm the prevalence and significance of the social, academic, and financial determinants of wellbeing identified in chapters five to seven; elucidate significant sociodemographic inequalities in welllbeing outcomes and risk exposure; and indicate interrelationships with the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal university identified in chapter one and three.

Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

The sample mean Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale [SWEMWBS] score was 19.98. This indicates possible depression or anxiety (Tennant et al., 2007) and is significantly lower than equivalent SWEMWBS scores reported in the UK general population (19.98 ≅ 23.21; Fat et al., 2017). 37% of students self-identified as having a mental health diagnosis. Of those, 80% reporting having been diagnosed for over a year. The most common diagnoses were anxiety disorders and depressive disorders, reported by 23% and 22% of the sample population respectively. Whilst there is an absence of large-scale weighted prevalence studies using consistent measures (Barkham

et al., 2019), it is estimated that approximately 29-34% of students may be currently experiencing a mental health condition such as anxiety or depression (e.g. Larcombe et al., 2022; McLafferty et al., 2021; Sheldon et al., 2021; Deng et al., 2021; Eisenberg & Lipson, 2020; Pereira et al, 2019; ACHA, 2019; Sivertsen et al., 2019). 39% of the sample population agreed that 'studying at university negatively effects my mental health' and 72% agreed that 'the Covid-19 pandemic has negatively impacted on my mental health'.

Variance in Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

Ethnicity, sexuality, disability, and academic program were all found to be significantly associated with wellbeing. LGBTQ+ students (T=2.381, P=0.008), Black students (F+2.49, df = 2, P= 0.001), disabled students (T=-4.58; P=<0.001), first year undergraduate students (F =2.491, df = 5, P = 0.030), and students studying arts and humanities (F =3.531, df = 2, P = 0.023) all reported significantly lower wellbeing outcomes than the overall sample population. Gender, age, religion, household income, and disability were not found to have a statistically significant effect on student wellbeing in this dataset. Equally, care experienced students, estranged students, international students, part-time students, students with caring responsibilities, first generation scholars, and students with a professional placement as part of their course were not found to report significantly lower wellbeing than the overall sample.

Ethnicity, sexuality, gender, and disability were found to be significantly associated with mental health diagnosis. LGBTQ+ students (T=-3.820, P= 0.0001), White students (T=2.514; P = 0.006), male students (P=0.005), and disabled students (T=9,60; P=<0.01) were significantly more likely to report a mental health diagnosis than the overall sample population. However, age, religion, household income, first generation students, care experienced students, students with a professional placement, estranged students, and students with caring responsibilities were all found to have no statistically significant association with mental health diagnosis in this dataset. 48% of the sample population agreed with the statement 'I have enjoyed most aspects of my course and not encountered any difficulties' and 44% agreed that 'studying at university is beneficial for my mental health'.

Help Seeking Outcomes

43% of the overall sample, and 73% of the sub-sample that reported a mental health diagnosis, reported accessing mental health services whilst at university – a help-seeking rate significantly higher than prior estimates (≈25%) in the UK student population (e.g., Macaskill, 2013). LGBTQ+ students (T=-3.243, P= 0.001) and disabled students (T=7.02; P=<0.01) were significantly more likely to have accessed mental health services at university, whilst male students (F =4390, df = 3, P = 0.0045), BAME students (T=-1.77; P=0.04), postgraduate students (T = -2.067, P = 0.012), and students with a professional placement as part of their course (t= -2.139; p. =0.016) were all significantly less likely to access services. Age, religion, course, and household income

were not found to be significantly associated with help-seeking. In addition, no statistically significant difference in help-seeking was found among international students, first-generation students, care-experienced students, estranged students, student carers, or part-time students.

Student Physical Health Outcomes

The sample population reported marginally healthier outcomes than the general population on measures of sleep duration and alcohol consumption, but unhealthier outcomes than the general population on measures of diet, exercise, and recreational drug use. These differences were not found to be statistically significant, however. Significant differences in physical health behaviours were reported on the basis of sexuality, ethnicity, gender, disability and age in the sample population [see Appendix 5].

Student Relationship Status and Wellbeing

52% of the sample described their relationship status as single; 39% in a relationship; 3% engaged; 5% married or in a civil partnership, and 1% divorced. Relationship status was not found to have a statistically significant relationship with wellbeing ($F=0.344$; $DF= 4$; $P=0.848$).

Student Living Arrangements and Wellbeing

51% of the sample occupied privately rented accommodation, 24% university owned accommodation, 13% owned their home and 12% lived with a parent

or guardian. Living status was not found to have a statistically significant association with wellbeing (F=1.16; DF=3; P=0.325).

Student Employment Status and Wellbeing

35% of the sample were engaged in paid employment, for an average of 12 hours per week. Postgraduate (T=3.06; P=0.001) and home (T= 2.57; P=0.001) students were significantly more likely to be employed. Students in employment reported significantly higher wellbeing than unemployed students (t= 1.72; p. =0.04) – yet number of hours employed per week had no significant impact on wellbeing (F = 0.488, df = 5, P=0.785).

Adverse Experiences at University

63% of the sample population reported experiencing adverse events since starting university. The most common adverse experiences were family conflict (26%), relationship break-up (25%), and bereavement (24%). BAME (T=4.12; P=<0.01; T=2.40; P=<0.01; T=1.88; P=0.03; T=2.29; P=0.01), LGBTQ+ (T=2.31; P=0.01; T=2.14; P=0.02; T=1.66; P=0.05; T=2.640; P=0.005) and disabled (T=2.43; P=<0.01; T=3.31; P=<0.01; T=1.78; P=0.04; T=1.80; P=0.04) students were significantly more likely to have experienced hate crime, verbal abuse, sexual assault and domestic abuse at university respectively. LGBTQ+ (T=2.04; P=0.02) and disabled (T=3.43; P=<0.01) students were also significantly more likely to have experienced bullying. Disabled (T=2.22; P=0.01) and BAME (T=1.91; P=0.03) students were more likely to have experienced housing

insecurity or eviction. Female students were significantly more likely to have experienced sexual assault (T=3.32; P=<0.01).

Experience of hate crime (t= -1.872; p. =0.030) and relationship break-up (t= 1.793; p. =0.037) at university were both significantly associated with lower wellbeing outcomes. However, experience of bereavement; bullying; burglary; debt; domestic abuse; family conflict; housing insecurity; serious illness/ injury; sexual assault; and verbal abuse were not found to have a statistically significant impact on wellbeing. Experiences of bullying (t= 2.355; p. =0.009); domestic abuse (t= 2.000; p. =0.023); family conflict (T=2.223; P = 0.013); and hate crime (T= -1.981; P=0.024) were all found to be significantly associated with a mental health diagnosis. Experiences of bereavement, burglary, debt, housing insecurity, romantic relationship break-up, serious illness/ injury, sexual assault, and verbal abuse were not found to have a statistically significant relationship with mental health diagnosis in this dataset.

Significance and Inequality of Wellbeing Determinants

In order of frequency, the sample population reported the biggest challenges for student wellbeing from a pre-defined list to be exams and/or assessments; loneliness; financial difficulties; workload; conflict with flatmates; alcohol and/or substance misuse; debt; employment demands and/or career prospects; homesickness; bullying and discrimination; housing; sexual violence; conflict with friends; conflict with romantic partners; social media; physical health difficulties; conflict with family; conflict with lecturers.

Variance in self-reported wellbeing challenges by socio-demographic status is shown in appendix 6.

Academic Determinants of Wellbeing

Test Anxiety and Student Wellbeing

80% of the sample population agreed with the statement 'I feel worried about failing my exams' and White (T=2.17; P=0.02), LGBTQ+ (T=2.12; P= 0.02), home (T=3.57; P=), disabled (T=2.93; P=<0.01), and female (T=4.75; P= <0.001) students were all significantly more likely to agree. Students reporting worry about failing their exams reported significantly lower wellbeing (T= -5.899; P= <0.001) and were significantly more likely to have accessed mental health services at university (T=2.32; P=0.01).

Perceived Workload and Student Wellbeing

80% of the sample population agreed with the statement 'I find the workload at university stressful and exhausting', with undergraduate (T=3.78; P=<0.001), home (T=5.16; P= <0.001), disabled (T=4.27; P=<0.001), and female (T=4.41; P=<0.001) students all significantly more likely to agree. There was no significant difference in perceived workload among students in part-time employment however (T=1.65; P=0.32). Students that agreed that workload is stressful and exhausting reported significantly lower wellbeing (T= -6.30; P= < 0.001) and were significantly more likely to have accessed mental health services at university (T=1.92; P=0.03).

Academic Competition and Student Wellbeing

53% of the sample agreed with the statement 'I dislike group work because I am worried I will look stupid to my course mates if I get the answer wrong', with White (T=1.81; P=0.04), LGBTQ+ (T=3.32; P= <0.01), undergraduate (T=5.77; P=<0.01), home (T=5.14; P=<0.01), disabled (T=3.15; P=<0.01), and female (T= 4.90; P=<0.01) students all significantly more likely to agree. 88% of the sample agreed with the statements 'I need to get the best grades possible so that I will have a competitive edge when I look for a job', with undergraduate (T=5.39; P=<0.01), home (T=2.30; P=0.002) and female students significantly more likely to agree (T=2.67; P=0.004). Students that agreed with the statement 'I need to get the best grades possible so that I will have a competitive edge when I look for a job' reported significantly lower wellbeing (T=-9.90; P=<0.01).

Surface Learning and Student Wellbeing

59% of the sample agreed with the statement 'I memorise information for assessment even if I do not understand it' and 23% of the sample disagreed with the statement 'I am able to explore my own academic interests at university, even when I know it will not be assessed'. Agreement with the statement 'I memorise information for assessment even if I do not understand it' was associated with the following neoliberal statements: 'the most important reason for coming to university is to increase employment opportunities after graduation' (T=7.70; P=>0.005); 'I need to get the best grades possible so that I will have a competitive edge when I look for a job'

(T=5.84; P=< 0.001); and 'if I don't get a 2:1 or an equivalent high grade going to university will have been a waste of money' (T=7.70; P=< 0.001). Students that agreed with the statements 'I feel able to explore my own academic interests at university even when I know it will not be assessed' reported significantly higher wellbeing than students that disagreed (T = 1.646; P = < 0.001).

Social Determinants of Wellbeing
Belonging, Inclusion, and Student Wellbeing

65% of the sample agreed with the statement 'I feel a sense of belonging at my university', 25% disagreed, and 29% disagreed that the culture at their university was inclusive. LGBTQ+ (T=3.00; P=<0.01), disabled (T=3.00; P=<0.01) and female (T=-3.09; P=<0.01) students were significantly less likely to report an inclusive culture, whilst BAME (T=-1.78; P=0.04), disabled (T= -2.23; P=0.01), and female (T=-1.65; P=0.05) students were less likely to report feeling a sense of belonging at university. Students (n= 527) that agreed with the statement 'I feel a sense of belonging at university' reported significantly higher wellbeing scores than students (n=205) who did not (T=9.520; P= < 0.001). Similarly, students that agreed that there was an inclusive culture at their university (T=7.28; P=<0.01) and that the university valued them as an individual (T=8.51; P=<0.01) also reported significantly higher wellbeing scores than students which did not. Students that agreed with the statement 'my university values me as a consumer' were more likely to report lower sense of belonging (T=2.14; P=0.03) and lower wellbeing outcomes (T=2.88; P=0.04).

Isolation, Loneliness and Student Wellbeing

65% of participants agreed with the statement 'I regularly feel isolated or lonely at university', with LGBTQ+ (T=2.93; P=<0.01), home (T=2.21; P=0.01), disabled (T=4.88; P=<0.01) and female (T=1.81; P=0.04) students significantly more likely to agree. Students that agreed with the statement 'getting a degree is more important than the student experience' reported significantly higher levels of loneliness (T=2.19; P=0.01). Students (n=480) that agreed with the statement 'I often feel isolated and/or lonely at university' reported significantly lower wellbeing than students (n=250) that disagreed (T=-11.959; P= <0.001).

Relationships with Peers and Student Wellbeing

52% of the sample agreed that 'getting a degree is more important than the student experience', with international students significantly more likely to agree (T=2.30; P=0.01). In addition, 34% of the sample agreed that 'the main reason for getting involved in extra-curricular activities is to boost my CV', with BAME (T= 1.66; P=0.05) and female (T=2.48; P=<0.01) students significantly more likely to agree. Notably, students from the highest income group [over 50,000 per year] were significantly less likely to identify their CV as the main reason for extra-curricular participation [T=3.82; P=<0.01). Students that

agreed that getting a degree is more important than the student experience reported significantly lower wellbeing (T=7.63; P=<0.01).

Relationships with Academic Staff and Student Wellbeing

71% of participants agreed with the statement 'I would feel confident that my tutor would support me if I approached them with difficulties', with LGBTQ+ (T= -1.65; P=0.05) and disabled (T= -2.12; P=0.02) students significantly less likely to agree. Students that agreed (n= 293; 39%) with the statement 'academic staff are more interested in research than my work and wellbeing' reported significantly lower course enjoyment (T=4.98; P=<0.01) and wellbeing than students that disagreed (T=-4.259; P<0.001). Similarly students that agreed with the statement (n= 578) 'I would feel confident that my tutor would support me if I approached them with difficulties' (T=6.648; P= <0.001) reported higher wellbeing that students that disagreed (T=6.648; P= <0.001).

Relationships with Local Residents and Student Wellbeing

58% of the sample disagreed with the statement 'I feel a sense of connection to the local resident community'. Postgraduate students (T=2.98; P=<0.01), students from the lowest income group (T=3.70; P=<0.01), and students living in their own home (T=2.30; P=0.002) were all significantly more likely to agree. Students that agreed with the statement that 'students should pay the majority of university funding as they benefit most from university' were

significantly less likely to report a sense of connection to the local community (T=1.37; P=0.005). Students that agreed with the statement 'I feel a sense of connection to the local resident community' reported significantly higher wellbeing outcomes (T=3.778; P= <0.001).

Financial Determinants of Wellbeing
Financial Anxieties

49% of the sample agreed with the statement 'I often worry about money to pay for essentials', with BAME (T= 1.99; P=0.02), LGBTQ+ (T=1.94; P= 0.03) and female (T=2.89; P=<0.01) students significantly more likely to agree. Students that experienced worry about paying for essentials reported significantly lower wellbeing (T= -3.621; P = <0.001).

Financial Difficulties

24% of the sample reported being unable to afford comfortable living arrangements at university. 16% of the sample had 'considered dropping out due to financial difficulties', with LGBTQ+ (T=2.06; P=0.02) and disabled students (T=2.16; P=0.02; T=-2.34; P=001) significantly more likely. Students that had considered dropping out of university for financial reasons reported both significantly lower wellbeing (T=-5.070; P= < 0.001) and physical health outcomes, including poorer diet (T=5.06; P=<0.01), reduced exercise (T=-2.699; P=0.004) and fewer hours sleep (T=1.89; P=0.03) .

Debt and Student Wellbeing

Whilst 48% of the sample agreed with the statement 'I am worried about repaying my student debt', 42% were not concerned due to the structure of debt repayment which they 'might not ever have to pay it back'. 37% agreed that 'any financial troubles at university are worth it because I am confident of finding work after I graduate', whilst 56% agreed that 'student loan repayments are an extra tax on graduate earnings'. Students from the lowest income group (T=6.08; P=<0.01), LGBTQ+ students (T=-3.18; P=<0.01) and disabled (T=-2.67; P=<0.01) students were all significantly more likely to report worry about repaying student debt. Students that agreed with the statement 'if I don't get a 2:1 or equivalent high grade going to university will have been a waste of money' were significantly more likely to agree with the statement 'I am worried about repaying my student debt' (T=2.41; P=0.02).Moreover, students that agreed with the statement 'I am worried about repaying student debt in the future' reported significantly lower wellbeing than students that did not (T=-4.491; P= <0.001). The full range in response to each item are shown in Appendix 7.

Student Recommendations

Participants were asked 'what has your university done and/or should your university do to support student mental health?' 524 free text responses were provided in total, amounting to 14,518 words. Free text responses were coded 1014 times across 44 inductive codes. Four main themes emerged, namely: services, strategy, culture, and pedagogy. A summary of the codes within each theme and their frequency is presented in figure 9. Taken

together, the findings demonstrate students recommend improvements to the availability, accessibility and inclusivity of mental health services and wellbeing support; and provision that is well-resourced, well-governed, and well-publicised in order to deliver timely, regular, varied, and effective provision. Alongside this, students emphasised cultural change and action to develop a sense of personal support and value, with particular emphasis on pastoral support from academic staff. Students also identified preventative actions to reduce distress caused by university culture, environment, and pedagogy such as fees, socialisation, workload, and assessment.

Figure 9: Student Survey Recommendations

Theme	Code	Description	Freq.
Services	Availability	Ensure appropriate provision & availability of specialist services	154
Services	Accessibility	Ensure support is accessible & approachable inc. drop-in	58
Services	Timeliness	Ensure timely access to support services with suitable waiting list	34
Services	Awareness	Ensure awareness of available support options	61
Services	Quality	Ensure effectiveness of existing services and interventions	31
Services	Duration	Increase duration of support with suitable follow-up	18
Services	Regularity	Increase regularity of contact for those engaged with services	13
Services	Clarity	Overcome obfuscation of support procedures	18
Services	Inclusivity	Ensure services are accessible to diverse student groups	25
Services	Targeted	Provide targeted support for groups with specific challenges	13
Services	Variety	Provide a diversity of support options	17
Services	Intensity	Provide access to and delivery of high-intensity crisis support	6
Services	Wellbeing	Ensure access to universal non-clinical wellbeing support	27

Services	Peer Support	Ensure accessible & well-governed peer support	35
Services	Modality	Provide support through a diversity of mediums including online	14
Strategy	Leadership	Ensure leadership prioritisation & investment in mental health	24
Strategy	Communication	Improve communication of university policies & procedures	4
Strategy	Student Voice	Provide structures to attune provision to student need	7
Strategy	Prevention	Address systems, structures, and cultures which cause distress	13
Strategy	Fees	Reduce student tuition fees	9
Strategy	Financial	Provide appropriate access to financial support	11
Strategy	Pro-active	Provide support proactively (not just reactively)	33
Strategy	Psychoeducation	Provide psychoeducational resources/ workshops for students	23
Strategy	Physical	Prioritise and align physical and mental health support	4
Strategy	Cohesion	Coordination and liaison between different support (int & ext.)	18
Strategy	Data	Collect data to inform service development	10
Strategy	Personal	Provide personal 1-1 non-specialist wellbeing checks for all	30
Strategy	Individual	Ensure support is attentive and responsive to individual's needs	22
Strategy	Covid-19	Appropriately adjust response to Covid-19 context	21
Strategy	College	College systems can enable cohesive & peer support	23
Strategy	Equality	Address institutional issues underlying mental health inequality	4
Strategy	Staff	Address staff workload and wellbeing	2
Culture	Discrimination	Address acts of discrimination and exclusion	7
Culture	Conflict	Address conflictual culture among/ between students/ staff.	7
Culture	Safety	Provide targeted prevention/ support for sexual violence	5
Culture	De-stigma	Create an 'open' mental health culture & address stigma	15

Culture	Socialisation	Social activities (& sports) to engender community & belonging	27
Culture	Value	Ensure students feel individually valued, not financially valued.	15
Culture	Self-Care	Promote healthy self-care behaviours and cultures	12
Pedagogy	Adjustments	Availability of adjustments/ extensions for assignments	24
Pedagogy	Workload	Ensure reasonable workload to reduce burnout	24
Pedagogy	Pastoral	Train academic staff to provide pastoral support	48
Pedagogy	Assessment	Reform weighting, bunching, grading & timing of assessments	16
Pedagogy	Curriculum	Diversify curricula content and pedagogical strategies	9

Interpretation of Findings

This chapter has presented quantitative data from a large national student survey to elucidate the prevalence, variance, and associations in student mental health and wellbeing outcomes, determinants, and confounders across UK universities in the context of the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal university. Taken together, the findings affirm the social, academic, and financial determinants of student mental health identified in chapters five to seven; elucidate significant sociodemographic inequalities in outcomes and exposure; and indicate an interrelation with neoliberal beliefs and structural conditions.

Echoing previous findings [Office for National Statistics, 2021; 2020; Neves & Hillman, 2019; 2018; Larcombe & Fethers, 2013], the sample reported significantly lower wellbeing outcomes than the general population (Fat et al., 2017). The findings also demonstrate significant inequalities in mental

health, wellbeing, and help-seeking outcomes, reported to have been exacerbated by entry into university [Evans et al., 2021; Conley et al., 2020; Hagemeier et al., 2020; Cvetkovski, Jorm & Mackinnon, 2019] and the pandemic [see Elharake et al., 2022; Kim et al., 2022; Charles et al., 2021; Fruehwirth, Biswas & Perreira , 2021; Zimmerman, Bledsoe & Papa , 2021]. Consistent with previous evidence, **LGBTQ+** (see e.g. Wilson & Cariola, 2020; Smithies & Byrom, 2018), **Black** (see e.g. Stoll et al., 2022; Arday, 2021; Mushonga, 2021; Arday, 2018; Lipson et al., 2018), and **disabled** (see e.g. Fleming et al., 2018; Holloway, 2010; McMillan & Jarvis, 2013) students, and students studying **arts and humanities** (see e.g. Lipson et al., 2016; Skead & Rogers, 2015) all reported significantly lower wellbeing than the sample population. In addition, **LGBTQ+** (see e.g. Smithies & Byrom, 2018), **Female** (see e.g. Deng et al., 2022; McManus & Gunnell, 2020; Scott-Young, Turner, & Holdsworth, 2020), and **White** (see e.g. Pereira et al., 2018) students were all significantly more likely to report a mental health diagnosis, whilst **male** students (see e.g., Cullinan et al., 2019; Yousaf et al., 2015; McIntyre et al., 2014; Czyz et al., 2013; Eisenberg et al., 2009), **BAME** students (see e.g., Olaniyan & Hayes, 2022; Stoll et al., 2022; Arday, 2018; Gonzalez et al., 2011), and students with a professional **placement** as part of their course (see e.g. Pickles et al., 2011) were all significantly less likely to have accessed university mental health services.

Whilst arguably signifying socio-cultural differences in perceptions of distress, professional help-seeking, and diagnosis (see e.g., Chakraborty, Patrick &

Lambri, 2011), evidence was found that differences in wellbeing outcomes may be compounded by differential exposure to academic, social, and financial determinants of wellbeing within the neoliberal system. For example, alongside poorer mental and physical health outcomes, both LGBTQ+ and disabled students in this dataset consistently reported disproportionate exposure to social and financial risk factors, including social isolation, exclusion, hate crime, verbal abuse, bullying, sexual assault, domestic abuse, financial anxiety, financial difficulties, financial exclusion, and debt worry.

Consistent with narrative review, **academic workload** (Pascoe, Hetrick & Parker, 2019; Williams, Dziurawiec & Heritage, 2018), **test anxiety** (Jones et al., 2020; Shields, 2015), **academic competition** (Slavin, Schindler & Chibnall, 2014) and **surface learning** (Postareff et al., 2017; Trigwell, Ellis & Han, 2012) were found to impact on student wellbeing. In particular, evidence was found that test anxiety, workload-related stress, and surface learning were prevalent; compounded by consumerist and instrumentalist neoliberal beliefs; associated with compromised wellbeing and maladaptive behavioural choices; and disproportionately experienced by minority groups. Indeed, 80% of students – disproportionately home, disabled, female, and LGBTQ+ students – reported feeling worried about workload and failing their exams; predicted by instrumentalist neoliberal beliefs; and associated with significantly lower wellbeing, mental health service access, and physical health behaviours. Likewise, 59% of students – disproportionately undergraduate and home students – reported memorising information for

assessment even if they do not understand it; predicted by instrumentalist and consumerist neoliberal beliefs that 'if I don't get a 2:1 or an equivalent high grade going to university will have been a waste of money'. and negatively associated with wellbeing

Consistent with narrative review, **belonging** (Winstone et al., 2020; Alsubaie et al., 2019); **loneliness** (McIntyre et al., 2018; Richardson, Roberts & Jansen, 2016); **relationships with academic staff** (Hagenauer & Volet, 2014; Margrove, Gustowska & Grove, 2014) **and relationships with the local community** (Priestley et al., 2022) were found to impact on student wellbeing. Evidence was found that isolation, loneliness, and low sense of belonging were predicted by individualist and instrumentalist neoliberal beliefs and conditions; negatively associated with mental wellbeing outcomes; and disproportionately experienced by minority groups. Indeed, 65% of students – disproportionately home, disabled, female, and LGBTQ+ students - reported regularly feeling isolated or lonely at university; predicted both by instrumental individualist socio-relational beliefs such as 'the main reason for getting involved in extra-curricular activities is to boost their CV'; and associated with poorer wellbeing outcomes. Likewise, neoliberal instrumentalist and consumerist pedagogical beliefs and behaviours, such as 'memorising information without understanding', were found to negatively predict perceptions of academic staff relations and poorer wellbeing outcomes.

Consistent with narrative review, evidence was found that financial difficulties and stressors were prevalent; compounded by neoliberal beliefs and conditions; negatively associated with mental wellbeing and physical health behaviours; and disproportionately experienced by marginalised groups (see e.g., McCloud & Bann, 2019; Richardson et al., 2018; Richardson, Elliott, & Roberts, 2015). In particular, evidence was found that the material impact of privatisation on student wellbeing is compounded by instrumental beliefs, with students that agreed 'if I don't get a 2:1 or equivalent going to university will have been a waste of money' more likely to report worry about debt. Moreover, students from the lowest income group, BAME, LGBTQ+, and disabled students were consistently more likely to report experiencing financial difficulties, financial anxieties about living essentials and debt repayment, and financial exclusion from being unable to afford to participate in extracurricular activities.

Chapter Summary

Presenting findings from a national cross-sectional survey, this chapter has affirmed the prevalence and association of academic, social, and financial determinants of student wellbeing; the interrelation with socio-material and socio-psychological neoliberal policy principles; and inequality of exposure and outcome in the neoliberal system. These findings substantiate the imperative of a pragmatic conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in the neoliberal context. Methodologically, the findings underscore the imperative of qualitative investigation in chapter

eleven to interrogate and interpret these associations from multiple perspectives and through lived experience (Bryne & Wykes, 2020).

Chapter Ten: Focus Group Method

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the methodological procedure and rationale for the focus group method with regards to data collection, sample, and analytic procedure. The focus group method was selected to address composite research questions one and four with two secondary research questions namely: 'How do students articulate experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university?' and 'What are student perspectives and proposals for policy and practice changes to improve student wellbeing?' The research questions were informed by pragmatist ontology and Foucaultian theory and sought to interrogate the findings from the WELL@UNI survey and narrative review. Befitting the pragmatist proposition that experience is encountered through socially-situated language, the focus group method aimed to elucidate student narratives of higher education and mental wellbeing within a neoliberal higher educational context and elucidate student-led recommendations for a pragmatic whole university approach within the neoliberal higher education context.

Focus Group Method Overview

Focus groups are characterised by 'the explicit use of group interaction' to elucidate the social context in which narrative experiences, attitudes, priorities, and identities are discursively framed and reproduced (Morgan, 1988, p.12). Consistent with the core tenets of pragmatist ontology (Widdershoven & der Scheer, 2008), focus group methodology is premised on

group process theory (Then & Rankin, 2014) and social constructivist epistemology (Bodenhafer,1923), presupposing socio-relational construction, dialogic interpretation, and collective sense-making of experience (Wilkinson, 1998). It is theorised that focus group participants draw on dominant social and cultural discourses to interpret, articulate, and construct experiences and subjectivities which are modified in hermeneutic interaction with the discourses and experiences of other participants, stimulating construction of new knowledge and solutions to existing challenges (Ivanoff & Hultberg, 2009). Methodologically, focus groups can facilitate elicitation of rich attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and experiences given that participants elaborate views in response to encouragement or justify them in the face of challenge from other group members (Wilkinson, 1998 ; Kreuger, 1994).

Focus Group Procedure

The focus group method was selected in alignment with the primary research question and the underlying ontological premise of pragmatism and Foucaultian theory. In pragmatist terms, focus group method can elucidate lived experience in a social context, with the researcher's own positionality epistemologically facilitative, not inhibitive, of understanding experience (Pawson, 1996; Edwards 1996, Griffin 1996, Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 1996). In Foucaultian terms, the focus group method can elucidate discourses of subjectivity in which an individual situates oneself and navigates their identity 'for an audience within which one exists, and from whom one seeks confirmation' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p.94). Taken together the focus group

method is ideally placed to understand lived experience as situated within a socio-political context and to identify recommendations for practice.

Focus groups were conducted across March and April 2021 during national lockdown in the UK, although universities operated virtually. 10 online focus groups were conducted, ranging in size from 5 to 15 participants with 100 participants in total. Participants were not previously known to each other. Each focus group was conducted online via Zoom Video Conference Platform. Focus groups lasted approximately 50 minutes in duration to provide a total of 472 minutes which was audio-recorded and manually transcribed to provide a total of 81, 097 words. Inclusivity was ensured through opportunity for 1-1 pre-meeting, private messaging to the facilitator, closed captions, optional disabling of web camera, and alternative modes of communication such as chat box (Bampton, Neelakantan, & Fernandes, 2021).

Focus group question sets were designed to provide semi-structured prompts to elucidate and examine students' beliefs, behaviours, and experiences of wellbeing and living and learning at university, and recommendations for future action. Facilitation prompts and probes were informed by narrative review and preliminary findings from the WELL@UNI survey to explore the lived experience of academic, social, and financial determinants of wellbeing in a neoliberal context [see Appendix 8]. Modelled on Student Voice Forums (Piper & Emmanuel, 2019) and informed by the pragmatist proposition that

anticipation and experimentation direct future action (Dewey, 1929; 1925), the interactive focus group 'collective activity' (Kitzinger, 1994, p.104) employed a semi-structured 'future retrospective' creative ideation strategy which asked students to collectively imagine, on the basis of their lived experience, what the ideal university for student mental health and wellbeing would be like and how it would be different (Priestley et al., 2022; 2021). The activity was designed to simultaneously elucidate narratives of lived experience and co-produce policy recommendations 'unconstrained by current possibilities' (Piper & Emmanuel, 2019, p.56) as part of a whole university approach. Participants were not asked directly to share personal experience of mental health difficulties.

The focus group activity and mode of analysis was piloted for feasibility, acceptability, and suitability, with subsequent conceptual and practical refinement in line with good practice (Howatson-Jones, 2007). A pilot virtual focus group was conducted with four students from two institutions using Zoom video conferencing platform. The pilot specifically sought to examine whether students from different years of study and different institutions would have sufficient shared experience given the disruption of the pandemic to the 2020/ 2021 academic year. The pilot also enabled refinement of the platform and practicalities for conducting an effective virtual focus group (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2016). Pilot data were fully transcribed and analysed. Following pilot feedback from two participants, all participants were asked to mute their microphone and use the virtual 'hands up' function to overcome

sound distortion and interruption; text contributions via the 'chat' function were permitted and assimiliated into the manuscript to support inclusive participation; and additional description and definition of mental health and wellbeing was provided to frame the parameters of the future retrospective activity.

Focus Group Sampling

'Issues of sampling and selection are likely to prove crucial in relation to the form and quality of interaction in a focus group, and therefore the kinds of data one gathers and the extent to which participants share their opinions, attitudes, and life experiences' (Stalmeijer, McNaughton & Van Mook, 2014, p. 7). The focus group sample population utilised a national sample of undergraduate and postgraduate students in line UK, in line with the research question. Participants were recruited using a targeted self-selective convenience sampling strategy (Stratton, 2021). Inclusion criteria encompassed any current part or full-time undergraduate or postgraduate student with or without lived experience of mental health difficulties in any year of study enrolled at a UK higher education institution during Easter Term 2021. Demographic information was obtained. The sample population comprised a diversity of institutions, year groups, ages, gender, and nationalities consistent with national target population [see figure 10].

Figure 10: Focus Group Sample Demographics

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage	National Average	
University Type	Collegiate	18	18%	≈ <0.1%	HESA, 2021[9]
	Large & with high research intensity/ reputation	49	49%	≈ 31%	
	Large & medium research intensity/ reputation	12	12%	≈26%	
	Medium/Small & medium reputation	9	9%	≈10%	
	Polytechnic	12	12%	≈33%	
Year of Study	Undergraduate Y1	17	17%	73%	HESA, 2021
	Undergraduate Y2+	54	54%		
	Postgraduate	28	28%	24%	
Student Status	Home	65	65%	80%	HESA, 2021
	International	34	34%	20%	
Gender	Male	34	34%	43%	HESA, 2021
	Female	65	65%	57%	
	Non-Binary	0	0%	0%	
Ethnicity	Asian	28	28%	11%	HESA, 2021
	Black	34	34%	7%	
	White	35	35%	76%	
	Mixed	2	2%	4%	
Mental Health Diagnosis	Yes	21	21%	29%	Pereira et al, 2019
	No	69	69%	71%	

Participants were recruited via an online expression of interest form. The form was disseminated virtually via an extensive national network of third-sector organisations, including the Student Mental Health Research Network [SMaRteN]; Student Minds; and If U Care Share Foundation. Participants were provided with a participant information sheet and completed basic demographic information and preferred availability. Participants were then

[9] Categories adapted from Boliver, 2015

contacted by the researcher to ensure that informed consent was provided. Participants were renumerated with a £10 amazon voucher for participation in the study.

Focus Group Analysis Method

To address the research aim whilst ethically ensuring retention of participant's original context and voice, focus group data were analysed using two interpretative methods of analysis, namely: thematic axial analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 1990) and interpretative narrative inquiry (Hurwitz, Greenhalgh & Skultans, 2004).

Axial Thematic Analysis

Transcripts were initially thematically analysed inductively to answer the research question 'what are student perspectives and proposals for policy and practice changes to improve student wellbeing?'. This analytic method aimed to ensure that recommendations were grounded in the student voice and experience (Priestley et al., 2021) rather than the researcher's theoretical paradigm, with 'priority given to the respondents hierarchy of importance, language, concepts, and framework for understanding the world' (Kitzinger, 2007, p.108). This involved adherence to the progressive phases of thematic analysis as identified by Braun & Clarke (2006, p.86), from data immersion, coding, thematic identification, and thematic review. In particular, open, axial, and selective coding was applied to sub-categorise the main themes

into current conditions, recommended actions, and the envisioned outcome in the ideal university (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 1990).

Following open coding of latent concepts and categories, axial coding was conducted 'in the development of models of action that capture key conceptual characteristics and detail contingencies that explain who, what, where, when, why, and how identified phenomena occur' (Allen, 2017, p. 80). Specifying the causal conditions and context of a phenomenon, axial coding seeks to elucidate intervening strategies pertaining to action and interaction directed toward changing the phenomenon (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). Grounded in pragmatist and interactionist epistemology, axial coding generated findings orientated towards future action in line with the research question, incorporating 'causal and intervening micro- and macrostructural, socio-political attributes of the context, actions, or interactional strategies used to manage the phenomenon, and resulting consequences of interactions and actions taken' (Scott & Medaugh, 2017, p.1). 'The goal of selective coding is to integrate the different categories that have been developed, elaborated, and mutually related during axial coding into one cohesive theory' (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019, p.89).

Using N'Vivo12, data were initially inductively open coded into categories, themes, and sub-themes. In vivo codes were used 'to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself' (Charmaz, 2006, p.55). Each code was subsequently categorised into conditions or actions

within each sub-theme. The cases and attributes function was used to infer how themes varied across demographic characteristics and institution type. 'Covid+' 'Covid-' and 'Transition' static sets were used to code cross-thematic influences. Several iterations to the coding structure were made until data saturation, or 'the point in coding when no new codes occur in the data' (Urquhart, 2013, 194). Memos were recorded during transcription to conduct interim analysis, recording the analytical 'process, thoughts, feelings, and directions of the research and researcher' (Strauss & Corbin 1998, p. 218).

Interpretative Narrative Inquiry

Focus group data were subsequently analysed using Foucaultian informed interpretative narrative inquiry to address the research question: 'how do neoliberal discourses infuse and intersect with student experience of wellbeing and living and learning and recommendations for change?' and 'to what extent is a Foucaultian informed framework helpful in interpreting subjective experience of wellbeing in the neoliberal university?'. Narrative inquiry is essentially grounded in the premise that individual experience, subjectivity, and relationality are processed, interpreted, and performed through personal narratives which reflect, incorporate, and function within social, cultural, and organisational structures (Haydon & Riet, 2016; Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2012; Hurwitz, Greenhalgh & Skultans, 2004; Gabriel, 2004). 'The inclusion of social, cultural and environmental influences on illness makes narrative inquiry very suitable for research in health as it incorporates

all dimensions that impact the individual's health experience' (Haydon & Riet, 2016, p.86) to facilitate impactful policy and practice (Gargiulo, 2020).

Interpretative narrative inquiry is particularly well-placed to analyse the discursive relations informing student lived experiences of higher education and mental wellbeing within a Foucaultian framework (Jackson, 2013) wherein 'discourse is understood as a social practice through which not only meanings but particular student subjectivities are constructed' (Raaper, 2019, p.2). In particular, it enables critical deconstructive interpretation of how neoliberal discourses frame experiences and expectations of higher education within relations of truth and power (Tamboukou, 2008) to 'make links between macro-organisation and institutional practices on the one hand and experiences and affective states on the other' (Gill, 2010, p.4). Given that, for Foucault, power creates conditions of possibility for specific narratives of truth, self, and experience to emerge In the neoliberal university whilst others are marginalised or appropriated (Olssen, 2014) 'what counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is already an interpretation, always contested, and always political' (Scott, 1991, p.797). Student narratives of experience constitute, in Foucaultian (1988, p.18) terms then, 'a technology of the self' which encapsulate how a subject positions oneself through discourse, both within and against the operant structures of truth and power within a specific context (Rose, O'Malley & Valverde, 2006). Informed by Foucaultian archaeological and genealogical analysis, interpretative narrative inquiry sought to interrogate and interpret the

discursive processes, procedures, and apparatus whereby truth, knowledge, and subjectivity are (re)produced as effects of power within the neoliberal university context (Tamboukou, 1999).

Crucially however, Foucaultian-informed interpretative narrative inquiry cannot – nor seeks to - elucidate the ‘‘true’ meaning of what the subject ‘really’ thinks and feels by what is said or not said’ (Cole & Graham, 2012, 116). For Foucault rather, individual narratives invariably constitute a matrix of multiple, fragmented, and at times conflicting subject positions which are temporarily inhabited and which reflect contested and unstable discourses of truth and power within specific contexts (Lester, Lochmiller & Gabriel, 2017). The analyst must therefore ‘locate the space left empty by the author’s disappearance, follow the distribution of gaps and breaches, and watch for the opening this disappearance uncovers’ (Foucault, 1998, p.209). In doing so, the analysis can develop a ‘new economy of power relations in a way which is more empirical, more directly related to our present situation, and which implies more relations between theory and practice’ (Foucault,1982, p. 211) as ‘a chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, find out their point of application, and the methods used’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 211). In this way, Foucaultian interpretative inquiry is consistent with the pragmatist orientation and research aim for understanding future action to improve wellbeing within a neoliberal context.

Using N'Vivo12, data was interpretatively analysed in alignment with the Foucaultian theoretical framework. 'In contrast to many interpretative methodologies, narrative inquiry does not 'dissect' the narrative into smaller units to find themes and trends, but instead analyses the narrative as a 'whole' seen from temporal, social and spatial perspectives' (Haydon & Riet, 2016, p.86). Interpretative narrative inquiry oscillated in a hermeneutic cycle between thematic description and theory development to iteratively frame the individual narratives within larger socio-political or psychological narratives of experience (Savin-Baden & Niekerk, 2007). Deductive a-priori categories of 'discourse-truth' and 'subjectification' were used according to the Foucaultian framework outlined in chapter three. A 'discourse truth' category was used to group codes into sub-themes of discourses which participants drew on to understand and frame educational experience. A 'subjectification' category was used to group codes into sub-themes relating to impacts on mental health, further sub-thematised into socio-psychological and socio-material factors.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the methodological rationale and procedure for the WELL@UNI focus group method. Findings are presented in chapters 11 and 12,

Chapter Eleven: Student Wellbeing and Experiences of Living and Learning at UK Universities: Focus Group Data Analysis Using Axial Thematic Analysis

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from ten student focus groups designed to elucidate student experiences, perspectives, and proposals for supporting student wellbeing and living and learning at university.

Findings

Four main themes emerged from the data, namely: Teaching, Learning and Assessment; Support Services Provision, Delivery and Communication; Relationships with Peers and Academic Staff; and Living Conditions. Each theme was further sub-thematised through axial coding into current conditions and recommended actions [Figure 11].

Figure 11: Focus Group Findings

Theme	Teaching, Learning & Assessment	Support Services Provision, Delivery and Communication	Relationships with Peers and Academic Staff	Living Conditions
Conditions	Assessment Bunching	Service Accessibility and Availability	Isolation and Loneliness	Cost of Living
	Assessment Weighting	Service Design and Delivery	Social Exclusion	Student Loan
	Assessment Expectations	Service Culture	Depersonalisation	
	Assessment Type	Service Communication		
	Assessment Environment			

	Extenuating Circumstances			
	Feedback			
	Curriculum			
Actions	Alternative Assessment Types	Service Investment and Diversification	Inclusive Social Provision	Financial Support
	Continuous Assessment	Peer Support and Student Voice	Pastoral Support	
	Curricular Redesign	Centralised Triage	Staff Mental Health Training	
	Curricular Intervention	Proactive Support		
	Personalised Pedagogy	Awareness Raising and De-Stigmatisation		

Quotations are attributed to anonymous participant codes classified according to socio-demographic characteristics [Figure 12].

Figure 12: Focus Group Participant Codes

Participant Code Key		
First Digit	University	1. Collegiate 2. Red Brick 3. Plate Glass 4. Polytechnic
Second Digit	Year of Study	1. UG 1 Year 2. UG 2+ Year 3. Postgraduate
Third Digit	Student Status	1. Home Student 2. International Student
Fourth Digit	Gender	1. Male 2. Female 3. Non-Binary
Fifth Digit	Ethnicity	1. Asian 2. Black 3. White 4. Mixed

Sixth Digit	MH Diagnosis	1. Yes 2. No 3. Prefer Not to Say

Theme One: Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Participants identified several conditions pertaining to exams and assessments which negatively impact on student mental wellbeing, namely: bunching of assessment deadlines; unclear assessment expectations; weighting of assessments; assessment type; assessment environment; and extenuating circumstance procedures..

Sub-Theme One: Assessment

Condition One: Assessment Bunching

Participants frequently described bunching of assessment deadlines through 'coursework and exams all at once' [531211] or 'a deadline every single week for five weeks straight and then three on the same day' [221232] as a source of academic stress and anxiety. 'If you have a three-week exam season and all your exams are in the same week, that's more stressful' [221132] due to cognitive overload and inadequate preparation time, so 'when there are too many deadlines in one go, or one week, together especially at the end of term it gets very stressful' [221213]. Other students affirmed that when 'all their modules, their projects, [are] due over three weeks then you stress over it, and it generally affects your wellbeing' [521122].

Condition Two: Assessment Weighting

By extension, 'another major stress that the exam seasons cause was so much weight to do well in one go' [231131]. Participants emphasised that the weighting or 'intensity' [121122] of single assessments contribute additional pressure and anxiety to perform. 'The biggest thing that made exams stressful for me was because they counted so much. If you didn't feel well and had a bad day, it was a real problem'[232232].

Condition Three: Assessment Expectations

Participants highlighted that assessment stress is further compounded by lack of clarity around expectations and performance criteria. 'Whenever there was an assessment that I got particularly stressed about, it tended to be because I wasn't exactly sure what was expected of me' [231142]. Some students perceived that 'lecturers just dump coursework on you and expect you to know what they want [without] a proper expectation or proper structure about how it is supposed to be' [222211]. Yet, 'if we are confused and have something we don't understand, it obviously does effect mental wellbeing' [231212], especially when you are 'not entirely sure what to do in order to get a high grade' [231212]. 'Academic expectations were described as implicit and dependent on tacit cultural knowledge with 'no examples in practice' [211211]. Confusion and anxiety around assessment expectations were particularly pronounced during academic transitions (e.g.

into university; from undergraduate to postgraduate) and for non-traditional students, including mature, international, and first-generation scholars.

Condition Four: Assessment Type

Participants emphasised that assessment type can have significant implications for student wellbeing. 'I don't have any exams on my course and I've found that has had a really positive effect on my mental health because it's stopped a massive build-up of pressure and made it more manageable throughout the year' [111233]. Indeed, the timing and weighting of traditional closed-book examinations demand that 'you work really under pressure in exams and it is very stressful' [422222]. Participants further described how the time pressure and unseen dimension of traditional closed-book examinations 'that test the whole course content in a matter of just two hours or three hours' [421122] create anxiety that 'it will not give the exact view of how I understood the content' [421122], 'especially for writing-based subjects if you are just basing your entire knowledge and attention to the subject on three hours in an exam hall' [231233]. Participants also identified greater workload in preparing for unseen closed-book examinations by 'just spend[ing] ages going over the same thing over and over again for the sake of committing it to memory' [121212]. Students felt this negatively impacted both on their wellbeing and on learning 'because you just stress because you are worried

you are going to run out of time and not be able to remember everything, but also it doesn't teach you anything' [231231].

Condition Five: Assessment Environment

Participants additionally highlighted that the assessment environment can compound exam stress. 'The environment for a lot of people is just anxiety provoking' [211211]. Physically, room size and temperature were identified as psychologically uncomfortable and stress-inducing. Participants also reported being 'so aware of all these people around you' [211211] whilst 'the invigilators are walking around and watching you' [221211]. The unfamiliarity and artificiality of the exam environment in 'the way that exams are structured so everyone is sitting in a really, really, large hall in rows is just so artificial and isn't like the real world at all. So practically if we could change that, that could impact on people's mental health beneficially' [311211].

Condition Six: Extenuating Circumstances

Participants additionally highlighted that the 'mitigating circumstances form that you have to fill in to get an extension' [221213] can further compound mental health challenges around assessment 'and making that process harder for students is way worse than anything else' [221213]. Participants emphasised 'that the process itself is quite daunting' [221213] and 'quite a scary thing to apply to because you feel you are going to be rejected or you don't have enough evidence' [221212] and 'it is even harder to work in that waiting time because you have this extra anxiety as to whether or not you

are going to get the extension' [131231]. Moreover, the process of 'filling out forms or requiring evidence that students might not have, or which isn't easy to get' [231231] can be financially costly, time consuming, and psychologically demanding for students with existing mental health challenges. 'If you are struggling with your mental health, actually going and getting evidence from a psychiatrist can be an unachievable thing' [231231] and 'if you had a recurring problem and needed fresh evidence every time, students could be paying quite a lot of money when finances are tight for students anyway' [231231].

Condition Seven: Feedback

Alongside conditions pertaining to assessment, participants identified lack of personal pedagogical support and structured feedback to impact on mental wellbeing. Where students felt staff were unavailable, physically or psychologically, to provide timely personal academic guidance for their specific needs, academic stress ensued. 'Sometimes you have a lot of work to do on your own and you don't have anybody to consult [because] they are very busy' [121212] and 'go like months without replying to our emails' [332231]. Students felt that the individual is responsibilised to actively seek additional feedback or guidance, which 'a lot of people, especially if they had passed and that was all they wanted, wouldn't go and ask' for [211211]. Moreover, 'there are certain tutors where you can't go and ask' [231231] because they are perceived to be resistant to providing further feedback and clarification, and 'get a little bit annoyed sometimes that students

question their feedback' [231231 or provide 'quite unkind feedback' [331213] 'literally like "this is shit" [431232]. Participants further described how lack of feedback specificity, clarity, and support negatively impact on wellbeing. Students identified unclear feedback 'with no explanation to it' [222211] as contributing to uncertainty, anxiety, or lack of motivation, where students 'never understand what I could do, how to improve' [222211].].

Condition Eight: Curriculum

Curricular design and delivery emerged as a further condition impacting on student mental health and wellbeing. Participants particularly identified that the structure, sequence, and density of the curriculum could be 'quite demanding' [511213] which can cause cognitive overload, unhealthy workload, and stress. 'They outlined how many hours you should be spending on each module, and for us, they say it should be 15 hours a week and if you are doing four modules, that is 60 hours per week' [221212]. Furthermore, content sequencing and 'how they structure the module and the courses that lead up to deadlines can cause the issues' [131231] by allowing insufficient scaffolding and preparation time .

Theme Two: Service Provision, Delivery and Communication

Participants identified several conditions pertaining to the provision, delivery, and communication of mental health and wellbeing support services which impact on mental health, namely: unavailability and inaccessibility of support; impersonal support; reactive support; unawareness of mental health services; and stigma of mental health services.

Condition One: Service Accessibility and Availability

Participants identified that student mental health support service provision is largely inadequate and inaccessible for student demand. Whilst some participants perceived that 'the universities lack proper assistance for the mental health of university students' [521122] and have 'no proper protocol where student wellness is being addressed' [521122], other students identified existing provision of time-limited embedded services to be inadequate for the complexity of demand, given that 'you have four sessions on Zoom and after that you are either too messed up to deal with and you have to go to the GP or they just close the case' [412212].

Participants attributed this gap between provision and demand to 'a lack of concern for student problems, and a lack of funding from universities for their wellbeing departments,… [with] millions of pounds of funding being cut from the government' [521231]. Consequently, whilst 'there is a mental health service on campus, the system is really, really, overworked' [221211] which can mean 'it just took ages to actually get any support' [412212], 'like if you want to get some counselling or help, it's usually about three to four months of waiting lists and by that time the condition could be a lot worse' [221211]. Accessibility concerns were compounded on certain courses 'like medicine, dentistry and health', for example, 'because we are always in 9-5 …. [and] there are not necessarily weekend ones or evening ones we could go to' [221231]. In addition, 'something needs to be done for your more non-

traditional students' [311211] 'that 'require a lot more support' [531211]; 'a lot of the support at universities doesn't touch on them at all' [311211].

Condition Two: Service Design and Delivery

Participants highlighted institutional strategies and systems which create practical and psychological barriers to support service access. In particular, students described self-referral, cross-referral, and triaging processes as onerous and fragmented, with poor information sharing practices that can cause distress, delay access to support, and deter help-seeking. 'The problem is that the process is so hard to navigate' [521132]; students 'have no idea who to email so you are just bounced around' [131232] which 'exacerbates the problem and you get in this cycle of like "ah god I've got this problem and I need to sort it out, but I don't know where to go" … and then it just becomes a bit overwhelming' [231231]. 'Just trying to find who to contact and being bounced around in emails, you just lose motivation to do anything and are like 'I'd rather just suffer really at this point', like it's annoying and painful just to be bounced around so much' [231231]. 'They signpost and then you get lost in the system' [131231] and 'you have to explain your story every single time and it's really exhausting' [231231].

Condition Three: Service Culture

Alongside the perceived unavailability of support, participants identified a reactive individual-orientated university mental health support culture, responding to severe individual difficulties rather than proactively identifying and preventing students from experiencing distress. Students perceived that 'the only way to get access to support promptly is if you have a high-risk label' [211231] but 'It really should not get to crisis point or breaking point where you are literally begging for support' [222241]. By extension, participants felt that 'for people that are struggling, I think it's hard for them to get support' [521132], 'there is not enough help for people that don't recognise that they need help' [521132]. Rather, the system 'all rests on you coming and saying you've got a problem and saying I need help' [521132], 'it's down to the person, the individual, to try and approach the services or at least actively seek them out' [211232], regardless of the practical, emotional, and cultural barriers. The university 'put the onus on students to be like "come to us to talk about your problems" [231132] but 'it can be really, really difficult to seek support and difficult to admit' [521132] with some students describing 'trying so hard to just go to someone to get help …. [and] having to get all of my motivation to talk' [412212]. 'They sort of expect students to know about things and to know things exist and put their own hands up to say I want to take part in this without any support, it's incredibly difficult' [311211].

Condition Four: Service Communication

Participants identified that 'some people may not be aware of the mental health services in universities' [531211] and 'a lot of the time students aren't

really aware of the full scope of what is available to them, who they can go to' [231231]; 'students either don't know what support is available or they don't know how to access it' [311211]. 'There is still a lot of work to be done on students knowing where to go and feeling comfortable with doing it' [231231]. Lack of clear or consistent communication regarding institutional processes, procedures, and practices were consistently identified to compound confusion, stress, and anxiety around disclosure and service access. Participants likewise identified challenges with wayfinding that can deter help-seeking and exacerbate stress because 'a lot of the time you can't find them [services]' [231231]. Participants further described stigma and 'embarrassment' [521122] around mental health disclosure with 'lots of people struggling underneath that are unable to voice that and make that known as much as they really need to' [211232]. 'The stigma may be more in certain degrees' [421212] and 'it's probably particularly bad in health care specialities' [221213] such as dialectics and medicine.

Theme Three: Relationships with Peers and Academic Staff

Participants identified several conditions in relationships with peers and academic staff which can negatively impact on student mental health and wellbeing, namely: isolation and loneliness; social exclusion; and de-personalisation.

Condition One: Isolation and Loneliness

Participants identified isolation and loneliness, particularly during the pandemic and initial transition to university, as impacting on student mental

wellbeing. 'Loneliness can be a massive factor in mental health challenges and issues developing' [231231] and 'it has quite a big impact on mental health' [222232]. 'Many students have a lot of stress because they don't have someone who they can communicate to openly' [121232]. Academic stressors were also identified to compound social stressors for students that 'are overloaded with a lot of work and do not get that time to interact with peers and engage in co-curricular activities' [221212]. Participants felt that 'there has been very limited opportunities to meet people and socialise; they have kind of assumed that people already have those connections' [231231]. Social challenges during transition were particularly pronounced for international students, given that 'the culture and the relationships with other people are quite different ….. and even just getting to make friends is hard' [121222].

Condition Two: Social Exclusion

Echoing previous findings (e.g., Brereton & Mistry, 2019; Saether et al., 2019), participants described socio-cultural exclusion relating to a 'student drinking culture [where] …. for the people that don't drink that must be quite isolating' [532212]; 'if you don't drink, it's quite hard to get involved' [532212] so 'there are students that don't drink who are left out' [231212]. Students also echoed previous findings (Dickinson, 2019; Brereton & Mistry, 2019) pertaining to geographical exclusion from social events: 'If you do live locally and not on campus then you are not included in those social bonding things which the university do put on' [431232].

Condition Three: Depersonalisation

Participants described how 'the tutor plays quite a big role in student wellbeing' [421122] whereby distant, de-personalised, and/pr damaging relationships with academic staff can impact negatively on wellbeing. Perceiving personal tutors to often be unresponsive or disinterested in student concerns, some students 'don't feel enough support from their tutor for my mental health' [211232]. 'Lecturers don't try to actively find out if anybody is struggling' [222241] by inviting students to contact them with concerns' and where they do 'it is quite impersonal because we don't really know our personal tutor and … I don't want to go to someone I don't know to speak about my mental health' [221212]. At the same time, students felt that 'you put a lot of trust and respect in your lecturers and I think sometimes they don't make themselves worthy of that' [521132] particularly if they appear to dismiss personal concerns, which can feel 'very, very, degrading and very demoralising and as though the academic, just didn't believe that the issues I had were real and legitimate'[131231]. However, some students acknowledged that 'lecturers don't have a lot of time, at all' [331231] and have 'too much work and they are underpaid and probably don't have the capacity to support everybody separately' [232233].

Theme Four: Living Conditions
Condition One: Cost of Living

Participants identified that 'students have many challenges from high cost of living' [212212] and that these 'financial constraints can impact on mental health' [231212]. In particular, students identified living cost and quality of student accommodation as impacting on student wellbeing. 'The [rent] prices for students are hiked up, just because they are students' [222241] so 'a lot of students can't afford their weekly bills just because of what they are paying for somewhere to stay' [222241] and these market-driven 'Increases in monthly rent' [232212] 'put [students] in a very precarious situation' [211231]. Moreover, 'a lot of people have issues with their accommodation like noise and damp, etcetera, things breaking' [222241] 'vermin, rising damp and mould, broken locks or windows' [521231] and 'water leaking from my ceiling through the lights' [222241] that private landlords ignore or 'refuse to get rid of' [521231] .

Condition Two: Student Loan

Students identified the UK student maintenance loan system as unequal and inadequate, given the amount of money that students receive, its differential allocation, the presupposition of parental support, and the discrepancy with student living costs. 'You get a limited amount of money; it doesn't really leave you with anything'[331213]. 'What I got from student finance doesn't even cover my accommodation' [412212]. In addition, students who are from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to go into low paying jobs which means that in the long run they pay more loan' [521231], so 'the people that borrow most because they don't have as much have to

pay more' [222241]. As such, the policy transition from grants to loans were perceived to compound inequalities and anxieties about loan repayments. 'I've still got worries about paying it back because I'm going to be paying back more for longer compared to people who have been able to put their own money or their parents money into university' [222241]. 'There is a lot of people in financial difficulty … [especially] people from low socio-economic backgrounds, people who don't have their parents' support and mature students' [222241].

Student Recommendations
Teaching, Learning and Assessment

Participants proposed several recommendations to address conditions pertaining to teaching, learning, and assessment, namely: choice of alternative assessment method; continuous assessment; curricular redesign; and personalised pedagogy.

Recommendation One: Alternative Assessment Types

Students advocated a choice of alternative assessment types depending on individual needs. '*You should be able to pick do you want to do this module as an exam or as coursework; you should be able to have an alternative option* [which] *could alleviate some of the stress people feel about doing an exam or an assignment, depending on how their mind works*' [231212]. Participants particularly recommended that having a choice of coursework instead of exams can be preferable '*because I find coursework less stressful than exams*' [231212]. Ideally, '*if I was to choose between the two I would*

have preferred coursework, and one that is quite spaced away from my other deadlines so that I can go at it at my own pace' [221212]. *'Having the option that you can do coursework instead of exams makes me feel a lot more comfortable'* [211211]. Students also advocated flexibility around mitigating circumstance processes and procedures in order to 'eliminate those bureaucratic hoops to jump through to access support' [231231] and make it easier to attain assessment extensions and accommodations and allow adjustment of deadlines when required.

Students further advocated a choice of innovative assessment types such as oral assessment, open book assessment, group assessment, and peer-assessment. Oral examinations were proposed as an authentic assessment type, alleviating expectational uncertainties by instantaneously and dialogically incorporating feedback.

> *'For a lot of people, an oral exam could be easier than their written exam, when you don't really have an option of explaining yourself further. So you know how sometimes we get feedback saying, 'this isn't clear' well if it were an oral exam they could have actually said, 'sorry this isn't clear please could you expand or explain a little bit better'. You get a better chance of actually putting your point across and getting a better grade'* [232233].

Other students proposed group presentations to assess collaborative co-construction of content and consequently alleviate anxiety.

> *'The group presentation is much better because you will group your ideas and come up with one better idea as a group. For the oral presentation, maybe some people can get tense and if you get tense the content that you had can go away. So really a group presentation is much better than maybe one on one'* [421122].

By extension, some students suggested peer and/or self-assessment to examine meta-learning skills, collaborative capabilities, and team-work, whilst further alleviating anxieties over assessment outcome.

> *50% of the grade was on the final outcome of the project and another 50% of the grade was on the self-assessment. So each member of the group had to give a grade to each member of the group and themselves as well. …. I can see how this can lead to conflict because you put in so much work and then everyone gave you a 40, but we can also see what we expect from people and what we expect from ourselves* [232233]..

Open book assessment was also advocated to examine critical interpretation, understanding, and application.

> *In open book exams, it's not the evidence that you know, but how you use it. So that would be a much more useful form of assessment to have that focus that you've got the information in that book and in your notes, but you've got to answer the question and really stay on that analysis* [131232].

Recommendation Two: Continuous Assessment

Irrespective of assessment type, some students advocated '*continuous assessment*' [421122] to alleviate the stress caused by assessment weighting and bunching. Continuous assessment was perceived to help identify troublesome knowledge and inform self-regulation strategies through '*smaller deadlines throughout the process, so you didn't leave everything until the last week'* [232232].

By extension, a significant proportion of participants felt that assessment is an inevitable and necessary part of learning which inherently involves stress and anxiety irrespective of change to university policy. 'On the examination side we should not change anything - students should stay focused and be ready for an examination at any time; this is the only thing that leads to efficient transition from one class to another' [121122]. Other students agreed that 'deadlines are something that is always going to be stressful, it's very hard to mitigate' [221213] because 'people usually take exams as stress' [331232] and that assessments are necessary for learning and preparation for the

workplace. ‘Deadlines are an inevitable part of the university experience and also post university they will always be there in some way’ [131231]. These students felt that exam stress should be alleviated by practice and increasing familiarity. ‘In first year exams were overwhelming and you feel stressed by the exam. But over time, you can adapt. So for me I believe the university can do nothing about it, it just comes with practice’ [332231].

Recommendation Three: Curricula Redesign

Whilst participants generally perceived that ‘it’s not really realistic to ask for less work’ [221213], some students did recommend that ‘the current curriculum should give students more time' [221122] to ‘stop overloading the students with too much work’ [121212] through curricula restructuring and redesign to reduce the effect of content density. Participants also recommended curricula diversification to support student engagement and ‘integrate co-curricular activities and life skills in the curriculum’ [212212]. Embedding assessment skills and exemplars into curricula and pedagogy was further recommended to alleviate assessment anxieties. In particular, additional ‘support and guidance whilst preparing for the exams’ [121222] was advocated to clarify expectations, particularly during the academic transition to independent study. ‘Having a clear sense of how exactly I am being assessed and what is expected of me always made me feel much calmer’ [231142]. Participants particularly felt that ‘*if* I had an example it would have saved a lot of stress*’;* ‘examples are a really, really, essential part [of assessment] *which isn’t really met most of the time’* [121222].

Recommendation Four: Curricular Intervention

Participants recommended that '*universities should integrate into the curriculum lessons that support student wellbeing*' [111122] through either a discrete '*study module for mental wellbeing specifically*' [121222] or embedded content and skills, around '*keeping your own mental health in check at university*' [221212] such as '*teaching mindfulness [and] sleeping habits, for all students*' [221213]. It was recommended that '*universities should also create peer to peer programmes into the curriculum, where students help one another and listen to one another; this would have a very big impact on mental health issues among students*' [121122]. Embedding wellbeing content in the curriculum could '*reduce the stigma*' [221213] and '*could also help to nip in the bud lots of potential problems that could arise*' [231142] by helping students to '*form those habits early and recognise where they can go for additional help*' [231142]. Whilst some students felt that compulsory curricula content could detract from '*individual responsibility [which] is so important in any mental health change*' [211242] or '*get in the way of your degree*' [221212], '*if it's a compulsory thing it means that nobody has to know why you are there, because everyone is there, and people may not otherwise know enough about mental health to go to access the resources*' [121212]. Participants generally agreed therefore that an introductory session should be embedded in the curriculum with additional optional content.

Recommendation Five: Personalised Pedagogy

Participants recommended that the curriculum enable more interactive and personalised pedagogy, comprising more regular contact with academic staff with 'time to answer questions' [221132], provide direction, and offer reassurance. Participants described how supportive tutors that 'were more than willing to help and give you their time and effort' had benefitted their wellbeing [331231]. Variety in pedagogical activities, 'enthusiasm and motivation for the subject' [222211], and 'relating the module back to real life examples' [222211] were all identified to support course enjoyment and engagement whereby 'students are going to be studying better and getting better results and altogether having a better time at uni if they have that support in place' [521132]. In particular, participants recommended additional 1-1 oral feedback to consolidate understanding and facilitate dialogic clarification, alongside general feedback embedded in the curriculum.

Support Services Provision, Delivery and Communication

Participants recommended investment in additional services and resources; targeted interventions for specific student demographics; diverse support options responsive to individual needs; and peer support.

Recommendation One: Service Investment and Diversification

Participants recommended more investment in specialist counselling and psychological services for students in universities. 'The university should

provide counsellors who are readily available for their students' [121232] to increase uptake and accessibility. Some students recommended additional professional services and staff wherein 'universities should have psychologists for the students' [211122], 'a psychiatric unit and a compulsory wellbeing unit in the university' [121122] and 'a designated mental health support officer' [221212].

By extension, participants recommended diversification of provision to ensure a range of culturally competent, inclusive, and targeted support options responsive to the needs of the diverse student body. 'Students should be able to talk to, receive advice and support from, mentors or professors or mental health advisors that they identify with culturally, religiously, racially, and all of that information should be very readily accessible' [521231]. Participants recommended that 'support should be targeted' [132132] through a range of diverse and trained practitioners for specific socio-demographic groups, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds, LGBTQ+ students, Black and Minority Ethnic students, estranged students, mature students, student with caring responsibilities, students with religious beliefs, disabled students, neurodiverse students, postgraduate students, and international students. 'Targeted support for international students' [211231], for example, 'would help them settle in, blend in, with the others' [211231] during transition.

To further increase the inclusivity and accessibility of support, participants recommended 'offering different kinds of mental health support for different

people' [211232] outside of traditional counselling and psychotherapy. Recommendations included universal wellbeing support that 'doesn't necessarily have to be that I'm struggling from this mental health condition or that mental health condition, it could just be a general 'I'm really struggling with this and I need someone to talk to about it' [231231]. Students recommended 'offering like exercise groups, wellbeing yoga, craft activities, as well as [psychoeducation on] how to sleep better to try and cater to a larger audience of students' [211232]. One panel also recommended 'emotional support animals [because they] also do provide mental wellbeing and a type of structure that some people need' [332231].

Recommendation Two: Peer Support and Student Voice

Participants recommended that 'universities should create peer to peer support groups where students can really share with their colleagues, get guidance, and really share their experiences and challenges together' [121122]. These recommendations encapsulate both formal supervised interventions such as 'peer to peer counselling where students can talk to one another and kind of solve their problems together' [212212] and peer buddy schemes for particular demographics with 'moderators and leaders who can introduce them to this new environment' [121122]. Perceiving that 'a lot of the time, a student would feel more comfortable going to them than a higher up position' [231231], advantages included disclosure, social connection, 'learning from others' [531211], and more student-specific support and signposting,

Participants further recommended that support services should be strategically attuned and responsive to the student voice and experience. 'University support services should listen to students better' [521231] ensuring 'improved methods of a feedback loop and better communication' [121122]. Identifying that 'having an approachable Student Union is really important' [531232], students also recommended that 'student reps could potentially provide a good avenue of someone that students can easily talk to' [231212] with a 'student representative for each department that is a bit of a welfare rep to then liaise with the student union and higher up student support service within that university [221231].

Recommendation Three: Centralised Triage

Participants recommended improved coordination and communication between support services through 'embedding designated wellbeing staff within academic departments' [231231] as 'a bridge point for services' [231231] to triage risk, provide pastoral support, and streamline access. Participants also recommended that 'there needs to be a simplification and expansion of student wellbeing services' [521231] through a cohesive triage system with resource allocation depending on individual needs.

> *'For all student concerns, inquiries, advice, concerns, there is a single point of access which is in our center and you can book an appointment with the wellbeing advisor and they have*

appointments all week long. And in that single session, they will tease out of you every single different concern that you have and then each concern will get branched off to specialist. Maybe disability service, maybe library service, maybe study skills support tutoring, maybe you go to mentoring services, maybe you get referred to a tutor or the learning support team, maybe you can get referred to mentoring. Either way, the single point of access and then it branches out and diversifies because then it can act as your advice service, as a diagnostic service, as a treatment service, and also as a data collection and policy informing service' [521231].

Recommendation Four: Proactive Support

Participants recommended 'support being proactive' [311211] by 'being accommodating to people that have difficulties' [332231] and 'being more proactive in not saying if you've got some issues you need to come to us but rather we will come to you' [231212]. Participants advocated making the process 'as easy as it can be [so] it is much more likely that the person is going to come and ask for help' [521132] and targeting preventative rather than reactive support, ensuring 'we are talking about people before they get to crisis' [311211]. 'The help needs to be more proactively offered and where to go to get the help needs to be more known to students' [211232]. Students recommended 'more of an opt out rather than an opt in approach; I think if everybody had this support by default they would be less likely to drop out if

they need help' [231132]. In addition, students recommended the university collect data to 'identify people who are at risk of poor mental wellbeing' [231212] and 'should identify those students that are needy so they can offer help' [121122] by 'maybe having a check in with a personal tutor or something'. Moreover 'if you can collect good data on common student concerns and you can identify the patterns, then problems get resolved and nipped in the bud' [231212].

Recommendation Five: Awareness Raising and De-Stigmatisation

Affirming that 'having better communication would be very helpful' [232233], participants recommended that 'the services need to be a lot more well-advertised' [231231] to 'make it easier for us to access things' [331213]. Students emphasised that 'it's really important to have an information guide to all students about these services' and 'a better system of signposting' [531211]. 'The university should share mental health information in training face to face for the better good of students' [212212]. Participants also recommended wayfinding initiatives, including 'in the email confirming my appointment, both written directions but also a video of the main SU building which could really help students … [and take] so much stress away from the experience' [231231].

In addition, students recommended mental health awareness and de-stigmatisation initiatives to 'sensitise the impact of seeing a psychologist at university' [112122] and promote the acceptability of support. 'There really

needs to be real active campaigning that recognises that mental health can affect all of us at any time' [311211]. 'The earlier people recognise that it [mental health] is just as much a part of them as their physical health, and both need to be addressed equally, it kind of just reduces stigma and targets some of those barriers straight away' [221231]. By extension, students advocated mental health literacy to enable students 'to even understand that their wellbeing is suffering a bit. if they understood what they are feeling is anxiety or depression or whatever, and how they can access the support, that would be beneficial' [211211].

Relationships with Peers and Academic Staff
Recommendation One: Inclusive Social Provision

Whilst some students felt 'the responsibility is up to me to know how to make friends and learn how to make friends' [121222], the majority of participants concurred that 'it should be partly the responsibility of the institution to help you develop connections with new people' [221212] insofar that 'the universities have a place to set up environments where people can make friends' [531232] because 'it can be very hard, especially remotely, without any sort of aid from the institution itself' [221212]. Participants identified this role to entail additional provision of inclusive sports, societies, and extra-curricular activities to 'give students a chance to interact and get to know each other' [421122], 'allow people to meet in a more relaxing way and form friendships' [231142], and benefit wellbeing because 'when you are feeling low, you know when you play games it helps a lot in relieving stress' [221122]. Participants described how, through university social provision, they 'made

lifelong friends' [311211] and 'got to know a lot of other students and staff too which I don't think I would have met otherwise, and they really became quite an important part of my social network and social support system' [231142]. Participants particularly recommended that social provision be targeted at transition; 'the university may set out groups for the new incoming students like in first year, they can bond, and they can get adapted into that environment and they can form groups and societies'[421122].

Participants emphasised that social provision should be heterophilic with 'more activities or experiences where you could meet a range of different people' [231212] and inclusive where 'no one feels left out' [121222]. Participants particularly recommended 'more non-drinking events or socials'[532212], embedding social activities in 'libraries because that is where the students are' [121212], and include opportunities to 'connect different departments'[221231]. Some participants identified provision of online social activities as more inclusive and accessible, 'like, online quizzes, competitions, …. so that people can meet each other' [221232]. Participants also advocated 'tailored' [222211] activities 'more geared towards somebody that you have more things in common with'[332231], particularly for international students so that 'if you want to be surrounded with people from your own home there is always an outlet for you to be there together' [222211].

Recommendation Two: Pastoral Support

Some participants recommended that academic staff provide additional personal and pastoral support, so that students '*have a regular contact with a person that actually knows you*' [111233] and 'a regular individual that we can contact who would actually know us' [111233]. By 'having those people that you know are there and aren't situated within student services, students would be more inclined to actually go and seek support' [231231]. 'As a student you see your lecturers multiple times a week and it can feel a lot more intimidating to message, who knows, some sort of black hole where you don't know whether you are going to get a response or who you are talking to' [231132]. In particular, participants recommended reforms to the personal tutor system including 'making meetings with your tutors a compulsory thing to make the students open up more' [321212]. 'It would be really helpful at first to have that regular contact of person who know you whilst you are settling into university' [111233]; someone who is readily available to communicate to openly and tell the person about your personal issues' [121232]. Participants provided examples of beneficial close, personal, and supportive relationships where 'whenever I have had an issue, I just go to my tutor and they'll sort it for me straight away … [which] has helped a lot' [331231.

Recommendation Three: Staff Mental Health Training

Participants recommended 'more training for lecturers on knowing what to do when a student comes to you with a problem like depression or anxiety' [431232] and 'to understand the complex myriad of issues which students will

come with and how to tactfully and sensitively respond, not make things worse'[131231]. Other students affirmed that staff should have 'some better training or clearer protocol for lecturers when they are approached' [231132]; 'lecturers could have funding to do first aid courses so they would be a little bit better equipped to recognise the signs, and that early intervention is so important to address these issues' [531232]. Some participants recommended, by extension, that 'tutors themselves could have done with some mental health support as well' [331213] to equip them with the psychological resources to support and respond to student needs.

Living Conditions

Recommendation One: Financial Support

To support student financial situation and living condition, participants recommended bursaries; financial advice; subsidised accommodation, transport, and food; and student employment opportunities. Some students recommended that the university 'introduce some programmes where they can employ students and maybe pay them'[121222] through 'a program like work study where they can employ some of the students who cannot meet their basic needs' [121232]. Other students recommended that universities 'should set up cafeterias for students where they can get food at cheaper rates' [221122] and subsidise the costs of transport and accommodation given that 'the prices are actually extortionate' [222241. Home students recommended the government 'bring back grants' [521231] to replace maintenance loans, whilst International students recommended 'the

university should give students bursaries [and] loans' [221222] and 'an emergency relief fund to help out student's financial situations' [221212]; 'the university should offer tuition assistance to students' [421122] and 'the institutions should introduce a loan system where students can be given loans to facilitate their studies' [221122].

Interpretation of Findings

This chapter has presented axial thematic analysis from ten semi-structured focus groups (n=100) elucidating student perspectives and proposals for improving student mental health and wellbeing at UK universities. Taken together, the findings reaffirm and specify the academic, social, and financial conditions impacting on student wellbeing and experiences of living and learning within the neoliberal higher education context. These findings are further investigated in chapter twelve using Foucaultian-informed interpretative narrative inquiry to situate student experience within neoliberal relations of knowledge-power and interrogate the socio-psychological implications for wellbeing.

Consistent with evidence presented in chapter seven, students identified stressors pertaining to assessment, curriculum, and pedagogy (Pascoe et al., 2020) including assessment type (Jones et al., 2021; Merrick et al., 2021; Hillard et al., 2020], assessment conditions (e.g. Howard et al., 2020; Vin der Embse, 2018), curricular design [e.g. Upsher et al., 2021; Kyndt et al., 2014] and feedback (Ryan & Henderson, 2018; Cramp et al., 2012). In line with theorisation of neoliberal disciplinary technologies in chapter three, student's

experience of these stressors arguably exemplify a pervasive anxiety regarding the structure and consequences of high stakes assessment in the neoliberal system wherein expressed dissatisfaction with the weighting and timing of closed book examinations and unclear assessment expectations for example, intimate a pervasive socio-psychological anxiety that assessment type and conditions will not represent competence in high stakes competitive performance structures (De Lissovoy, 2018). Indeed students demonstrated a ubiquitous perception of threat and fear of failure in assessment conditions, articulating anxiety in pedagogically necessary assessment and feedback processes (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019).

Consistent with existing literature (Priestley et al., 2022; Broglia et al., 2021), students identified structural and cultural conditions pertaining to the availability and accessibility of support services. Students identified structural challenges pertaining to funding allocation and wait times in university services (Priestley et al., 2021; Broglia, Millings & Barkham, 2018), which have been contextualised alongside neoliberal austerity cuts to public mental health services (Hughes, Priestley & Spanner, in press; Batchelor et al., 2019; Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017; Knapp et al., 2016; Caleb, 2016). Consistent with cross-temporal meta-analysis (n=6796) showing increasingly negative attitudes among students toward mental health service access in parallel to the neoliberalisation of higher education [Mackenzie et al., 2014], students also emphasised cultural and psychological challenges to service access, including a reactive individual-orientated and self-responsibilising service

culture (Lewis et al., 2022), stigmatisation of mental health difficulties and services (Cage et al., 2020; Vidourek & Burbage, 2019; Wynaden et al., 2014), fragmented 'university systems, structures and administrative processes' (Lister, Seale & Douce, 2021, p.9) and service unawareness (Stallman, 2011; Gulliver et al., 2010). Problematising the neoliberal narrative of individual responsibility and free choice of service access (Sweet, 2016), students emphasised the emotional challenges involved in disclosure, particularly in an institutional culture of compulsory performance and achievement (Eskin & Baydar, 2022; Bynum & Sukhera, 2021; Fletcher et al., 2020; Soldatic & Morgan, 2017).

Consistent with existing literature (Priestley et al. 2022; Brewster et al., 2021), students identified the importance of relationships and belonging with both peers and academic staff for mental wellbeing. Student accounts of pastoral support indicate the impracticality of personal relationships in the context of neoliberal expansion (Scanion et al., 2010), and the negative implications for belonging and wellbeing (Diehl et al., 2018). In addition, where previous findings have attributed decline in staff wellbeing to working demands in the neoliberal system (e.g. Loveday, 2018; Berg et al., 2016), students similarly described poor staff wellbeing and the interrelation with student wellbeing, relationships, and learning (Brewster et al., 2021; Harding et al., 2018). Students additionally highlighted financial difficulties and anxieties impacting on student wellbeing, consistent with existing literature (McCloud & Bann, 2019; Richardson et al., 2013). In particular, student experience intimated how

neoliberal privatisation of student accommodation exacerbate financial difficulties (Benson-Egglenton, 2019) and create impoverished, precarious, living conditions and economically exploitative relations with landlords (Hochstenbach, Wind & Arundel, 2021), whilst the privatisation of higher education and the transition from maintenance grants to means-tested loans exacerbate financial inequality and compound mental health inequalities (Walsemann, Gee & Gentile, 2015).

Methodologically the findings arguably signify conceptual challenges regarding the parameters of perceptual possibility in the neoliberal system, substantiating the imperative of Foucaultian-informed narrative inquiry in chapter twelve. Furthermore, the partiality of student experience of the higher education system and inconsistent conceptualisation of mental health stands to be enriched by contextualisation alongside stakeholder perspectives in chapter fourteen (Priestley et al., 2021).

Chapter Summary

Presenting the findings from ten student focus groups, this chapter has investigated and situated student lived experience of academic, social, and financial determinants of student wellbeing in the neoliberal higher educational context and identified recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter Twelve: Student Wellbeing and Experiences of Living and Learning at UK Universities: Focus Group Data Analysis Using Interpretative Narrative Inquiry

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents Foucaultian-informed interpretative narrative inquiry of student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning at UK universities to elucidate the complex and multifaceted influence of neoliberal higher education policy on student wellbeing. The analysis is quintessentially grounded in narrative review of neoliberal philosophy, policy, and critique outlined in chapter one, and interrogates the theorised Foucaultian relations between policy discourse and subjective wellbeing described in chapter three. Tracing the neoliberal discourses underpinning relations of power, knowledge, truth, and subjectivity, it is proposed that identifiable neoliberal higher education policy discourses condition and construct the parameters for student experience of wellbeing and living and learning at university.

Taken together, the inquiry identified five neoliberal policy discourses underpinning student narratives of higher educational experience, truth, and reality, namely: consumerism; instrumentalism; competition; individualism; and performativity. Collectively, these neoliberal discourses are shown to construct socio-material power relations that socio-psychologically frame student subjectivity, and mediate exposure to salient social, academic, and financial determinants of wellbeing identified in chapters five to seven,

namely: social isolation, conflict, workload, test anxiety, surface learning, and employability concern [see figure 13].

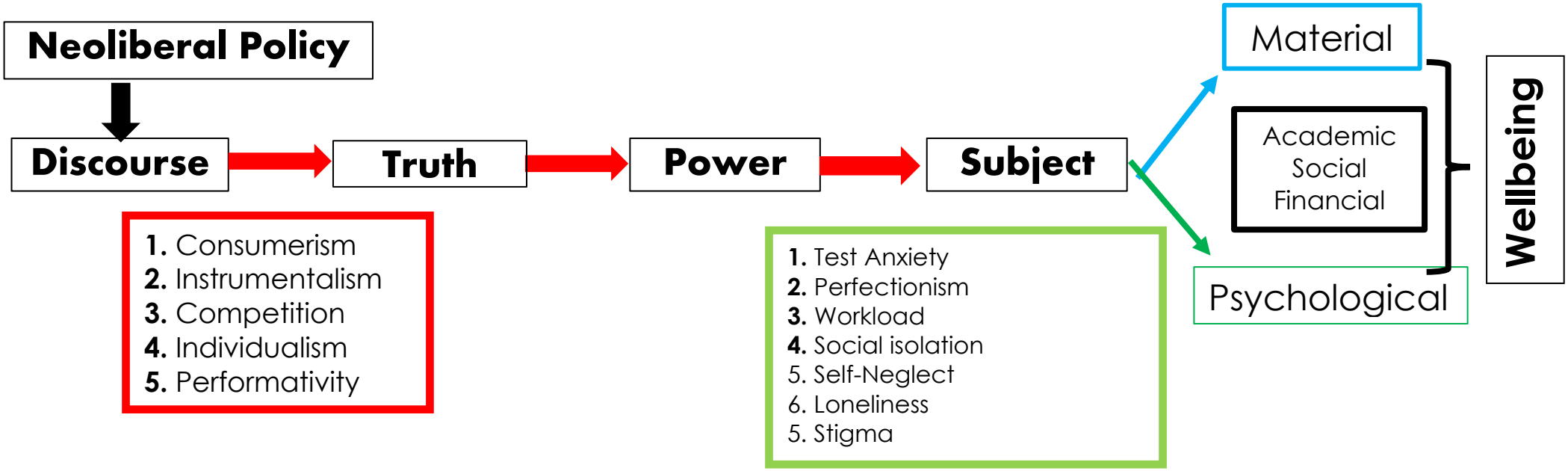


Figure 13: Interpretative Narrative Inquiry Findings

Student Discourses of Higher Education Truth
Discourse One: Consumerism

Interpretative inquiry identified evidence that participants internalise neoliberal discourses of education as a consumer commodity to frame their university experience, expectation of university support, and perception of their own wellbeing. Often qualified with reference to significant personal financial investment in university tuition, students appeared to expect more, and more personalised, support:

> *'At the end of the day, you are paying, what, nine grand for it. If you have a question, you deserve it to be answered'* [331231]*; 'There is no reason that you should be paying insane tuition fees and then not getting any type of support'* [331231].

In the neoliberal university, a paying subject is a deserving subject and receipt of support is a financial rather than pedagogical expectation (Bates & Kaye, 2014). 'Fee increases have reinforced greater overall expectations' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.456), further entrenched by the pandemic and subsequent transition to online provision, with students lamenting '*still paying the same amount - 9K - when I have only been to my university about three times [and] haven't spoken to my personal tutor*' [511213]. Discrepancy between student expectations - given the financial cost of provision - and the receipt of support, particularly online, discursively frame student experience, self-efficacy, and satisfaction with independent learning, with 'students

feeling short changed when university staff ask them to learn for themselves' (Wilbraham et al. in press). Once personal pedagogical support is discursively positioned as a commercial expectation, the liberal pedagogical emphasis on independent learning is experienced through relations of power as a personal and financial injustice, producing emotional experience of inundation, isolation, and failure (Houlden & Veletsianos, 2021).

> *'I might as well have just paid myself six grand, sat in front of the computer, gone on a few videos on YouTube and then printed myself off a certificate saying 'sorry, you've failed'. Because it's been literally like 'do it yourself'* [331213].

Personal investment in independent learning is discursively translated into financial value, with 'failure' subsequently both commercialised and personalised as a failure of the university to deliver the product – 'the certificate' – to meet the individual's needs (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009). As in any market, consumer satisfaction with the value of the commodity – again 'the certificate' - is calculated against alternative competitive providers such as YouTube and Free Learn. Framed as such:

> *'What is it that they are giving us – especially now –, to watch online lectures? You can go on the free learn or any of those things and get yourself a certificate. How is that different than what is happening now? It should be cheaper'* [232233].

This underlying expectation of transactional exchange of capital for academic services infuse students' emotional experience, blurring perceptions of personal and financial educational expenditure (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009).

> *'You've got this really strange exchange relationship between university where you are giving and they are supposed to give back. And sometimes it really does feel like you're giving and giving and giving – you've got nothing else to give - and they are still wanting more from you. And it doesn't always feel like a balanced relationship with universities. A lot of it you do feel like you are giving a lot and not getting a lot back'* [222241]

Discursive blurring of a transactional financial relationship and a mutual pedagogical relationship within the neoliberal university heighten students' perceived investment of personal resource and the perceived imbalance and injustice of '*what they are supposed to do and what they need to do'* [222241] which takes a personal and emotional toll. Students' emotional needs for personal contact with academic staff become a commercial expectation so that commercial and relational dissatisfaction become indissociable [Ball, 2012].

Consumer narratives commodify the pedagogical experience and expectation of independent learning, manifest in a belief that staff should

'make it easier for us to know what to do so we don't have to look, it's all there for us, packaged, you know paid and packaged. And I think that would really help our mental health' [331213]. The whole learner experience is part of the package that students pay for, and the discursive slippage between consumption of a branded educational product and the implications for mental health encapsulate how, in the neoliberal university, mental health itself becomes part of the package that students pay for, with discourses of mental health permeating the experience of pedagogical situations and relationships (Ecclestone & Hayes, 2019).

Framed as a commercial transaction of property and ownership, students expect institutional intervention for personal problems. 'I'm *the property of the university I am studying in - I was expecting they could help me with my problems, but it was more of a signposting and not really giving me anything'* [121122]. Mental health is repositioned as a transactional exchange, where the institution is expected to 'give something' tangible in return for student investment, transposing the role of actor and subject between students and staff (Molesworth, Nixon, & Scullion, 2009). The institution's responsibility for mental health is thus explicitly framed in market terms; that of competent competitive provider, rather than the ethical imperative of a public service (Moth, 2018).

> *'I don't think it [wellbeing] is necessarily like a responsibility. But I think considering that where you go to university is effectively an*

> *open market, I think it's within the university's best interests to provide those kind of services'* [221132].

Student dissatisfaction, by extension, was often framed in discourses of trading standards, product warranty and guarantee, consumer complaint legislation, and refund eligibility, with demand for 'greater transparency over the resources provided from fee revenue' (Tomlinson, 2017, 456).

> *I would actually love to know the breakdown of what they spend my 9 and a half grand on. Because surely if I'm paying the university that amount of money over three years, it should cover things you have got problems with, you shouldn't have to beg for basic things. That should be covered and if we're not getting it then it should be a refund* [222241].

Some students evinced an even more explicit consumer-contractor conceptualisation of the relationship between student and university, citing a legal right to compensation for '*breach of contract'* equivalent to any other private commodity.

> *'These problems are in significant breach of contract and do make us entitled for thousands of pounds of refunds … you are entering into a contract which is conditional upon them fulfilling*

> *their terms and if they are not then you can get money back'* [521231].

Students thus 'perceive themselves to have increasing bargaining power in how their higher education is arranged and delivered' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.457), with narratives of educational consumption citing a characteristic neoliberal construction of private citizenship based on individual rights, independent information to empower free choice, and freedom to complain about inadequate services (Harvey, 2007).

> *'It's holding personal tutors accountable for their actual role'* [222241]*; 'If students have a complaint, it should be incredibly easy for them to talk about it. And if they don't feel like they can receive advice from the university, there needs to be better communication and resources to talk independently through [the] Office for Independent Adjudicators. They are the ombudsman so independent body that regulates universities* [222241].

Indeed some students explicitly articulated the complaint process in the logic of the free market, wherein '*listen[ing] to student grievances … allow the university to explore and change how things are done in order to better education quality'* [111122]. The market, in this way, discursively performs and reproduces the parameters of student desires in complex networks of power,

wherein market regulators and performative disciplinary systems of surveillance and accountability are evoked as resistance to the relational disconnect inherent to transactional consumer-based relations (Brunella, 2019; Sandel, 2012), paradoxically reproducing the market conditions they oppose (Jankowski & Provezis, 2014). Indeed, the discursive commodification of education is so entrenched in students' educational reality that alternatives become unthinkable and resistance is limited to negotiating retail price relative to the market exchange rate, rather than challenging the commodification of education itself (Lissovoy, 2018).

> *'Institutions usually run on the tuition that students pay. So if we say that students have education for free some of the institutions would have to close down'* [221122]*; 'let's keep the price because that makes sense, but it's unjustifiably high'* [232233]

Neoliberal consumer discourses thus perform the parameters of truth, reality and 'sense' in higher education, constructing and frustrating students' expectations of university provision and support, with agency, identity, and resistance constructed as private complaints of 'paying customers' who expect their providers to deliver their services and products in ways commensurate with their demands' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.452).

Discourse Two: Instrumentalism

Indissociable from consumer discourses of education, students cited an instrumentalist and credentialist discourse of educational value, 'driven by the pursuit of economically advantageous outcomes, often at the expense of more intrinsically educational ones' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.453). Indeed 'when knowledge becomes reconfigured as a commodity to be purchased and then exchanged … [the focus becomes] outcome related rather than process related' (Tomlinson, 2017, p.454). As such, once endowed with market value by quantifiable performance indicators, students' perception of educational investment and value is synonymised with assessment, performing students' learning desires, expectations, and personal investment of effort in learning strategies (Mintz, 2021); *'I like to know what my assignments are from the first day of term …. so I know roughly what to read for'* [131231].

In this way, consumer 'expectations affect students' motivation, engagement, and investment of effort in learning' (Kinsella et al., 2022, p.536), with the particular 'focus on the expected outcomes of education, rather than the process, seen to affect students' motivation for learning' (Wilbraham et al, in press). Indeed, 'to have a degree as a means to an economically prosperous end, positions the individual within consumer discourse and reduces their freedom to engage in opportunities for personal transformation' (Molesworth, Nixon & Scullion, 2009, p.284), reproducing 'passive instrumental attitudes to learning' (Bunce, Baird, & Jones, 2017,

p.1959) mani/fest in cynical learning strategies and expenditure of effort to meet prescribed academic outcomes, rather than intrinsic motivation to actively and deeply engage with curricular content (Slater & Seawright, 2018).

> *'I find most people in my course leave early or just come for attendance; there are some students that do not even want to contribute, and there is lots of people that say audio or mic is not working'* [322211]

Neoliberal instrumentalisation promotes a calculating self-interested subject that evaluates choices and actions based on the return for investment in knowledge capital (Ball, 2015; Varman, Saha, & Skalen, 2011). Indeed, 'the enterprising self is a calculating self' (Rose, 1990, p.7) and neoliberal subjects 'make decisions about the value of activities and the investment of time and effort in relation to measures and indexes and the symbolic and real rewards that might be generated from them' (Ball, 2015, p.300). The consumer student subject is therefore principally motivated by academic activities that clearly and directly inform their assessment results, for example not accessing feedback '*if they had passed and that was all they wanted'* [211211] and evading engagement in collaborative, exploratory, or intangible types of learning (Rowe, 2020; Glazzard & Stones, 2019):

> *'Students don't want to advance knowledge, they often just want to ask about the assessment or assignment. When you want to have a nice creative discussion or critical discussion, it just turns into how this will work in my essay or how will this translate into my exam. It really kind of limits the discussion that you are able to have'* [431232].

'Students in the neoliberal university have a heightened need for instant gratification, an unwillingness to feel uncertainty, fear or risk, and 'an impatience, even fury towards that which is not useful' (Grant, 2017, p. 151). In instrumentalised consumer-based relations of transactional exchange, pedagogy is (re)constructed and consumed as the 'packaging and presenting of the most useable and relevant information in the most efficient way as possible' to meet each student's individual needs (Tomlinson, 2017, p.454), with alternative pedagogical discourses positioned as 'disqualified knowledges, naïve knowledge, knowledges inadequate to their task' (Foucault, 1980, p.81). Notwithstanding, some students reasserted alternative narratives of educational purpose:

> *'what was the point? It got me to the next stage, but I don't remember anything'* [131232].

'The next stage' is a central motif in the neoliberal narrative of self-improvement, and inherent to instrumentalist and credentialist educational

discourses (Ward, 2018). The implied contrast with long-term knowledge acquisition points towards what Ball (2012, p.225) describes as the 'performance of performativity' where actors purposively perform representations intended to be competitive in the market system, whilst simultaneously retaining the experiential knowledge that its logic of educational progression is flawed, in an act of both reproduction and resistance (Keddie et al, 2011).

Discourse Three: Competition

As an extension of instrumentalist discourses, neoliberal discourses of individual meritocratic competition infuse student narratives and emotional experiences of group and online assessment. For example:

> *'Some people don't like the idea of 'my grade might be effected by other people's level of work. The fact you have to rely on other people to get your grade can be quite stressful, because not everybody puts in the same effort as you; grades have been majorly effected because of other people's effort levels'* [321212].

The instrumental value inscribed upon assessment outcome within neoliberal competition create fear and distrust of reliance on others, and reconstruct 'attitudes and values to fit with an instrumental rationality that privileges competitiveness and autonomy' over collaboration and cooperation (Wilkins, 2012, p.773). Similarly student anxieties regarding the expectations of

online assessment over 24 hours and '*worry about how long other students are spending on it and how long I should spend on it*' [221212] suggests a pervasive hyperconsciousness of positional market value of academic outcome in competition with others (Madsen, 2022). Encapsulated in the perception that '*the integrity of some of these exams is just not very high'* and that '*more needs to be done to combat plagiarism'* [212212], competitive narratives of assessment construct adversarial power relations where 'the other is related to as competition' (McNay, 2009, 64) and perceived to threaten fair transparent and meritocratic competition and devalue private knowledge capital (Buckner & Hodges, 2015). As a result, students perceived that online '*exams have been a lot less impactful' [212212]*, conflating the 'impact' of assessment with its market function in differentiating competitive performance, rather than depicting personal pedagogical process and progress within a criterion-referenced system (Fletcher et al. 2012).

Discourse Four: Individualism

Student narratives further indicated a pervasive neoliberal discourse of personal responsibility for welfare.

> *'When we are struggling we are told we should go home and try to solve our own problems' [521122].*

In the neoliberal university, wellbeing is perceived both as a personal responsibility and choice, discursively excluded from university responsibility

and physically located, through the body, within the domestic sphere (Berg, Harting, & Stronks, 2021; Fisher, 2011). Likewise, the systems for accessing support in the neoliberal university *'all rest on you'* [521132] to identify and choose, irrespective of the differential social, emotional, and psychological barriers involved (Cosgrove & Karter, 2018). *'it's down to the person, the individual, to try and approach the services or at least actively seek them out'* [211232]. By extension, some students cited a meritocratic neoliberal discourse of free choice, pertaining to equality of opportunity over equality of outcome, to frame perceptions of service access (Littler, 2013).

> *'It's important to give students that option, but what is made out of that option is something the university can't really contribute with'* [231232].

Non-interventionist neoliberal discourses appeared to align with medicalised discourses of mental health as an internal, individual, and natural pathology (Adams et al., 2019; Cosgrove & Karter, 2018; Moncrief, 2008). In these terms, some students seemed predisposed to believe *'it's never going to affect me'* [221231] and conceptualise university responsibility for wellbeing to be limited to specialist services, with individual responsibility '*to deal with issues and have a positive mental attitude'* [111122]. Indeed, specialist psychological and psychoeducational interventions were evoked to responsibilise the individual to act upon themselves to cope with institutional stressors (Forbes, 2017) by equipping the individual with relevant knowledge and skills through

'teach[ing] the students on time management, on how to budget, and feeling overwhelmed with work' [121212], '*training sessions on mental health tips'* [121212] and '*engaging them in life skill lessons [that] will help their mental health'* [121212]. Disciplinary knowledge of mental health is thus recuperated to reproduce neoliberal governmentality and subjectification (Moncrief, 2008), wherein the individual is ethico-economically responsibilised to '*strive for everything including mental health and wellbeing'* [221211], whilst acquisition of mental health related skills is instrumentalised 'to *look good on their CV*' [221213].

Discourse Five: Performativity

Neoliberal new public management systems of performance metrics have been described as 'measur[ing] life and future in terms of productivity' (O'Flynn & Peterson, 2007, p.465) and 'eradicating the value of the individual as a person' (Ball, 2003, p.224). The discourses of knowledge embedded in the examination operate as a technology of power that construct the subject as an object of knowledge and, in doing so, exclude subjective self-narrative from representations of educational performance (Ball, 2012). Likewise students perceived '*it's all about your outputs rather than you as a person*' [231231] and that performance indicators '*only focus on the academic and being productive'* [121222] or '*things that have economic impact on the student'* [221122], excluding personal discourses of self and educational value.

> *'Module review forms are all very based around, have you understood the information? Was it delivered in the right way? But they never really have any focus on how you are feeling and was the work too much on a mental thing rather than a physical thing'* [421212]*; 'it's very much focussed on the work but doesn't really take into account just you as a person, and how you are coping'* [211232].

Exclusion of subjective experience from institutional metrics construct and convey a reality where academic performance is valued and prioritised above self-care and wellbeing (Lynch, 2010), 'leading to students prioritising academic achievement over their wellbeing' (Wilbraham et al, in press). '*I don't think a lot of attention was given to mental wellbeing in that it wasn't a priority; most of the time we were focusing on the academic [rather than] wellbeing*' [121222]. Grounded in the Cartesian dualism between rationality and emotion (Lynch , 2010), 'performance has no room for caring' (Ball, 2003, 224) and this exclusion of affective discourses make it '*hard for some students to even understand that their wellbeing is suffering a bit. They just kind of think, 'oh I'm at uni, this is normal'* [*211211]*

Similarly within support services, institutional discourses of performance determine and discipline eligibility for access.

'When I did go to the wellbeing service. It was like 'oh are you still getting the grades though? That's okay' [412212].

Mental health is instrumentalised and disciplined in relation to individual performance outcomes, wherein mental health assessment functions as a dividing practice in which '*the subject is either divided inside himself or divided from others*' (Foucault, 1982, pp.777) in the provision of services.

Implications of Neoliberal Discourse for Subjective Wellbeing

The inquiry found these five neoliberal policy discourses to socio-materially and socio-psychologically mediate exposure to social, academic, and financial determinants of wellbeing identified in chapters five to seven, namely: test anxiety; perceived workload; social isolation; conflict; and employability concern.

Assessment and Self-Worth

Once educational value is situated within a discursive network of instrumentalism, individualism, and meritocratic competition, examination outcomes become socio-symbolically inscribed as an indicator of individual self-worth within the neoliberal university (Besley & Peters, 2007). Signified through disciplinary technologies of the examination that 'measure in quantitative terms and hierarchicalises in terms of value the abilities, the level, the 'nature' of individuals' (Foucault, 1979, p.183), assessment outcomes are discursively attributed to personal ethico-economic qualities such as 'hard

work' 'that are understood to reflect on the value and worth of the individual' (Gill, 2009, p10) as 'a measure of worth to oneself and others' (Raaper, 2019, p.4). As such, '*it is the expectations surrounding the deadlines*' [221122] – rather than the deadlines themselves – that create stress and construct a threat to subjective identity, self-beliefs, and self-worth (Singh, 2017). '*Our examinations are really overrated over-hyped and I think that is where the pressure comes from*' [121122] and '*that level of perfectionism comes through for a lot of students*' [131232] where performance '*has to be flawless*' [212212]. In the neoliberal university:

> *'you don't really matter as much as your grades and if you can't really do good in academics, then you don't really have a purpose. That's why I think for me, exams are so stressful and why I put too much pressure on myself in exams'* [221211].

Given these existential implications, students define subjective identity and value according to performance outcomes, internalising a competitive pressure to perform against their own personal standards even when assessment conditions are demonstrably low stake (Brunella, 2019; Paltrinieri, 2017).

> *'I'm very academic driven, so even when they just tell us "oh this is just a formative assessment it doesn't really matter" and like in first year when you are told "oh, it doesn't count, you just need to*

get 40% and above" I'm still there aiming to get 90 plus percent or 100 per cent. And even this year we've had exams at home so you've not had the stress of going into an exam hall, and most of them have been open book so you've been able to look at notes and such. But for me I still got really stressed and anxious. So I do think, there isn't really much to be done because even if the university told me 'oh, it doesn't matter' or changed it, I still think I would get just as stressed about it' [521122].

The Imperative of Self-Improvement and Perfectionism

Where educational subjects are permanently seen, known, and valued in panoptical power relations according to assessment outputs within the neoliberal system, students internalise the judgement of the neoliberal 'gaze' to monitor, value, and discipline their own performance in relation to these indicators, 'as part of our sense of personal worth and our estimation of the worth of others' (Ball, 2013, p.139). The assessment results, rankings, and categories inherent to performativity consequently underpin a performative 'change in categories of self-understanding and techniques of self-improvement' (Rose, 1992, p.161) wherein 'the entrepreneurial subject competes with the self, and not just with others' (Scharff, 2016, p.108). In this way, physical power relations whose 'effects take the form of limit and lack' (Foucault, 1976, p.83) are replaced by disciplinary technologies of power inherent to the examination that 'appropriate the freedom of subjects through discursive technologies and techniques to bring their own ways of

conducting and evaluating themselves into alignment with political objectives' (Rose, 1996, p.155).

Time and Perceived Workload

Student narratives further demonstrate how neoliberal discourses of performativity, competition, and personal responsibility become internalised by the subject to regulate rest and relaxation in the neoliberal university. 'Not being idle is central to neoliberal subjects' life' (O'Flynn & Peterson, 2007, p.469).

> *'There is a bit of a toxic work landscape in academia that you should always be working and shouldn't take time off. Every sort of holiday we have had, so whether it was Christmas break or reading week, we have always had huge essays or exams after. So it's just been sort of this dagger over your head'* [231231].

Where performance outcomes are discursively inscribed with personal characteristics relating to individual ethico-economic choices, taking a break is disciplined as a personal moral failing that threatens subjective identity (Slater & Seawright, 2018; Turken et al., 2016) - akin to the corporeal threat of 'a dagger'[231231].

> *'Not being able to take a proper break over the holidays because you had this deadline hanging over you. And I personally, even if*

> *I've done the work, I can't allow myself to take a proper few days' break before that deadline. So whether it's over Christmas or over Easter, because I'm still thinking about the work that needs to be done'* [131231].

In the exclusion of alternative discourses of self-worth, student's personal life and identity is synonymised and assimilated with academic labour (Brienza, 2017; Torrance, 2017) where the emotional consequences of non-optimal productivity to identity are so significant that students 'cannot allow' themselves to take a break (Slater & Seawright, 2018). Rather, 'neoliberalism demands high productivity in compressed time frames that command self-disciplining individuals to dedicate their lives to constant, methodical work as if it were a 'calling' or a moral duty' (Simpson, 2020, p.8).

> *'Universities can set the standards way too high and that can lead to people over-working themselves [221212]; 'There is a culture and expectation that you have to be working all the time. …. I receive emails even at 2 o clock in the night …. it puts a lot of pressure, when I wake up there are emails in my inbox and when I go to sleep there are emails in my inbox so it is a constant culture of you have to work around the clock'* [231231].

In the panoptical power relations inherent to performativity, working expectations are constructed through comparison with others, where email is

perceived as a permanent surveillance and disciplinary technology to regulate non-work time (Long, Goodman & Clow, 2010).

> *'You are expected to work every day of the week. Or we are anyway, or we have to, to keep up. And I think that is more to do with the workload, but the fact that we are being assigned that much that we have to do eight hours a day every day. My dad always says to me 'oh, why are you working weekends?' but it's kind of like we have to, to keep up. So I guess in terms of that, the mindset where you should always be working. I feel guilty for taking time off'* [221232].

'Since there are no limits to self-improvement, productive uses of time become paramount …. [and] the resulting constant activity means that there is also a feeling of a lack of time' (Scharff, 2016, p.112). Academic labour is subsequently transposed as 'hope labour' (Kuehn & Corrigan, 2013, p.9), paradoxically constructed as a protective mechanism 'to keep up' in the hope that 'if we only work harder, produce more, achieve more, we will eventually get 'there' (Hey, 2004, p.80). As such, stress is normalised, even fetishized through a 'normalisation and even valorisation of overworking' (Simpson, 2020 p.7) as individuals strive to maximise productivity (Sefton, 2018) and 'constantly transform himself, improve himself, and make himself ever more efficient' (Dardot & Laval, 2014, p,265). In this way, 'the entrepreneurial self orients to time with a view to making the best use of it' (Scharff, 2016,

p.112) and 'increase the available time for production (Hall & Bowles, 2016, p.39), 'account[ing] for every minute of their day to remain constantly 'productive' (Simpson, 2020, p.7). For example:

> *'In terms of online exams, I think it makes me more productive because it gives me more time to revise due to the fact I don't have to travel to university'* [112122]; *'[it] gives me a lot of time, a lot of free time, which I can utilise somewhere else and be productive'* [521122].

Freedom, manifest through physical mobility of the body, is paradoxically perceived as inhibitive and internally regulated to optimise performance outcomes (Maguire, Braun & Ball, 2014), synonymised with 'free time' in which to be productive.

Perceived Workload and Social Isolation

In the imperative for self-improvement, 'any consideration of the relational, the embodied, and the affective …, are excluded from such technically rational conceptualisations of time (Leathwood & Read, 2020, p.6) resulting in the subject experiencing no time to meet their social, emotional, and physical needs (Valovirta & Mannevuo, 2022).

> *'Where do we get the time to do other things and extra things that we need to do on the side? I feel like that contributes very*

negatively to my mental health in particular' [221212]*; 'they are just expecting everyone to sort of constantly be working, and constantly be doing things when they are a lot of other things going on which they might not necessarily understand'* [231212].

As such, the demand to optimise time to maximise performance outputs were described to diminish the perceived time available for caring and social relationships, compounding social isolation and loneliness.

'The tutors should not give their students a lot of assignments over the weekend and holidays because it doesn't give them time to interact with their peers, they just stay in their rooms. And it can affect their mental wellbeing. They are overloaded with a lot of work and do not get that time to interact' [221212]*.; The university can stop overloading the students with too much work, so at least they have time to interact with their peers, engage in co-curricular activities, and socialise with other students'* [121212].

'Under neoliberalism, the idealised worker is one that is available 24/7 … [and] capable of working without time limits and without primary caring responsibilities' or self-care (Lynch, 2010, pp.57-58). Indeed Institutional discourses of instrumentalism and self-improvement devalue social relationships and personal interests as an inefficient investment of time

(Dickinson, Griffiths & Bredice, 2021), as one 'that's not important and useful, and gets in the way of studies' [121212]. For example:

> *'A friend that I know was getting really overwhelmed and went to speak to his tutor about it and just said 'I don't think I've got enough time to revise all the content' and his tutor said, 'are you still playing rugby once a week … well, there's an extra two hours a week for you, stop doing rugby'* [121212].

Perceived Workload and Self-Care

The demand to optimise time likewise inhibits the perceived time and resources available for self-care (O'Dwyer, Pinto, & McDonough, 2018). *'By the time I finish the day, I don't have any energy left to take care of myself* [231231]. investment of time in care of the self is perceived, in the imperative for self-improvement, to have no market exchange value and thus impede academic productivity (Lynch, 2010); it '*adds to the workload and it's another thing to do*' (231232].

> *'If the university put on a course or something [for wellbeing], I'm going to think 'well in reality I could be revising when I'm doing that' [421212].*

"Self-care" and care of others are not absent, but now need to be conceived as an investment and legitimized as an investment, that is,

pursued in terms of profit or as a means to add value to one's human capital …. necessitating an instrumental approach to care which renders genuine self-care and care of others virtually impossible' (Brunella, 2019, pp.135-136).

Competition and Perceived Threat of Failure

Construction of time in the instrumental imperative for self-improvement manifests in a permanent anxiety that failure to utilise time productively will be competitively disadvantaged (Ross, 2021).

> *'We got an email from some admin team saying 'what were you doing during the pandemic? If you weren't doing all these extra-curricular things and doing extra courses and doing this and doing that, then employers won't hire you because other people will have". You are putting this extra pressure on by saying employers are going to think you are shit if you didn't take up a sport, or publish a paper with your time'* [431232]

Competitiveness of the employment market thus compound the demand on time and performance, threat to self-worth, and produce existential precarity and uncertainty (Simpson, 2020).

> *'The graduate job market feels more competitive now and this is a kind of additional weighting or pressure on our performance at university for what we might do in the future'* [222232].

Through systems of competition, 'neoliberalism produces in the subject a feeling of constant (and growing) precariousness …. [and] this precariousness is inimitable to mental wellbeing in higher education' (Berg, Huijbens, & Larsen, 2016, p.173), compounding anxiety that performance and the self are deficient, and augmenting the imperative for self-improvement (Hoggett, 2017). 'The neoliberal subject is … a constantly 'failing subject' (O'Flynn & Peterson, 2007, p.470) and 'competitiveness intensifies the neoliberal spotlight of surveillance' (Watermeyer & Olssen, 2016, p.203), wherein students evaluate self-worth in panoptical power relations on the basis of comparative and competitive systems of performance outcome (Ball, 2013). 'Semi-permanent feeling of failure and inadequacy is the consequence of such performative regimes where the ideal remains forever elusive' (Hoggett, 2017, p.365), where failure is individualised, and the self 'always falls short before the imagined gaze of the Other' (Hoggett, 2017, p.369). Hence, 'performativity generates a subject consumed by performance anxiety, a subject constantly measuring itself against an (unobtainable) ideal (Hoggett, 2017, p.375).

> '*when I compare it* [the work others do] *to the work and the amount that I should be doing, I think that negatively effects my mental health'* [221212].

Where value of performance and self are inscribed within a competitive system of performativity, others symbolise the expected workload '*that*

definitely plays into our feelings of guilt, of not getting stuff done, and that loss of motivation' [521132]. In the imperative for self-improvement, competition creates a 'constant imperative to be and do more – imperatives that promote a sense of guilt and self-dissatisfaction' (Peterson & O'Flynn, 2007, p.209). 'individuals are encouraged to add value to themselves, to be entrepreneurial and productive – carrying with themselves a high sense of (self) expectation that might lead to disappointment and a feeling of guilt and underachievement (Wyn, Cuervo & Landstedt, 2015, p. 63; Shahjahan, 2020), wherein 'a sense of inadequacy and not quite measuring up is pervasive among university students who are steeped in a competitive environment that promotes individualism' (Ross, 2021, p.351).

Commodification and Loneliness

Alongside perceived lack of time for socialisation, commodification of the student experience constructs unobtainable expectations of peer relationships (Worsley, Harrison & Corcoran, 2021) which similarly impact negatively on student wellbeing once unfulfilled.

> *'Unis contribute to the pressure of the image that at uni you are meant to be having the time of your life and meeting lots of people and have a large group of friends and this adds pressure if your uni experience isn't like this, it makes you feel like you're doing something wrong and you can feel quite negative about yourself.,*

… because it [uni] can be lonely but I don't think that is ever spoken about' [332231].

The commercial expectation and image of university is oppressive and pressurising, with the exclusion of incompatible discourses constructing and compounding the experience of rejection, loneliness, and failure (Wulf-Anderson, 2022). Likewise, in commercial transactions of exchange, expectations that academic staff 'should provide a point of call if you need anything' [222241 construct unobtainable expectations that permeate student perception and relations with academic staff 'in a complex link between neoliberalism and emotions' (Pilkington, 2015 , p.11).

Relationships with students and staff are advertised as part of the product's brand, yet this relational commodification and instrumentalisation paradoxically prevent satisfaction of relational needs, precisely because the transactional consumer relation is substantively different to mutually and emotionally supportive caring social relations at the heart of student belonging and wellbeing (Haslam et al., 2022; Brunella, 2019; Patsarika, 2014; Sandel, 2012). Indeed, 'the denial of relational needs inherent in the ideology of neoliberalism and the all-pervasive market is a source of widespread anxiety and psychic pain' (Rustin, 2014, p.155). In this way, neoliberalism extends 'the market beyond monetary exchanges … as a principle for intelligibility of and a principle of decipherment of social relationships and

individual behaviour' (Foucault, 2008, p.243) to (re)define 'our subjective existence and our relations with one another' (Rose, 1989, p.ix).

Individualism, Stigma and Help-Seeking

Student narratives demonstrated a disciplinarily 'politics of guilt' (Collett et al., 2022, p.203) regulating help-seeking and service use in the neoliberal institution.

> *'One thing I hear a lot of is 'there are people who are worse off than me, there are people more disabled than me and there are people who are more critical than me. So if I was to go and see a counsellor and seek support, that would be moving the support from somebody else'* [311211].

The neoliberal narratives of personal responsibility for welfare, limited public resource, and demonisation of welfare recipients construct 'experiences of guilt and shame at failing to meet the standard of self-sufficiency promoted by neoliberalism' (Swales et al., 2020, p.673; Greener & Moth, 2020; Gill, 2017). Market-driven expansion entrench the sense of personal responsibility in which '*the responsibility is up to me because the university has so many students, I don't think you can focus on everyone'* [121222]. The system for granting support is constructed to discipline resource allocation and signify the deserving subject *by 'involving so much extra labour'* [231231] and '*if you are a couple of minutes late then the appointment is cancelled [and] that is*

so stressful in itself' [532212]. '*The harshness of some of the uni policies can be a real big barrier in some students getting help'* [231231].

In particular, student narratives of extenuating circumstance processes revealed an institutional disciplinary practice which materially and psychologically discipline or shame students for accessing mental health support (Soldatic & Morgan, 2017; Mattheys, 2015). Students described how their own narratives of self-knowledge and self-experience were subordinated to '*the evaluative lens'* of specialist scientific evidence, becoming personally responsibilised to 'prove' their mental health challenges, 'requiring evidence that students might not have, or which isn't easy to get' [231231].

> *'We have a mitigating circumstances form that you have to fill in, to get an extension and that process itself is quite daunting, and you have to wait for acceptance. And waiting for that approval is very stressful itself, not knowing whether your circumstances warrant an extension. …. And also I was worrying that the lecturers that ran the course would see that I had put in this extension and they would look negatively on me for asking for an extension* [221213].

The perception that academic staff will penalise extension requests and that extensions *'just put work off'* suggest a persistence of morality and labour discourses which Foucault (1965) argues frame knowledge of mental health in neoliberal society. Mental ill health is imagined as an 'indissociably economic and moral' condition (Foucault, 1965, p.57) – 'the psychological effect of a moral fault' (Foucault, 1965, p.158) indicative of individual failure to work hard. The extenuating circumstances process is consequently perceived as an existential threat as students are subject to surveillance of the ethico-economic qualities of their character to evaluate the validity of their experiential narratives.

> *'The extenuating circumstances process is quite a scary thing to apply to because you feel you are going to be rejected or you don't have enough evidence'* [221212].

In this way, neoliberal discourses of individualism and non-interventionism permeate students' emotional engagement and experience with disclosure, help-seeking, and service access (Eskin & Baydar, 2022).

The Possibility of Resistance?

Within this discursive network of neoliberal subjectification, some students exemplified 'parrhesia' (Foucault, 1984, p.11) - 'tak[ing] the risk of telling the whole truth that [s]he thinks' (Foucault, 1984, p.13) by critiquing neoliberal discourses of individualism that exclude the structural pressures and stressors

in the neoliberal context. 'Critique', Foucault writes, 'is the movement through which the subject gives itself the right to question truth concerning its power effects and to question power about its discourses of truth' (Foucault, 1997b, p. 386). 'it is through people paying greater attention to what is happening to themselves in contextual terms that it is possible to develop a consciousness of personal feelings as public feelings and thus as a possible source of critique' (Brunella, 2019, p.138).

Students particularly critiqued the construction of educational and mental health knowledge of self through the examination in 'a refusal of these abstractions, of economic and ideological state violence which ignore who we are individually, and also a refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition which determines who one is' (Foucault, 1982, p.212). Rather, in an act of 'care of the self' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p.85), students critiqued the individualised explanations, interventions, and responsibilization for mental health in the neoliberal university by '*reframing the way you think about things so that blame isn't on you, it's on the difficult situation that you are going through and the external pressures of university rather than the fact that you are rubbish and don't deserve to be a student'* [121212]. For example:

> *'They'll just be throwing stuff on top of everything they've already got but then they'll say okay now if you want to talk to someone*

> *we are here for you'* [511213]; '*what can someone say to me if I've got too much work, …, what can they possibly say to me that will CBT me a first' [331213]. 'Talking won't help that kind of issue because what can someone say to me if I've got too much work'* [511213].

In this way, situated within competing discursive networks of consumerism, instrumentalism, and individualism (Tomlinson, 2017; Saunders, 2014; Williams, 2013; Nordensvärd, 2011), student subjects renegotiate the power relations underlying mental health knowledge and intervention, manifest in a resistance to the 'construction of workloads as a private failing rather than a structural political issue' (Gill, 2017, p.6).

> *'It's the easy fix. 'Ah yeah we can get a therapy dog come in the library'. I'm like 'what about the structural issues please? If you solved them, we might need less therapy dogs'* [211231].

By demanding '*an acknowledgement from the university that those extra stressors are there'* [431232], students resist the exclusion of structural stressors from mental health knowledge, reasserting the power of the institution for structural and cultural change, and reimagining the possibility of a wellbeing-supportive university.

'Universities, as well as just academic education, it makes an individual grow in all aspects of life. Mental health should be included too. It's a place where you learn from those around you and develop as an individual' [212212]

Chapter Summary

Taken together, this chapter has demonstrated the value of Foucaultian-informed narrative inquiry for interpreting student experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the context of the neoliberal higher education system. In particular, consistent with theorisation in chapter three, the neoliberal policy discourses and subjectivities identified in chapter one were found to socio-psychologically mediate experience and exposure to salient academic, social, and financial determinants of student wellbeing identified in chapters five to seven, namely: social isolation, conflict, workload, test anxiety, surface learning, and employability concern. The disciplinary technologies of the examination, surveillance, and intervention theorised in chapter three were found to be particularly influential in framing the ethico-economic intersection between students' subjective experience of education and wellbeing. Where the analysis illuminated 'conflicted' neo-liberal subjects, who engage in small acts of resistance, but whose academic subjectivities are, nonetheless, dominated by neoliberal, economical practices and vocabularies (Danvers, 2021, p.644), the (im)possibility and implications of resistance are discussed in chapter fourteen 'to disrupt and open up spaces for change' (Taylor, 2016, p.12).

Chapter Thirteen: Interview Method

Introduction and Chapter overview

This chapter outlines the methodological procedure and rationale for the interview method with regards to data collection, sample, and analytic procedure. The interview method was selected to address the research question: 'what are the salient issues, needs, and challenges experienced by different stakeholders in a whole university approach to student mental wellbeing?'. The research questions were informed by pragmatist ontology and systems theory, and sought to interrogate the preliminary findings from the survey, focus groups, and narrative review. Befitting the pragmatist proposition that knowledge is constructed through multiple perspectives, the interview aimed to contextualise student experience of wellbeing and living and learning, and the implications for a whole university approach, within the context of the neoliberal system.

Interview Method

Traditionally informed by phenomenological conceptions of knowledge as mediated by subjectivity (Bevan, 2014), a research interview enables a researcher 'to learn what another person knows about a topic, to discover and record what that person has experienced, what he or she thinks and feels about it, and what significance or meaning it might have' (Mears, 2012, p.170). Whilst a multitude of interview methods, modes, and types have been used for different research purposes since their origin in the 1880s (Fontana & Frey, 2000), an 'expert interview' (Meuser & Nagel, 1991) is a specific type of

research interview designed to elucidate expert knowledge and experience from actors deemed responsible for the development, implementation, or control of processes, practices, and decision making that structure a particular field of action (Glaser & Laudel, 2009). A 'problem-centred' expert interview (Döringer, 2021, p.266) is particularly well-placed to elicit both experts' 'process knowledge' (Van Audenhove & Donders, 2019), based on practical experience and the institutional context of action' (Döringer, 2021, p.266) and 'interpretative knowledge' (Bogner & Menz, 2009, p.218) 'based on subjective relevancies, viewpoints, or perspectives on which experts draw in decision-making and action orientations' (Döringer, 2021, p.267). A problem-centred expert interview thus aligns with the pragmatist ontological premise that experience is relevant to the re-contextualisation and re-theorisation of action (Döringer, 2021).

Where structured expert interviews adhere to standardised question sets in order to elucidate specific technical or factual knowledge consistent with a pre-determined research question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009), problem-centred expert interviews are typically semi-structured to 'allow for in-depth probing while permitting the interviewer to keep the interview within the parameters traced out by the aim of the study" (Berg, 2007, ,p. 39). Semi-structured interviews are particularly effective for eliciting knowledge gaps and interpreting experience of complex processes and systems such as mental health (Palinkas, 2014). Synchronous online interviewing methods

imitate offline techniques using computer-mediated communication (Engward et al., 2022; Salmon, 2012).

Interview Procedure

Problem-centred expert interviews were selected in alignment with the pragmatist ontological underpinnings of this study and the project research question and aim. Indeed the chosen interview method, medium, and structure were purposively directed to eliciting experience orientated towards future action and situated within productive hermeneutic dialogue (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). Pragmatist hermeneutic interviewing situates the researcher in the interpretive process by which the research 'problem' is re-contextualised and iteratively coproduced, wherein the fusion of different experiences allows new perspectives and solutions to emerge (Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). The problem-focused expert interview was selected to complement and contextualise student experience of the university system and the delivery of a whole university approach rather than to elucidate generalisable trends or represent findings universal to the stakeholder group (Döringer, 2021). Consistent with the theoretical underpinnings of this study, the problem-centred interview method purposively did not seek to explicitly interrogate the impact of neoliberalism on student mental health in simple linear relations.

Nine online semi-structured expert interviews were conducted during November and December 2020. Participants were purposively selected to represent a range of relevant professional perspectives, experiences, and

expertise on student mental health within a whole university approach (Hughes & Spanner, 2019). The sample included academic staff [n=2]; mental health practitioners [n=5]; and policymakers [n=2] from a range of different roles and national institutions as identified in chapter one [see figure 14]. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio-recorded and manually transcribed. Participants provided informed consent and were given opportunity to ask questions. Interview design adhered to Kvale's (1996) five stages, including initial thematization of interview purpose; design of question format, response mode, structure, and sequence; operational synthesis of the cognitive, ethical, and interpersonal interview components; transcription; and analysis.

The semi-structured interview topic guide was informed by narrative review of existing literature in chapters five to seven [see Appendix 9]. Consistent with the research question, interview questions sought to elicit the salient issues, needs, and challenges of each stakeholder group in the operationalisation of a whole university approach. In particular, interviews sought to explore staff perceptions of the prevalence, causes, and solutions to student mental and wellbeing difficulties, how these trends inform their working practices, their experience and perception of the student mental health policy and practice context, and any identifiable gaps, challenges, needs, and priorities in the sector. Consistent with good practice guidance for conducting problem-centred expert interviews (Scheibelhofer,2008; Witzel & Reiter,2012), the topic guide utilised a funnel structure, transitioning from open-ended narrative

questions to specific exploration of salient issues, interrogating details of potential research interest that were secondary in the interviewee account. Whilst semi-structured and problem-centred expert interviews transcend mechanical rules of practice (Kvale, 2011), appropriate interview techniques were actively applied in context to elicit rich experiential, interpretative, and action orientated data (Hyde et al., 2005). This included signposting of the interview sequence in order to structure narrative responses; condensation and reflection of interviewee themes to clarify and expand understanding; active reaction to interviewee experiences to establish trust and rapport; and silence to encourage additional information (Kvale, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These techniques are especially important in pragmatist problem-focused interviews where knowledge of phenomena is dialogically co-constructed (Döringer, 2021). Particular consideration was also given to relational strategies in an online setting (Engward et al., 2022).

The interview schedule and strategy was piloted for feasibility, acceptability, and suitability, with subsequent conceptual and practical refinement in line with good practice (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Following pilot reflection with one participant, interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams to enhance professional accessibility and convenience, and the question set was reduced to three questions to enable greater practical and conceptual flexibility.

Interview Sample

A purposive sample of expert higher education stakeholders were recruited to represent a diversity of perspectives and experiences related to mental health, including 1. Academic staff [n=4]; 2. Mental health practitioners [n=4]; and 3. Mental health policymakers [n=2] from a range of different national institutions. Academic staff were selected to include: 1. A course leader or head of department; and 2. An academic lecturer. Mental health practitioners were selected to include 1. A clinician; 2. A counselling expert; 3. A University Mental Health Advisor; 4. A General Practitioner [GP] in the National Health Service [NHS]. Policymakers were selected to include the Chief Executive Officers of two relevant third sector service providers.

The expert sample was recruited using a non-probability convenience and chain referral sampling method (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981). Convenience sampling was selected as an efficient strategy enabling the target sample to self-select from within the researcher's existing networks and contacts (Stratton, 2021). Participants then recruited other relevant participants from professional roles not directly accessible to the researcher, such as mental health practitioners in NHS services (Hendricks & Blanken, 1992).

Figure 14: Interview Sample

		Role
P1		Head of University Counselling Service at a Russel Group University.
P2		Senior University Mental Health Advisor

P3	Practitioners	Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Community Mental Health Service
P4		General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care
P5		General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care and Academic Staff Member
P6	Policy-Makers	CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity
P7		CEO of a National Mental Health Charity
P8	Academic Staff	Head of Department in the Faculty of Social Science at a Russell Group University.
P9		Academic Staff Member with a Pastoral Role at a Russell Group University.

Analysis Method

Interview data were analysed using thematic axial analysis to identify the salient issues, needs, and challenges as expressed by different stakeholder groups and perspectives using open, axial, and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). NVIVO 12 was used to code and analyse the data. Open coding constitutes 'the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data' based on its conceptual properties and dimensions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.61) through application of 'meaning condensation' into small units (Kvale, 1996, p.192). Latent and semantic codes were identified inductively in line with the research question to ensure findings were grounded in participant voice and experience (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). The coding process thus involved reflexive comparison between coding structure and the data to identify points of contradiction, expansion, and support (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Themes were categorised using axial coding into current causal and structural conditions, recommended actions, and the ideal outcome (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; 1990). Axial coding was selected in line with the problem focused interview method and research aim to identify practical implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in a neoliberal context. Memos were used during axial coding to record 'conceptual connections between categories' (Glaser & Holton, 2004, p.61). Selective coding was then used to interpret relationships between categories, their conceptual properties and dimensions, and variations in contexts and conditions until 'theoretical saturation' was reached (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2013). Selective coding was informed by cross-tabulation to record the frequency and variability of codes across each stakeholder. This inductive process was used to elucidate and interpret the specific conditions, contexts, and variations that impact the phenomenon in a neoliberal context. As the research question and method was problem-focused rather than presupposing the researcher's theoretical framework to interrogate the neoliberal context specifically, Foucaultian-informed interpretative inquiry was not used to analyse interview data (Ferreira-Neto, 2018).

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the methodological rationale and procedure for conducting problem focused expert interviews to elucidate the key issues,

needs and challenges pertaining to student wellbeing and identify recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter Fourteen: Student Wellbeing and Experiences of Living and Learning at UK Universities: Interview Findings

Introduction and Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from nine problem-centred interviews with a range of expert stakeholders. The method was selected in response to the research question 'what are the key issues, needs, and challenges, experienced by different stakeholders in a whole university approach to student mental health?'.

Findings

Four main themes emerged from the data, namely: support service provision; mental health prevalence and trends; mental health determinants; and delivery challenges. These themes were further sub-thematised and categorised through axial coding into current conditions and recommended actions [see Figure 15].

Figure 15: Interview Findings

Theme	Support Service Provision	Mental Health Prevalence and Trends	Mental Health Determinants	Delivery Challenges		
				Structural Challenges	**Procedural Challenges**	**Cultural Challenges**
Conditions		Increasing Demand	Academic Determinants	Demand and Resources	Evaluation	Expectations
		Increasing Disclosure	Cultural Determinants	Leadership	Fragmentation	Role & Target user
		Increasing Complexity	Financial Determinants			
		Seasonality	Social Determinants			
		Staff Wellbeing	Covid-19			
		Mental Health Inequality				
Actions	Prevention and Early Intervention		Staff training	Service Redesign		
	Mental Health Literacy Interventions		Social Prescribing	Institutional and External Partnerships		
			Curriculum & Pedagogy	Data Collection		

Theme One: Provision

This theme encapsulates stakeholder descriptions of the range and rationale of current service provision for student mental health and wellbeing in the UK. Taken together, participants, reported an expansion from traditional counselling services to a more diverse range of practitioners, modalities, and providers, as part of a paradigmatic shift from biomedical and psychological approaches to mental health, to a more holistic, inclusive, biopsychosocial, patient-centred, and strengths-based framework [see Appendix 10]

Theme Two: Prevalence and Trends

This theme encapsulated stakeholder perceptions of temporal changes to the prevalence and severity of student mental health presentations.

Condition One: Increasing Demand

Participants generally described an '*explosion of demand*' [P1], with increasing numbers of students presenting to services during their time in post. Indicatively the Head of University Counselling Services [P1] described a *'very significant'* and *'striking difference between 2005 and 2015'* in student demand, with *'a much, much, much higher presentation of anxiety than had been the case in 2005'*; '*a lot of the increase in demand is probably the increase in anxiety'* [P1]. Likewise, one General Practitioner [P5] affirmed that NHS services similarly *'seem to be seeing more mental health problems'*. Participants acknowledged that '*Covid-19 has played a massive part'* [P4, General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service] exacerbating a

'*situation where wellbeing is a problem*' [P8, Head of Department at a Russell Group University] and accelerating increase in demand for support.

Condition Two: Increasing Disclosure

Participants acknowledged that increase in demand may be related to changes in mental health conceptualisation, awareness, and stigma, with associated increase in help-seeking. For example, P1 [Head of University Counselling Service] reflected that whilst '*it's going to be really hard for anyone to ever say definitively how much of the demand you would attribute to different things, it is undoubtedly the case that most students now have been through schools with personal health and social education lessons where they are told, keep an eye on your mental health and if you're struggling, reach out and get some help'* which may increase presentation to services. Notwithstanding however, the Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Community Mental Health Service [P3] described '*ongoing stigma around mental health, and it somehow not being seen as real as physical health'*.

Condition Three: Increasing Complexity

Alongside increase in demand and disclosure, reference was made to increasing complexity and severity in student presentation. For example, P1 [Head of University Counselling Service] stated that '*the proportion of students who report that they are either currently self-harming or they had done in the previous six months or the previous year or so, it's really striking and completely different to ten years before'*. A potential increase in suicide

risk, particularly following the pandemic, was also acknowledged by P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] given that '*the suicide rate was already going up pre-pandemic owing to austerity, so there is a bit of an assumption that will continue, and if we do go into economic recession, that always effects suicide'*.

Condition Four: Seasonality

The Head of University Counselling [P1] also perceived there to be '*pressure points'* during the academic year where particular student groups present to services with particular issues. For example, it was felt that *'there's a particular point after Christmas when final year students in particular hit a moment of despair when they feel very, very, uncertain about their futures, and I don't think we really used to experience that 10 years before'* [P1]. Equally '*at the start of term students are too busy …* [and] *it won't be a priority for them'* to engage with mental health support [P1].

Condition Five: Staff Wellbeing

Alongside trends in student mental health, the CEO of a National Mental Health Charity [P7] acknowledged that '*there is quite a lot of stress among* [academic] *staff*. '*This is effecting them',* the Head of Department at a Russell Group University [P8] affirmed*, 'because they can't work in the way that they normally want to work as a teacher …* [which can] *cause stress and anxiety and this effects wellbeing'*. In addition, P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] described pre-existing *'issues when you get to a university around*

their need to be a bit more commercial and business minded [because] *they need to have people achieving well and publish research*' which impacts on *'some of the drivers which might mitigate against mental health and wellbeing'*.

Condition Six: Mental Health Inequality

Participants identified that particular student socio-demographic groups experience additional mental health challenges and barriers to accessing mental health services; including PGR students, Black and Minority Ethnic students, international students, and male students. The Head of a University Counselling [P1] described, for example, 'much lower *self-referral rates from males versus females, even for similar reported rates of wellbeing*' and a trend where '*Asian students have a much lower presentation rate'* to support services. The Academic Staff Member at a Russell Group university [P9] also acknowledged particular stressors wherein, for example, '*because of the particular challenges of the PGR journey, there are many challenges that can have a negative impact on wellbeing'*. In addition 'It's hard sometimes for international students to start interacting very actively with home students' [P9] and 'people have been struggling with issues about racism' [P9].

Theme Three: Mental Health Determinants

This theme encapsulates stakeholder perceptions of the academic, financial, social, and cultural determinants of student mental health.

Condition One: Academic Determinants

Participants described academic pressures including assessment results, deadlines, workload, and academic transition that can impact on student mental health and wellbeing. The CEO of a National Mental Health Charity [P7] for example, perceived that '*students arrive at university having been shaped by the education system, and I think there are some serious issues about the focus on academic attainment and exams which can create vulnerability among some students, because it is where all their worth is located and has been for years'*. The General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care [P5] further described how assessment anxieties are compounded by objective workload demands, given that '*there is a lot of academic pressure; it's obviously a packed curriculum so they don't have a lot of free time'*. P7 similarly asserted that the '*education system is not holistic enough really … and it can lead to a certain amount of vulnerability'* as other skills and talents are devalued, whilst P9 [Academic Staff Member at a Russell Group University] reflected '*the education system doesn't really help develop curiosity about learning*'. In particular, '*the exam orientated system in education'* [P7, CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] was identified to undermine independent learning skills and compound transitional challenges into higher education.

> *'It's a whole systemic thing really, that the schools are highly motivated by final results and league tables … and the consequence for schools is that it suits them better to spoon feed the*

> *school-aged kids with what they need to know to pass the exam, not actually to equip them with the skills and the knowledge that will be the foundation of their university degrees …. [so] students know less than they used to coming in'* to university' [P1, Head of University Counselling Service].

This perceived systemic tendency towards surface learning was described by several participants to exacerbate academic transitional challenges and stressors.

Condition Two: Cultural Determinants

Participants described socio-cultural expectations that create feelings of uncertainty, insecurity, and failure. As P6 [CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] put it, *'the expectations we have of young people is that they should be on the pathway to achieving'*. Particularly through education, it was perceived by P1 [Head of University Counselling Service] that *'we ask them to specialise and get very obsessive about their future and employment possibilities'*, with *'the pressure to achieve and to get a job'* [P7, CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] compounding student academic and existential anxieties. Moreover, the institutional culture and *'pressure to achieve'* in universities was perceived by P6 [CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] to prevent acknowledgment or disclosure of mental health challenges among both students and staff, producing an *'expectation that because you achieve academically you cannot have any*

form of mental stress'. In addition, cultural pressure to achieve were described by P1 [Head of University Counselling Service] to impede self-realisation, relaxation, and other wellbeing-enhancing engagements.

> '*Something that vexes me, particularly about Russell group universities at the moment, is the kind of instrumentalisation – sorry, ugly word - of the wider experiences of university; that leisure then becomes something which you are encouraged to engage in because it makes you a better student and more employable, rather than just because it's enjoyable. I think if we have an excessive model of this is all about being employable and accruing all of these kudos and badges and points to demonstrate how worthy of high employment you are on graduation. We are putting a lot of pressure on people to be self-actualising all the time. I think that students get very busy and can get quite preoccupied and I think that there is an under-valuing of down time and genuine play for play's sake rather than play in order to be better at your studies'* [P1, Head of University Counselling Service].

At the same time, the Head of a University Counselling Service [P1] reflected that there is a cultural '*challenge to work out what does it mean to be 18 to 21 at undergrad';* there is '*a model where students are adults'* but given the *'kind of experiences which they are allowed to have and exposed to, we've got a whole group of people arriving at university who've really not got much*

experience of life and organising themselves in the world. So I think a certain degree of the pressures that people face is because we've got a model which expects them to be developmentally older than they are' [P1, Head of University Counselling Service].

Condition Three: Financial Determinants

Participants identified '*financial pressure which is pretty massive' [P7,* CEO of a National Mental Health Charity*]*, manifest through financial anxieties, employment uncertainties, debt worries, and '*the wealth differential in the UK'* [P4, General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care]. The Head of a University Counselling Service [P1] described '*more pressure on students today in terms of their ideas around graduate employment and the levels of debt that they will be carrying for their degree as they move into the workplace'*, whilst P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] perceived that more students are '*trying to get a job and have been unsuccessful or trying to secure postgraduate study funding and been unsuccessful*' . As a result, P1 described a common presenting experience:

> '*To be graduating and being aware that many of the things that your parents had – as in the capacity to buy a flat within a few years after starting work – which would have been my experience and the experience of almost all of my peers, is just not available structurally, economically. They are, as a cohort, much more economically challenged than we were, and that's even without the levels of debt and*

thinking about paying back the tuition thing, just property prices etc, etc. So I just think they are in a very different world of thinking about what their degree means in their economic lifecycle' [P1, Head of a University Counselling Service].

Condition Four: Social Determinants

Some participants identified '*pressures around the social side and friendships'* [P7, CEO of a National Mental Health Charity], including '*issues around bullying … which has created a lot of problems with some students'* [P9, Academic Staff Member at a Russell Group University], and homesickness given that '*a lot of students are far from home for the first time which can be difficult'* [P5, General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service].

Condition Five: The Impact of Covid-19

Participants perceived the Covid-19 pandemic to have compounded the academic, social, and financial drivers of poor mental health, particularly through an increase in social isolation, unemployment, and transition to online learning [see Appendix 11].

Theme Four: Delivery Challenges

This theme encapsulates stakeholder perceptions of structural challenges relating to the strategic planning and design of services; procedural challenges relating to the delivery of efficient and effective services; and

cultural challenges relating to individual and institutional conceptualisations of the role, responsibility, and boundaries of mental health services.

Sub-Theme One: Structural Challenges

Condition One: Demand and Resources

Participants consistently described disproportionate service demand and resource, particularly in NHS services, and the subsequent challenges for effective university provision, with services *'not able - because of capacity, because of lack of investment, to have an impact on people'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity]. *'The NHS mental health services are just horrendously under-funded and under huge pressure'* [P5, General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service]; '*the crisis teams are understaffed; community mental health teams are understaffed'* [P3, Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Service] and '*police are fulfilling a crisis team role and that comes from investment'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] meaning *'there is no quick response of service'* [P5, General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care Service] and significant waiting times. *'It's not about those people that work in those services not caring; it's just about numbers'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] and *'in services that are under-resourced, they just do not have time'* [P2, Senior University Mental Health Advisor], '*nowhere near enough time to cover what you need to cover if someone is turning up for the first time with a mental health problem'* [P4, General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care].

The General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service [P5] particularly described resource limitations and long waiting times as forcing GPs to '*use a lot of anti-depressants [*even though*] I don't think any of us think they are a miracle cure for anything, but they are the only thing you can give somebody which doesn't take two months to arrive'*. In this way, resource limitations, waiting times, and service thresholds were perceived to reproduce reactive and crisis-based responses to mental health '*so when things do go wrong, instead of being able to act early on and perhaps equip people with some kind of resources to sort themselves out, we have to wait until they are fairly severely ill before we can get them seen'* [P5, General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care Service]:

> *'You've got to be pretty much just about to jump off something before you really qualify for the crisis team. And if they don't deem you to be 'crisis-ey' enough, they can be quite dismissive and I think not very helpful to the patient, as well as to us'* [P5, General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care Service].

Perceiving that *'realistically universities can only go so far before they have to rely on the clinical expertise of external services'*, P2 [University Mental Health Advisor] reflected that NHS capacity limitations mean universities '*can't refer externally in a crisis or …. they are going to get discharged, they are back in accommodation, another crisis happens, they are out again which is the reality for some students because nobody is picking up the pieces'*. Indeed

both P1 [Head of a University Counselling Service] and P2 [University Mental Health Advisor] described how university services are consequently compelled to provide high intensity support for a complexity of risk which they are neither equipped nor qualified to provide. *'It's very complicated',* P1 [Head of a University Counselling Service] explained, *'to start stepping into effectively mental health treatment when you don't have the back-up systems and the governance to run those kind of services, quite apart from the cost of them'*. Indeed P1 felt that universities *'shouldn't be offering services that really need to be based in the NHS and yet, in a world where the NHS services are so strapped and waiting times are so long, I can see that it is in the universities interest, and it's certainly in the students interest, if the universities do step into that void'*. There was a general consensus among the practitioners in this study therefore that *'there is a limit really on what universities can do internally until the mess outside is sorted out …* [and] *universities are actually doing amazingly well given the state of the NHS'* [P2, University Mental Health Advisor].

Condition Two: Leadership

Structurally, some participants identified a lack of leadership, expertise, and prioritisation as a challenge to coordinating an effective student mental health strategy. Senior leadership were perceived not to '*understand the situation on the ground to make those very, very, difficult resource decisions'* [P1. Head of a University Counselling Service] so '*when a lot of universities say we are putting all this money into mental health, they are not really putting it*

into what is needed because they just don't know what they need' [P2, Senior University Mental Health Advisor]. In addition, P4 [General Practitioner in NHS Primary Care] perceived a de-prioritisation of mental health relative to financial concerns by senior leadership, given that '*uni[versities] seems to be expanding really quickly and are the university support services expanding as fast as the student base?'*. Furthermore, P1 [Head of University Counselling] and P2 [Senior University Mental Health Advisor] identified that within university services '*a lot of the managers don't really have that skill'* [P2], experience, or expertise to coordinate a strategic and cohesive approach within multi-disciplinary teams '*and that can lead to conflict in services'* [P2].

Nationally, inconsistency, fragmentation, and lack of prioritisation were described to compromise an effective whole sector approach. For the Senior University Mental Health Advisor [P2], '*the main issue is the roles and where mental health support sits in universities is very different in different universities'* and '*the problem is that people use different terminology to mean the same thing [and] there is no consistent data collection across the sector*' [P2] which was perceived to prevent comparison of outcomes and the development of an evidence-informed approach to student mental health. Indeed, P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] expressed that *'it's that sharing of best practice, that learning across the sector, that needs to be done'* which, for P6, without third-sector organisations '*pushing that forward onto their political agenda, wouldn't have happened'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity].

Sub-Theme Two: Procedural Challenges

Condition One: Evaluation

Participants described practical and conceptual barriers to effectively measuring and evaluating evidence-based services, with *'a real challenge in getting any kind of meaningful outcome data'* [P2, Senior University Mental Health Advisor]. *'All services in this sector are highly, highly, challenged to evidence their outcomes'* [P1, Head of University Counselling]. *'In terms of actually measuring the impact of the services or the interventions as a whole, we are not doing it. Individual services might be doing it in a way, but there is nothing sector wide. So it is a huge priority, I would say, the biggest priority in student mental health'* [P2].

Conceptually, the Head of a University Counselling Service [P1] described mental health interventions as '*near impossible to evaluate*' [P1] given the multiplexity of relevant dependent variables, so there is *'no way we'd be able to determine any kind of causal factor in our work'* [P1]. It was perceived to be particularly challenging to evidence universal preventative interventions as part of a whole university approach, because *'these are highly complex situations and you can never predict – oh well that person wouldn't have become unwell if they hadn't had that proactive approach'* [P1]. P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] similarly recounted how preventative interventions '*are quite difficult to measure over a short period of time to demonstrate change so you need some qualitative measures'* to

encapsulate the holistic complex, relational, and intangible implications for wellbeing, describing how *'In real life, there isn't a randomised control trial or anything approaching that for many different effective mental health interventions – the person at the canteen who happens to notice a student who is struggling and says something, there isn't an evidence-base for that, but we know that's a powerful intervention that can make a big difference'* [P7].

Practically, some participants described how accessing valid and reliable clinical outcome and evaluation data can be compromised by attrition and time-lag for psychological change. For example, P1 explained how:

> *'With anything to do with mental health, counselling and psychotherapy, you wouldn't usually feel the full benefit of what you have done on the day that you finish. It's better to ask people several months down the line when they have digested, processed, started putting some changes into action. But in a busy student life, if you try to reach out to a student three months after they finished to say can you fill in this form to tell me how you are, they won't send it back'* [P1, Head of a University Counselling Service].

Furthermore, needs-based delivery and attrition '*make it very difficult to work out exactly when it ends and therefore at what point you get the data on how you are at the end of your intervention'* [P1]. *'It's much easier to say, if*

everyone gets six weekly sessions, at the end of the six sessions, let's do the outcome form and then we can do the calculation of your intake scores versus your outtake scores' [P1].

Condition Two: Fragmentation

Participant experience was characterised by fragmentation and lack of communication institutionally and with external services, creating a barrier to accessible, efficient, and effective support and *'safety management'* [P2, University Mental Health Advisor]. P2 described '*real pockets of inconsistency*' in provision, procedures, and delivery which create confusion for both services and students and prevent '*a true picture of the individual student's needs if you are all working individually'*. '*it's not joined up internally most of the time, so when you then add an external provider into that, no hope at all' [P2]*. In particular, '*In some universities, the communication and the triaging between those different areas is not seamless in any way, shape, or form'* [P2], with a particular '*divide between the academics and the centre … and definitely there are real silos'* [P2]. P2 further described significant '*bureaucracy in the administration that students have to go through to register with the service'; 'all the student wants to do is to turn up and get what they need, whereas they get told 'oh sorry, that's not me, that's so and so'*.

Likewise, the General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service [P4] perceived NHS services to be '*not particularly well-tailored to students' needs*

because they are looking at the more general older population' and fragmented from university services, with 'no *direct communication between the student counselling and NHS mental wellbeing service'* [P5]. The Head of University Counselling Service [P1] similarly reflected that '*we have got universities offering services and then we have NHS services offering services and they are really separate. And I think there would be many, many, efficiencies in much closer partnership working … there is a lot of resources lost between those two stools'* [P1].

Sub-Theme Three: Cultural Challenges

Condition One: Expectations

Some participants perceived an increase in student expectations to receive individualised and intensive support, particularly given the cost of university tuition.

> *'It does make a difference that students are now seeing themselves as buying their education and buying education services, because they then feel that they want to make the most of what is available to support them to get the best value for money out of their education. If they are struggling they are more likely to see that they are also paying for the services to help support them and so they should access those services when they need them …. Suddenly charging students fees does change how you are going to think about it – of course you are – you are a*

*customer and you think you deserve a certain amount of provision' [*P1, Head of a University Counselling Service].

Student consumer pressures were perceived to lower the threshold for support and risk pathologizing normal academic stresses and emotions. For example, P1 described how 'If a student says, I'm really struggling and I want some help, it is a brave service in our risk aversive, complaint facing, kind of world that says no actually, you are actually doing fine; it's normal to be feeling a bit of that, here are these resources now crack on'. As such, P1 perceived 'really, really, really complex challenges of how to give the messages about normalising ordinary levels of distress' [P1] whilst still providing accessible support and acknowledging the 'very real stresses and strains … that the university/ local authority/ government should do something about' [P1]. 'Once you set up a world where you need support if you are at all distressed, you are undermining something which is how are you as a group of students going to mobilise yourselves to resolve these challenges' [P1, Head of a University Counselling Service].

Condition Two: Role and Target User

Some participants consequently identified challenges around the role, responsibility, and target user of university mental health services given that 'the role of the university is education' [P1, Head of a University Counselling Service]. As P1 reflected, 'certainly up until about 15 years ago, very few students would have actually accessed the services, but the ones that did

often got quite long-term support', whereas contemporary services are required to provide wellbeing support to a greater proportion of the student body which can create 'a really, really, big challenge' around prioritising allocation of resources to 'proactive and universal, low level and practical, or high intensity support for students' [P1]. 'There's been such demand for those general provisions and the proactive support, but without additional resources those universal approaches have been cannibalising the one-one interventions for those who most need it' [P1]. As a result, P2 [Senior University Mental Health Advisor] perceived that universities have become 'good on the shiny outer, stroking puppies thing, which is great for some people but not always for the people that are probably having the hardest time at university and the students with the long-term mental health conditions'.

Stakeholder Recommendations for Policy and Practice

This theme encapsulates stakeholder perceptions of required policy and practice in response to mental health prevalence and trends, determinants; and delivery challenges. Acknowledging that change is needed '*in society in general not just within university settings*' [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] and that '*there is no standard model for everyone*' [P3, Consultant Psychiatrist in NHS Service], participants particularly advocated prevention and early intervention; and service redesign.

Mental Health Provision, Prevalence and Trends
Recommendation One: Prevention and Early Intervention

Participants consistently emphasised the perceived efficiency and effectiveness of additional *'investment in prevention and having the right levels of services for timely and appropriate support to offer a level of intervention that does support anybody who feels like they are struggling'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity]. *'A light-touch low-level quick access service'* was recommended by the General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service [P5] as *'somebody you could send people to, to be seen in a week or two … to head off a lot of the worst problems [and act as] … a sort of filtering service to work out who just needed a bit of basic advice and who needed more specialist intervention'*. Affirming that '*getting in early and getting help early is one of the most important things*', the Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Community Mental Health Service [P3] similarly advocated *'secondary prevention first - those that are starting to have anxiety, depression, phobias, OCDs, get them help initially. Then go to the masses … Schools, colleges, universities provide support for mental health there. Jobs, all occupational places, should have separate provision'* [P3].

Prevention and early intervention was situated by the General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service [P4] within a wider paradigmatic shift from reactive to proactive, holistic, and longer-term care '*that is not medical, but medics can be involved: medics and social care together*' [P4]. The CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity [P6] concurred that '*people face*

complex challenges in their lives and that isn't fixed in four or six weeks counselling or CBT' necessitating an imperative for '*change to mental health services so that you are looking at a prevention rather than a long-term history of mental illness or a long term possibility of someone taking their life'*. Specific preventative and early intervention initiatives recommended by participants included mental health literacy, staff training, social prescription, and curricula and pedagogical interventions.

Recommendation Two: Mental Health Literacy Interventions

Participants particularly advocated improved mental health literacy to equip students, staff, and the wider community with the knowledge and skills to proactively identify and respond to signs of distress and access support. The Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Community Mental Health Service [P3] perceived that '*you've got to normalise mental health, so it is everybody's business'*. For the Head of Department at a Russell Group University [P8], this involved:

> '*Making sure that both staff and students have an understanding of what we mean by wellbeing, the factors that would impact on wellbeing in different contexts in different circumstances, and know exactly what to do in response. If you get that right then you create a culture where people can enjoy good mental health and wellbeing, where they can support others with their wellbeing, and where they*

can identify if they've got an issue themselves, they know what it is, they know what to do, they know where to seek support' [P8].

Participants particularly emphasised '*the interaction between physical and mental wellbeing'* [P8] and '*the importance of giving emotional and mental health as much priority as what we would if we had a broken leg or any other limb or organ'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity]; '*mental health fitness, along with physical health fitness, should come hand in hand'* [P3, Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Service].

Mental Health Determinants

Recommendation One: Staff Training

Participants recommended additional training to support '*people within the system to be equipped to have a more sensitive and nuanced understanding of mental health'* [P8, Head of Department]. For example, the Head of Department at a Russell Group university foregrounded the importance of academic staff training to effectively identify and respond to student mental health challenges within the appropriate boundaries, *'whether its pastoral support from the tutor, whether its academic support from a module leader, or whether it is specific support from a health and wellbeing tutor who has specific responsibility'*.

'Sometimes with mental wellbeing there are some simple things which the non-professional non-expert can do. But as teachers, we are not health

workers or health professionals with mental health experience, and therefore we have to know what our limits are as well, and the point at which we say, well, there is definitely a problem but I'm not the right person to deal with this and pass it on to the professional. Because one of the worst things that you could possibly do is to make a mistake with something like this, because mental wellbeing is so important that if you do make a mistake with it, that is not only life changing but life threatening. If we have an awareness of what these needs might be and how they impact on an individual, and a knowledge of what kind of support may be available, we can at least point them in that direction' [P8, Head of Department at a Russell Group university].

The CEO of a National Mental Health Charity [P7] also recommended '*specific bespoke training around suicide and supporting specialist and non-specialist staff to be able to ask the question about suicidal thoughts and know what to do'*.

Recommendation Two: Social Prescribing

The General Practitioner in an NHS Primary Care Service [P4] additionally recommended social prescribing, with '*everyone coming together and getting active in some way'*.

Recommendation Three: Curriculum and Pedagogy

Identifying a bi-directional relationship between student learning and student wellbeing, several participants recommended reforms to pedagogy and curriculum. Both the Head of Department [P8] and Academic Staff Member [P9] at a Russell Group university acknowledged that *'wellbeing enables people to thrive academically'* [P8] and '*the better one feels about themselves and the better they feel supported emotionally by others, or they can find supportive mechanisms within themselves, the better they can learn'* [P9]. Therefore, '*If students are struggling with mental health issues, learning would certainly be challenged and they wouldn't learn or develop to the best of their ability'* [P9].

Pedagogic diversity was recommended by P8 and P9 to equip students with the skills and interests conducive to good mental wellbeing. Indeed P8 expressed that to '*help with young people's engagement with learning … my priority would be enabling, encouraging, or enhancing creative thinking across education'* to support '*an individual's health and wellbeing, their mobility, and their identity'* [P8].

> *'So, thinking about how to solve problems, how to create solutions which might be personal and novel, and allowing people the space or helping them to think for themselves. So creativity, critical thinking, helping young people develop thinking strategies of how to think for themselves and develop curiosity … because the more we learn how to think, the more*

we get excited about life and the world around us, and the more engaged we learn to be with life and learning' [P9].

Collaborative pedagogy was also recommended by P8 as a means for '*making sure that students have maximum opportunity to talk with each other* [and] *with tutors*' [P8]. '*Explicit teaching about health and wellbeing in the curriculum*' was further proposed by P7 [CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] to teach students how to look after their wellbeing and embed it '*within all teaching and learning in order to make it a normal routine part of what you experience at university'* because *'If you just bolt on some mental health education, it doesn't have the same standing as the other content that students would be getting, it doesn't embed it, it doesn't normalise it. It will always be something of a poor relation which you can opt to do, or not'* [P7].

Delivery Challenges

Recommendation One: Service Redesign

Some participants recommended improvements to the cohesivity of mental health service design, strategy, and procedures by '*creating policy so that we do change things'* [P6, CEO of a Regional Suicide Prevention Charity] '*to have those systems supporting wellbeing rather than making things worse' [*P2, Senior University Mental Health Advisor*]*. P6 particularly underscored the importance of lived experience and co-production in the design and

delivery of any policy strategy to ensure that it is '*driven by young people, which is really, really important because often the people who are going through the stresses are the people you need to be listening to*'.

Recommendation Five: Institutional and External Partnerships

Several participants recommended improved coordination, consistency, and '*internal* communication' [P2] within universities. Asserting that '*to get the best outcomes for the student, there needs to be that joined up approach'*. *The* Senior University Mental Health Advisor [P2] recommended development of stronger institutional partnerships through a needs-based '*triaging process where the student will be diverted either into counselling or into the mental health advisor kind of role, or into a more generic wellbeing type of role*'. P1 and P2 further advocated improved cross-sectoral partnerships with **external providers** such as NHS and third-sector services, *whilst maintaining all privacy for students if they don't want their university to be involved in their health'* [P1]. *'It's crucial that university services are embedded within the university and that they have the time to work with the NHS'* [P2].

Recommendation Six: Data Collection

Some participants recommended improved research and '*data collection'* [P7, CEO of a National Mental Health Charity] to inform strategy development and effective partnership working. For P2, '*the biggest priority in student mental health is just that basic measuring the impact of the*

services or the interventions as a whole' by *'pick[ing] some sort of reliable validated measures and stick[ing] with them over time'* [P7]. There is also *'much more research needed into effective treatments for children and young people' [P3*, Consultant Psychiatrist in an NHS Service*]*.

Interpretation of Findings

This chapter has presented findings from nine problem-centred interviews with expert stakeholders, including academic staff [n=2]; mental health practitioners [n=5]; and policymakers [n=2]. Substantiating a systems-based biopsychosocial and salutogenic conceptualisation of mental health, the findings contextualise social, academic, and financial determinants of student mental health as identified in chapters five to seven within the neoliberal higher education policy context.

Participant perceptions of student mental health prevalence and trends defined by increasing demand and complexity of student presentation corroborate previous UK student (Priestley et al., 2021) and professional staff (Hughes, Priestley & Spanner, in press) perspectives, and reflect existing data across the sector (see Linden, Boyes & Stuart, 2020; Knapstad et al., 2018; Duffy, Twenge & Joiner, 2018), with subsequent challenges for maintaining accessible and effective service provision (Randall & Bewick, 2016; Mair, 2015). In addition, participants echoed previous findings identifying academic, social, and financial determinants of student mental health such as test anxiety, workload, and surface learning [see chapter seven]; social

isolation and exclusion [see chapter six]; and debt and financial difficulties [see chapter five], compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic (Evans et al., 2021), and disproportionately experienced across the student body (Pollard et al., 2021). The perceived increase in demand and complexity of presentation between 2005 and 2015 align with the neoliberalisation of higher education policy [Steger & Roy, 2010], and was explicitly attributed by participants to distinct academic, social, and financial characteristics and consequences of the neoliberal system such as 'austerity', increased '*levels of debt*', '*and issues around the need to be a bit more commercial and business minded'*.

Participants situated academic determinants of student mental health within the neoliberal instrumentalisation of education '*to pass the exam'* and the '*cultural pressure to achieve and get a job' 'which can create vulnerability among some students, because it is where all their worth is located'*. Hence, the perceived socio-emotional consequences of the examination by expert stakeholders echoed theorisation in chapter three that assessment constitutes a technology of power-knowledge in the neoliberal system, wherein assessment results are socio-symbolically inscribed with ethico-economic judgement of individual value, and the subsequent implications for self-worth heighten the affective consequences of assessment performance (Feigenbaum, 2021; Torrance, 2017). Participants further described how the instrumentalisation of '*the exam-orientated system in education ... is not holistic enough'*, excluding creative pedagogical skills,

'*curiosity about learning'*, and independent learning skills, to preclude the associated benefits for wellbeing identified in chapter seven. By extension, participants described an '*instrumentalisation of the wider experience of university … through an excessive model of being employable and accruing all of these kudos and badges'*. Consistent with theorisation in chapter three, participants thus situated students within a neoliberal culture of enterprise and self-improvement with personal responsibility to increase productivity, employability, and competitive market performance, where private leisure time is subsumed within the entrepreneurial imperative for self-optimisation (Brunella, 2019).

Participants also situated structural challenges to service provision and delivery within the neoliberal policy macro-system. Consistent with previous findings (Hughes, Priestley & Spanner, in press; Batchelor et al., 2019; Sakellariou & Rotarou, 2017; Caleb, 2016), university support services were perceived in interaction with austerity and 'lack of investment' in public mental health care, resulting in 'horrendously under-funded' and 'under-resourced' services. In the absence of accessible public mental health services, participants described university services as providing high intensity support for an inappropriate complexity of risk (Caleb, 2014), increasing mental health risk to students (Prince, 2015). Furthermore, participants situated service resource allocation in the context of neoliberal massification and marketisation, wherein unregulated proliferation of student numbers exceed and outpace service provision (Priestley et al., 2021; Sage, Smith &

Hubbard, 2012). By extension, participants reported a compromising absence of a centrally coordinated sectoral strategy to data-collection, sharing, and external partnerships within a decentralised neoliberal system of governance (Church, Gerlock & Smith, 2018; Mattheys, 2015).

Participants highlighted cultural challenges pertaining to service provision in relation to the privatisation and commodification of education, given that students '*see themselves as buying their education*' and '*want to make the most of what is available to support them to get the best value for money*'. University service practitioners subsequently described commercial pressure in a '*complaint facing-world*' to protect the university brand image and gratify consumer preferences by providing visible, universal, and marketable support in conflict with professional judgement, that is '*good on the shiny, outer, stroking puppies thing … but not always for the students with the long-term mental health conditions*'. Situated in a wider social context of increased disclosure, consumer pressures were perceived to lower the threshold for specialist support and risk pathologizing 'normal' academic stresses and emotions (Ecclestone, 2020; Arie, 2017). At the same time, the cultural imperative 'to achieve' in the neoliberal system was perceived to prevent disclosure, help-seeking, and service access (Eskin & Baydar, 2022; Soldatic & Morgan, 2017; Sweet, 2016). Stakeholder experience of funding cuts to UK primary and secondary care mental health services were equally perceived to have resulted in increasing demand on university services from

students with long-term, complex, and severe support needs (Hughes, Priestley & Spanner, in press; Prince, 2015; Caleb, 2014; Stallman, 2010).

Methodologically, the findings underscore the imperative of a pragmatist approach to synthesis of diverse practitioner perspectives, wherein apparent contradictions - such as accounts of both low and high service thresholds simultaneously - elucidate pluralist truths and specific tensions between austerity and consumerism inherent to the neoliberal system. The findings equally substantiate a pragmatist approach to mixed-methodological and context-specific conceptualisation, measurement, and evaluation of mental health in a whole university approach, to enable meaningful interpretation of complex phenomena for different purposes and stakeholders in different contexts (Long, McDermott, & Meadows, 2018).

Chapter Summary

Drawing on axial thematic analysis of nine problem-focussed expert interviews, this chapter has identified stakeholder perspectives on student mental health prevalence and trends; academic, social, and financial determinants of wellbeing; the delivery of services; and changes to policy and practice in the context of the neoliberal system.

Chapter Fifteen: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction and Chapter Overview

Identifying a limiting trend across existing research, policy, and practice towards individual-level explanations and interventions for student distress, the theoretical synthesis propounded in this thesis has sought to provide an innovative and integrative framework to conceptualise the academic, social, and financial determinants of student mental health within the structural and cultural context of the neoliberal higher education system. Grounded in pragmatist ontology, it is postulated that the synthesis of different epistemological perspectives can enable enriched understanding of student experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal university and, in doing so, elucidate future action pertaining to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach in this context. Specifically, where existing interventions are arguably compromised by a failure to account for the neoliberal context that frames and constrains student experience of wellbeing and living and learning, this chapter seeks to summarise, synthesise, and critically interrogate the findings from this thesis, to elucidate the socio-material and socio-psychological factors that mediate both exposure to institutional stressors and the effectiveness of institutional interventions in the neoliberal system.

Critically, where pragmatist ontology foregrounds lived experience to understand and direct future action as part of a whole university approach, Foucaultian philosophy demands critical interrogation of the ways in which

lived experience is itself discursively conditioned by knowledge-power structures, to appropriately contextualise lived experience of wellbeing within the confines of the neoliberal system. In doing so, this discussion seeks to 'productively disrupt' (Collective, 2019, 34) the subject reproduction of institutional and individual mental health responses that are dissociated from, and inadvertently reproduce, the neoliberal system (Gill, 2017). In this way, the possibility of a new language of student mental health emerges, situated within the neoliberal higher educational context that 'disturbs what was previously thought immobile … [and] seeks to re-establish the various systems of subjection' (Foucault, 1991, p.82) to 'enable both critique and action' in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009, p.801). Having summarised the key findings to each composite research question, a Foucaultian lens is applied to interrogate the neoliberal knowledge-power structures that underpin student experience as expressed and interpret the implications for collective resistance to the health-compromising features of the neoliberal university. Strengths, limitations, and implications for future research, policy, and practice are discussed.

Summary of Findings

RQ:1.1. What theoretical insights are illuminated through pragmatist synthesis of systems-based theories of wellbeing, cross-disciplinary neoliberal critique, and Foucaultian philosophies of subjectivity?

Against a backdrop of individual level explanations and interventions for student distress, the innovative and integrative theoretical synthesis of systems-based theory, cross-disciplinary neoliberal critique, and Foucaultian subjectivity was found to conceptually recontextualise existing biopsychosocial etiological evidence and service provision within the socio-material and social-psychological conditions underpinning the neoliberal higher educational context, whilst taking account of the wider socio-political system. In particular, by critically interrogating mental health knowledge within specific knowledge-power relations, this conceptual framework can illuminate the mechanisms by which the neoliberal higher educational policy context which frames and constrains student experience of living and learning at university mediates differential exposure - both socio-materially and socio-psychologically - to institutional academic, social, and financial experiences of living and learning at university which demonstrably, detrimentally, and differentially impact on student wellbeing.

By situating psycho-scientific discourses of mental health within the neoliberal system itself, this theoretical synthesis equally enables a critical deconstruction of the individually responsibilised and entrepreneurial subject that is reproduced through mental health knowledge-power relations based on individual ethico-economic deficiency and improvement (Esposito & Perez, 2014; Moncrieff, 2008). Notwithstanding, this theoretical synthesis cannot universally explain the impact of neoliberal policy on student wellbeing through deterministic linear relations of causality, but instead

establishes a pluralist language of understanding that is more helpfully aligned to student and stakeholder experiences of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal context.

RQ:1.2. What are the financial, academic and social determinants of student wellbeing situated within a neoliberal higher education context?

A. Financial Determinants

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that neoliberal policy has imposed material financial conditions within higher education that demonstrably and differentially increase personal debt, financial difficulties, and exposure to deprived unsafe living and working conditions, with an evidentially negative and unequal impact on mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Indeed, where chapter one demonstrated that neoliberal higher education policy is premised on the 'assumption that students are the private beneficiaries from the investment in their education and thus expected to cover a greater share of their tuition costs' (Roberts, 2007, p.351), evidence was found in chapter five that neoliberal reforms to university tuition have directly and demonstrably increased financial hardship, insecurity, and debt, which – corroborated by primary evidence in chapter nine - are strongly, directly, and unequally associated with poorer student mental health and wellbeing outcomes.

B. Academic Determinants

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that neoliberal higher education policy has imposed material and psychological conditions that demonstrably and differentially increase student exposure to academic determinants of mental health, such as test anxiety, perceived workload, and surface learning. In particular, where chapter one demonstrated that neoliberal higher education policy is premised on performative assessment outcomes and academic competition, evidence across chapters seven, nine, eleven, and twelve indicate that competitive individualist assessment structures create conditions that demonstrably and differentially increase student test anxiety and perceived workload. Similarly, evidence was found in chapters seven, nine and fourteen that neoliberal privatisation and subsequent instrumental valuation of assessment outcomes within performativity structures incentivise strategic surface learning over intrinsically motivated deep learning, negatively impacting on perceived workload and wellbeing.

C. Social Determinants

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that neoliberal policy principles of individualism and competition have imposed material and psychological conditions that create and compound social competition, conflict, isolation, and exclusion in relationships with peers, academic staff, and local residents, which negatively and unequally impact on student

mental health and wellbeing. In particular, where chapter one demonstrated that neoliberal higher education policy is premised on individualism, competition, and instrumentalism of social relationships, evidence presented in chapter six, nine, and eleven found that neoliberal policy and culture promote individualised living and learning practices that ostensibly undermine wellbeing-enhancing social relationships, cultures, and sense of belonging. Secondary evidence was similarly found in chapter six that individual, instrumental, and competitive neoliberal cultures and systems have coincided with increased prevalence of bullying, abuse, and hostile social cultures and practices at university, with negative and unequal implications for wellbeing. In addition, evidence in chapter six and nine suggests that privatisation, commodification, and deregulated market-driven expansion have compounded tensions between students and the local residential community, negatively impacting on sense of belonging and wellbeing. Chapter twelve identified consumerist, competitive, instrumental, and individualist neoliberal discourses that construct student social expectations, beliefs, and behaviours, devaluing caring social relations in market-based systems of exchange, and negatively impacting on students' relationships with peers and academic staff.

RQ: 1.3. What are the methodological benefits and challenges of using survey, focus group, and interview methods to situate the experience of wellbeing and service provision within a neoliberal higher educational context?

In line with pragmatist ontology, the mixed methodological procedure adopted in this thesis enabled an enriched fusion of different sources and uses of language to connect the findings with student and stakeholder experience in different contexts for different purposes to answer different research questions. In particular, the epistemological opportunities of using survey, focus group, and interview methods in a mixed methodological design remained attuned to the ontological complexity and multi-dimensionality of student experience and the interrelated socio-material and socio-psychological consequences of neoliberalism. As such, these methods elucidated pluralist truths with utility for different purposes in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach, inaccessible through a single method.

Survey methods were particularly beneficial for identifying the prevalence, variance, and association of wellbeing determinants within the context of the socio-material and socio-psychological consequences of the neoliberal system. Quantitative analysis in chapter nine for example, was able to demonstrate how test anxiety, workload-related stress, and surface learning are prevalent in the neoliberal university; are compounded by consumerist and instrumentalist neoliberal beliefs; are associated with compromised wellbeing and maladaptive wellbeing-related choices; and are disproportionately experienced by minority groups. Likewise survey methods accessed a wider sample to elucidate how isolation, loneliness, and low sense of belonging were prevalent in the neoliberal institution; predicted by

individualist, instrumentalist, and competitive neoliberal beliefs and conditions; negatively associated with mental wellbeing and disproportionately experienced by minority groups. In this way, there are rich opportunities for survey methods to illuminate the demonstrable, differential and detrimental implications of socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal higher education context on student wellbeing, without epistemological dependence on interpretative and subjective qualitative analysis.

Focus group methods were particularly beneficial to enrich survey findings by exploring student perspectives, proposals, and lived experience of wellbeing and living and learning as situated within the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal system. Whilst axial thematic analysis elucidated conditions and actions in the neoliberal university attuned to student experience as expressed, Interpretative narrative inquiry complementarily illuminated the ubiquitous socio-psychological mechanisms and consequences of neoliberalism on individual experience and subjectivity. This approach enabled, for example, enriched understanding and exemplification of how the pervasive neoliberal discourses of instrumentalism, competition, and privatisation construct student perceptions of assessment and productivity as indicative of personal worth, increasing the emotional and existential consequences of academic performance, and resulting in heightened test anxiety, perceived workload, and surface learning. Hence, by theoretically situating student narratives in knowledge-

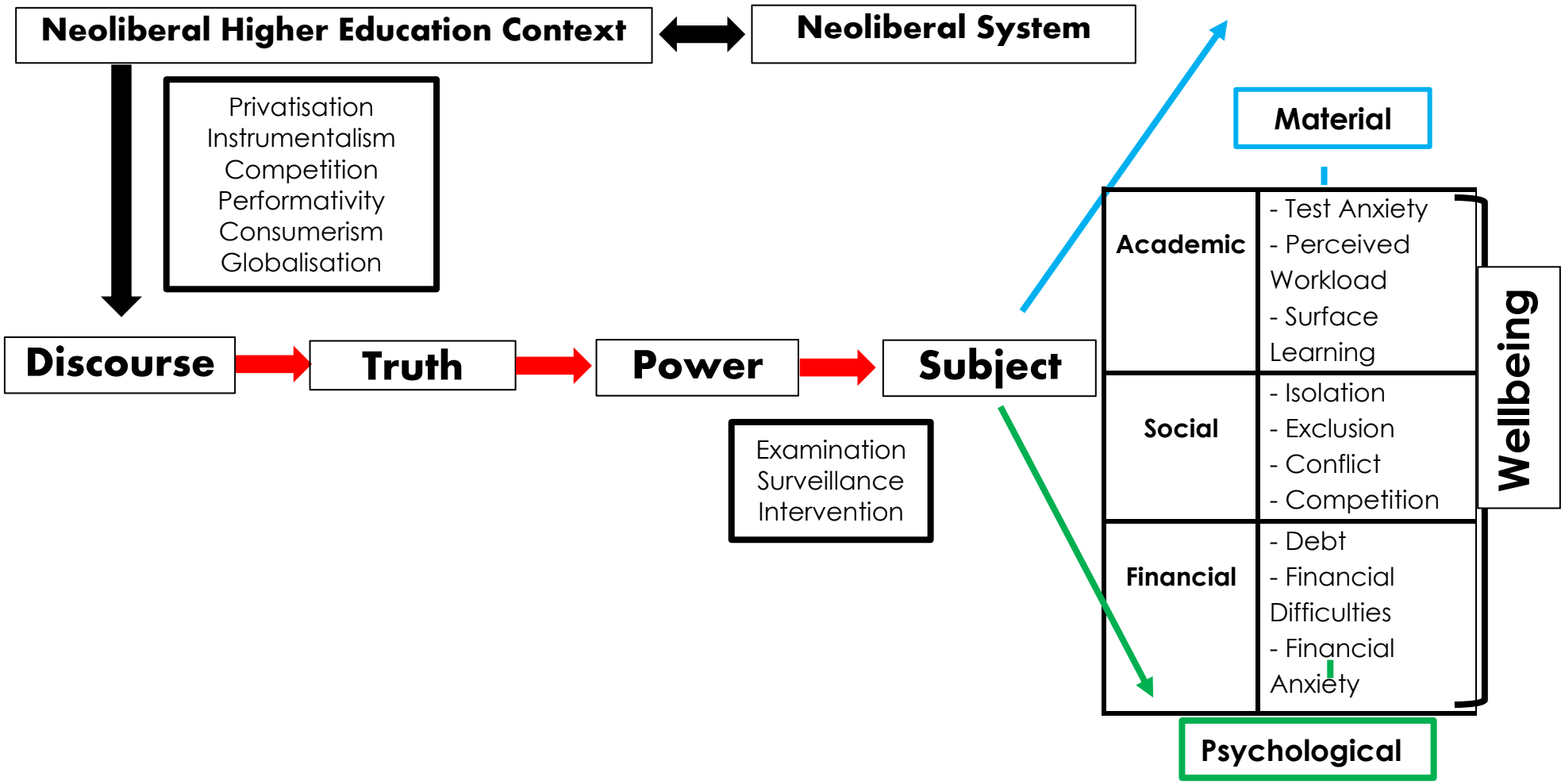
power structures, the methodological opportunities of combining thematic axial analysis and interpretative narrative inquiry enable ethical and epistemological alignment to student voice, whilst transcending the limitations of perceptual possibility to re-envision impactful action in practice (Priestley & Mazzoli-Smith, Under Review). Interview methods were particularly beneficial to access expert perspectives, contextualise student experience within the wider system, and explore the consequences of neoliberal socio-material and socio-psychological conditions for the delivery of services, to ultimately identify impactful mechanisms for practice in the operationalisation of a whole university approach.

What are the recommendations for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university?

Given that a whole university approach to mental health policy and practice is purposively and principally concerned with addressing differential exposure to academic, social and financial determinants, the theoretical insights elucidated in this study help to illuminate how the neoliberal higher education context inherently compromises the implementation of a whole university approach in practice. In pragmatist terms, to ensure beneficial consequences for student and stakeholder experience, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach demands critical interrogation in the context of the neoliberal system. Given that student focus groups, stakeholder interviews, and evidence-informed sectoral guidance foreground student voice and experience to

operationalise a whole university approach (see e.g. Vikram, Siniscalchi, & Banerji, 2022; Hughes & Spanner, 2019; Byrom, 2017), it is necessary to critically interrogate student experience and recommendations through a Foucaultian lens, to elucidate the power relations that condition, construct, and reproduce the parameters of perceptual possibility and permissibility in the neoliberal system (Oliver, Kothari, & Mays, 2019). 'it is the researcher's job to interrogate experience ... using knowledge, interpretation, and meanings that may be outside of what participants would recognise and say' (Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, 2012, p.2) to elucidate alternative meanings and forms of experience in the neoliberal system (Stephens & Breheny, 2013). In pragmatist terms, this deconstructive process can create critical space for a new language to 'productively disrupt' (Collective, 2019, 34) the 'historically specific relations of power, practices of subjectification, and technologies through which the "conduct of conduct" is regulated' in the neoliberal university (Bansel, 2014, p.4).

Figure 16: Summary of Findings



Interpretation of Findings

Applying a Foucaultian lens, it is argued that, whilst students actively resist the individualisation of distress by situating personal experience of wellbeing in relation to institutional structures and stressors, the general depoliticization of these structures within student accounts results in expressed dissatisfaction with isolated material conditions, dissociated from the wider conceptual and cultural conditions and subjectivities inherent to the neoliberal system. As such, student freedom to resist the health-compromising features of the neoliberal university manifest as discrete recommendations for a-political micro-level structural change that ultimately enable the neoliberal culture of higher education - and the identified implications for wellbeing - to persist unchallenged. By extension, where neoliberal cultural conditions are invisibilised and internalised in student perception and subjectivity, students cite neoliberal consumerist and instrumentalist discourses of higher education to critique material neoliberal conditions, precluding critical agency and collective solidarity (Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2020) to paradoxically reproduce the conceptual and cultural foundations of the neoliberal system that they oppose (Lolich, 2011). It is argued therefore that a new language of student mental health which incorporates the material and cultural implications of the neoliberal system as propounded in this thesis can empower students and stakeholders with the freedom to (re)imagine more helpful and context-specific solutions to the aforementioned anxiogenic conditions experienced (Kumar, 2005; Rorty, 1981).

The Invisibilisation of Neoliberal Power Relations

Where chapters five to seven documented a demonstrable trend across existing research, policy, and practice towards individual-level explanations and interventions for student distress, the empirical findings across chapters nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen were striking in that both students and professional staff explicitly and recurringly resisted individual responsibilization for distress by situating student experience of wellbeing in relation to institutional structures. From test anxiety to social isolation and financial deprivation, participants largely resisted the attribution of stressors to wholly individual choices and characteristics, instead foregrounding how institutional practices such as assessment type and conditions, provision of social opportunities, and student accommodation costs inherently frame and constrain individual exposure and experience of these stressors.

However, notwithstanding the aforementioned interrelations between these academic, social, and financial determinants of mental health and neoliberal higher educational conditions identified in this thesis, student perception of these conditions as experienced were largely dissociated from the operant neoliberal power relations identified in chapters one and three. For example, the anxiogenic assessment types and conditions highlighted by students in chapter eleven were often expressed as discrete institutional policies, unrelated to the competitive and instrumentalist theoretical components of the neoliberal system identified in chapter one. Drawing on Foucaultian theory in chapter three, the subsequent depoliticisation of

university experience tended to result in isolated recommendations to address specific micro-level structures in university practice and procedure, such as 'having the option to do coursework instead of exams' [211211], opposed to active recognition and collective resistance to the neoliberal cultural conditions that underpin and reproduce these material structures (Lolich, 2011). Hence, and consistent with previous findings, 'while the structural changes in higher education and the policy context … have been explained as being problematic, there was very little evidence of any major type of overt resistance towards the neoliberal technologies of government' (Raaper, 2016, p.185).

In explanation, chapter three theorised that student experience of higher educational reality is inherently performed through totalising discursive epistemic rules governing the formation of objects; the formation of concepts; and the theoretical relations between discourses, which ultimately condition and construct the conceptual and theoretical parameters of higher educational experience in the neoliberal university (Ball, 2013). These discursive 'practices systematically form the objects of which they speak' (Foucault, 1972, p.49) and (re)produce 'the domains of validity, normativity, and actuality' (Foucault, 1974, p.68) of higher education as experienced. Crucially, given that 'the manifest discourse is really no more than the repressive presence of what it does not say' (Foucault, 1972, p.25), the exclusion of alternative discourses in the neoliberal system inherently 'presuppose and constitute power relations' (Foucault, 1979, p.27),

precluding conceptual formations and theoretical relations that permit perception and critique of the objects of distress within the context of the neoliberal system (Bettache & Chiu, 2019). Students subsequently experience and oppose institutional stressors as isolated material conditions that 'determine the conduct of individuals' (Foucault, 1988, p.18), conceptually and theoretically dissociated from the ideological and socio-psychological components of neoliberalism identified in chapter one (Clarke, 2012).

Student accounts of social relationships and belonging in chapter eleven and twelve exemplify these complex interrelations and consequences of neoliberal power-knowledge on subjectivity, paradoxically resulting in simultaneous exclusion *and reproduction* of neoliberal cultural conditions in students' critique of anxiogenic material structures in the neoliberal university. That is, student narratives signified profound dissatisfaction with the privatisation of higher education and the perceived discrepancy between receipt of tuition and financial expenditure, with students experiencing an exploitative 'exchange relationship with the university' [222241] given the lack of personal pedagogical support for student needs and absence of 'regular contact with a person who knows you' [111233]. Crucially however, this dissatisfaction was predominantly experienced and expressed in relation to the material consequences of privatisation for individual academic experience and outcomes, rather than collective recognition and resistance to the substantive cultural and relational consequences of privatisation and instrumentalisation for higher education (Danvers, 2021).

As a result, the object of dissatisfaction in student accounts was frequently individual staff rather than neoliberal structures and cultures, with students lamenting the perceived inadequacy and absence of 'care about student wellbeing' in staff provision of personal and pedagogical support [211122] as 'lecturers don't try to actively find out if anybody is struggling' [222241] and 'dismiss' or discredit mental health concerns [131231]. Indeed, 61% of students in chapter nine agreed that 'academic staff are more interested in their research than student work and wellbeing' and this was identified in chapter eleven to exacerbate academic stressors, given that 'you find exams stressful because the tutors have not prepared adequately' (121212]. The role of neoliberal cultural conditions in devaluing and distorting mutual caring relationships through privatised transactional and consumer-based relations of exchange are invisibilised (Dowie-Chin & Schroeder, 2022; Lynch et al., 2020; Wrenn & Waller, 2017), wherein academic staff are consequently constructed as both the actor of neoliberal power relations and responsibilised to remedy the deficiencies of privatisation in the neoliberal system (Heffernan & Gates, 2018).

Hence, when given the freedom to imagine an ideal alternative, student recommendations tended to foreground micro-level material changes to staff behaviour and interactions, such as 'more training for lecturers' [231132] and 'more regular contact with academic staff to answer questions, provide direction, and offer reassurance' (p.360), without critical interrogation or collective critique of the material and cultural consequences of neoliberal

privatisation in reproducing the individualism and instrumentalism they oppose. This was exemplified by the recommendation to 'keep the cost [of tuition] because that makes sense' [232233] and the relative absence of recommendations to address financial difficulties, notwithstanding students' opposition to the consequences of privatisation and experienced impact on wellbeing. In this way, through 'what is not said' (Foucault, 1972, p.25) in the possible and permissible discourses of the neoliberal institution, students inadvertently reproduce emphasis on individual rather than institutional change, Invisibilising the impact of neoliberal cultural conditions, and reproducing the 'weaken[ing] or abolish[ment] of collective standards and solidarities' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.1) necessary for collective resistance (Lynch & Kalaitzake, 2020).

The Reproduction of Neoliberal Power Relations

Moreover, where neoliberal cultural conditions become invisibilised and internalised in student perception and subjectivity, students were found in chapter twelve to paradoxically cite neoliberal cultural discourses to frame critique of the material neoliberal conditions they oppose, representing a 'double bind' (Bateson et al., 1956) whereby free choice to imagine an ideal alternative is recuperated through neoliberal discourses to reproduce the existing neoliberal system (Giroux, 2005). A double bind is 'a confusion of message and meta-message in the patient's discourse' resulting from 'communicational discontinuity [and] widely incongruent messages' between subjective identification and accepted socio-relational discourse

(Bateson et al., 1962, p.155); the 'individual is caught in a situation in which the other person in the relationship is expressing two orders of message and one of these denies the other' (Bateson et al., 1956, p.256).

The conflicting messages from student lived experience of the socio-material conditions of the neoliberal university and the socio-psychological neoliberal discourses of subjectification arguably construct a double bind (Lund, 2020; Shore, 2010), wherein the subject cannot 'discriminate communicational modes within the self and between self and others' (Bateson et al., 1956, p.253). As a result, the neoliberal student subject cites neoliberal 'communicational modes' to critique the material conditions experienced in the neoliberal university (Mackenzie, 2022). For example, student dissatisfaction with neoliberal privatisation and relational fragmentation in chapter eleven was critiqued through the theoretical neoliberal logic of consumerism and individualism, exemplified by citation of a legal right to compensation for 'breach of contract' [521231], the evocation of market regulator 'bod[ies] that regulate universities' [222241], and advocation of disciplinary 'accountability' technologies [222241]. This evocation of transactional relationships exemplifies the double bind, whereby neoliberal subjects' experience is framed by the neoliberal socio-psychological conditions to paradoxically reproduce the relational disconnect they oppose, recreating cultural conditions of individualism and instrumentalism, and resulting in 'helplessness, fear, exasperation, and rage which a double bind situation provokes in the patient' (Bateson, 1956, p.264).

The Pathologisation of Experience

The internalisation of the double bind has been shown to lead to a form of 'learned helplessness' (Efremova, Kobysheva & Shalova, 2021) or 'passivity in the face of trauma' (Seligman, 1972, p.7050) as 'a way of dealing with double bind situations [and] to overcome their inhibiting and controlling effect' (Bateson, 1956, p.264). That is, by Invisibilising, internalising, and reproducing neoliberal cultural conditions in the critique of material structures, students may alleviate the emotional dissonance of the double bind by invisibilising their own subjective agency in reproducing and resisting neoliberal cultural conditions (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017). Placed in these terms, whilst student accounts critiqued the material institutional structures that impact on experience of wellbeing and living and learning, the internalisation of socio-psychological neoliberal conditions evoke passive consumer discourses that necessarily responsibilise the institution, and specifically academic staff, for material change - positioning the student subject as 'power-less' and precluding collective action (Hornung, Lampert & Glaser, 2016).

In particular, student accounts in chapter twelve suggest that consumer expectations of higher education frame individual agency and permeate the experience of stress and stress tolerance, underpinning a pathologisation of academic experience and vulnerabilisation of the subject (Ecclestone, 2020; 2015; 2012; 2011; 2009; 2007; 2004). The consumer expectation that independent learning should be 'paid and packaged' [331213] for example,

was found to ostensibly undermine student agency and autonomy, producing overwhelm, anxiety, and distress in independent learning experience. Furthermore, 65% of students in chapter ten agreed that 'learning at university should not be stressful' and 82% believed that 'lecturers should adjust teaching, learning, and assessment to minimize stress'. 'Emotional discomfort, challenge, and even distress [are] an integral part of learning and the student experience' (Meyer, 2019, 74) that is excluded in consumer discourses and expectations of higher education which, alongside evidence of increased exposure to academic distress in chapter nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen, reduce stress tolerance. In this context, stakeholders in chapter fourteen and across the sector (e.g. Arie, 2017) have raised concerns that the cultural conditions of the neoliberal university and implications for support expectations conflate 'normal' academic experience with mental health conditions in a whole university approach that reduce student capacity for coping, compound distress, and conflate different levels of need, re-directing resources away from students with severe mental health difficulties.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Student experience and recommendations as expressed arguably demonstrate complex interrelations of freedom, subjectification, and resistance in the neoliberal university that problematise the primacy of student experience in operationalising a whole university approach (Oliver, Kothari & Mays, 2019). In explanation, governmentality as theorised in

chapter three entails 'techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour' (Foucault, 1997, p.81), which 'appropriate the freedom of subjects through discursive technologies and techniques to bring their own ways of conducting and evaluating themselves into alignment with political objectives' (Rose, 1996, p. 155). It is 'this freedom that makes individuals increasingly accept neoliberal reforms' (Raaper, 2016, p.177). Notwithstanding, given that the application of power in disciplinary society operates through a 'conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982, p.212), 'in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides' (Foucault, 1988, p.194); 'If there were no possibility of resistance, there would be no power relations at all' (Foucault, 1997, p.292).

Synthesising recommendations from exiting literature [chapters five to seven] and primary data [chapters nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen], and the implications of Foucaultian relations of governmentality and subjectification as discussed, five pragmatic policy principles are propounded that seek to situate existing recommendations for a whole university approach in useful dialogue (Rorty, 1989) and within the context of the neoliberal higher education system [see figure 17]. These principles purposively do not propound simple universal solutions, but rather seek a more helpful and context-specific language to understand student experience of wellbeing that incorporates the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions in the neoliberal system that mediate both exposure to institutional stressors,

and the effectiveness of institutional interventions to 'influence the organizational policies and practices that create supportive environments, and explicitly address broader political, economic, and social factors' (Dooris, 2009, p.32). 'Policies and proposals for social action are to be treated as working hypotheses, not as programs to be rigidly adhered to and executed … [but] subject to ready and flexible revision in the light of observed consequences" (Dewey, 1927, p.202-203). These principles are incorporated and further developed in the author's CREATE University Mental Health Strategy Toolkit produced in collaborative partnership with the Charlie Waller Trust, designed to support institutions to meet the principles of good practice in the University Mental Health Charter in alignment with specific institutional context and local population needs (see Priestley, 2022; Priestley & Cowley, 2022). Each principle is discussed in turn.

Figure 17: Policy Recommendations

Financial Narrative Review Recommendations	Social Narrative Review Recommendations	Academic Narrative Review Recommendations	Student Survey Recommendations	Student Focus Group Recommendations	Stakeholder Interview Recommendations
Psycho-educational Interventions **[4]**	Social Activities **[1]**	Curricula Interventions **[3]**	Service Availability & Accessibility **[5]**	Assessment Diversity & Skills **[3]**	Mental Health Literacy **[5]**
Financial Assistance **[4]**	Psycho-educational Interventions **[1]**	Collaborative Pedagogy **[3]**	Strategy & Leadership **[All]**	Curricular Intervention **[3]**	Staff Training **[2]**
	Staff Training **[2]**	Experiential Pedagogy **[3]**	Social Integration & Belonging **[1]**	Pedagogy **[3]**	Social Prescribing **[1]**
	Collaborative Pedagogy **[3]**	Academic Skills Interventions **[2]**	Assessment, Curricular & Pedagogy **[3]**	Service Availability & Accessibility **[5]**	Curricula & Pedagogy **[3]**
	Physical Environment **[1]**	Staff Wellbeing [**2]**		Service Strategy & Leadership **[1-5]**	Leadership & Policy **[1-5]**
	Student-community Interactions **[1]**	Curricular Redesign **[3]**		Social Activities **[1]**	Institutional & External Partnerships **[5]**
		Assessment Diversity **[3]**		Pastoral Support **[2]**	Data Collection **[4]**
		Feedback **[3]**		Staff Training [**2]**	Accessibility & Inclusivity **[5]**
		Inclusivity **[5]**		Financial Assistance **[4]**	
		Staff-Student Interactions **[2]**			

Policy Principles in a Neoliberal Context

1. Address the material and psychological barriers to cohesive social relationships within the neoliberal university.
2. Address the material and psychological barriers to mutual caring pedagogical relationships between students and academic staff.
3. Address the competitive and instrumentalist academic cultures and practices that compound academic stress, anxiety, and perceived workload.
4. Alleviate the financial stressors and inequalities inherent to the privatisation of higher education
5. Deliver provision responsive to the disproportionate stressors experienced by different demographic groups.

Learn	Support	Work	Live	Enabling Themes
• Transition • Learning, Teaching & Assessment • Progression	• Support Services • Risk • External Partnerships • Information Sharing	• Staff Wellbeing • Staff Development	• Proactive Interventions • Social Integration & Belonging • Residential Accommodation	• Leadership • Student Voice • Cohesiveness of Support • Inclusivity & intersectionality • Research, Innovation & Dissemination

1. Promote Social Connection and Belonging

Where this thesis found that neoliberal individualism, instrumentalism, and competition have imposed material and psychological conditions that create and compound social isolation and exclusion, recommendations across both narrative review (chapters five to seven) and the empirical findings (chapters nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen) were consistently found to prioritise strategies and interventions to promote cohesive social relationships and sense of belonging at university [see figure 17]. Where these recommendations are epistemologically predisposed to foreground individual-level explanations and interventions, it is imperative to contextualise these recommendations within the socio-material and socio-psychological context of the neoliberal higher education system to ensure beneficial consequences for student and stakeholder experience (Ayres, 2022; Daniels et al., 2020). Because institutional cultures mediate interventional uptake and effectiveness (Marteau, 2019), 'policies and interventions alone without cultural change are inadequate to support better student and staff wellbeing' (Brewster et al., 2021, p.7).

Whilst, for example, recommendations foreground material provision of additional social opportunities, the conceptual insights illuminated by this thesis indicate that isolated material interventions are unlikely to be effective without action to identify and address the socio-psychological and cultural barriers to wellbeing-enhancing social relationships within the neoliberal system. These conditions were found to include the devaluation of social

relationships in neoliberal systems of performance outcomes; barriers to sense of belonging in deregulated market-driven expansion; structural exclusion of marginalised socio-demographic groups; cultural valorisation of competition; corruption of caring relationships within transactional structures of exchange; and the promotion of self-interested individualism.

Pragmatic action to address the principles of good practice in the Social Integration and Belonging theme of the University Mental Health Charter may pertain then, for example, to scaffolding of collaborative pedagogy and assessment within a supportive learning environment (Burton, 2021; O'Leary & Cul, 2020; Avci, 2018; Zepke, 2016). Secondary evidence in chapter six indicates that collaborative pedagogy can effectively facilitate heterophilic relationship formation (see e.g. Mannisto et al., 2019; Motta & Bennett, 2018; Robinson, Kilgore & Warren, 2017; Houghton & Anderson, 2017), whilst simultaneously challenging the individualistic, competitive, and instrumentalist beliefs and behaviours found to inhibit caring relations in the neoliberal system (see e.g. Slavin, Schindler, & Chibnall, 2014; Manansingh, Tatum, & Morote, 2019; Meyer-Parsons, Etten & Shaw, 2017; Moffett & Bartram, 2017; Bond et al., 2013).

2. Build Caring Pedagogical Relationships

Where this thesis found that distant or damaging student-staff relationships can detrimentally impact on student wellbeing, recommendations across both secondary and primary data in chapter seven, eleven and twelve

propound strategies to promote personal, pedagogical, and/or pastoral relationships with academic staff [see figure 17]. Where these recommendations were found to foreground individual-level explanations and interventions, it is imperative to contextualise these recommendations alongside the socio-material and socio-psychological barriers to staff-student relationships identified in this thesis, such as: deregulated market-driven expansion; academic staff workload and working conditions; transactional consumer-based expectations of academic relationships; and cultural de-prioritisation of care work. Pragmatic action to operationalise the staff wellbeing theme of the University Mental Health Charter in the neoliberal context may pertain, for example, to increased capacity, resource, and support for academic staff, alongside academic skills-based interventions that clearly demarcate staff and student pedagogical roles and responsibilities, to align expectations and engender caring relations (Moen et al., 2019; McLean et al., 2019; Cooper & Miness, 2014).

3. Nurture Non-Instrumentalised Education And Work-Life Balance

Where this thesis identified socio-material and socio-psychological conditions in the neoliberal system that increase student exposure to academic determinants of mental health, recommendations across both narrative review (chapter six) and the empirical findings (chapters nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen) were found to consistently propound curricular, pedagogical, and assessment strategies to alleviate academic distress [see figure 17]. However, where these recommendations were found to foreground

individual -level a-contextual explanations and interventions, it is imperative they are contextualised within the neoliberal system that materially and psychologically frame and constrain student experience, such as: the signification of assessment results in relation to ethico-economic qualities and the subsequent implications for self-worth; instrumentalist valorisation and surveillance of performance outcomes; cultural regulation of time and perceived workload; competitive cultures and fear of failure; and conflicting caring and employment responsibilities.

Pragmatic action to address the principles of good practice in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment theme of the University Mental Health Charter within the neoliberal context may pertain, for example, to purposive implementation of pedagogy, curricular content, assessment type, and method of grading to produce alternative socio-psychological relations with education and assessment (Hughes et al., 2022; Bergland, 2021; Mayer & Eccles, 2019; Smith, Jeffery & Collins, 2018; Mountz et al., 2015). Self-assessment, group assessment, and open book assessment have been shown to engender non-competitive and non-instrumental pedagogical expectations (Nieminen et al., 2018; Heijne-Penninga et al., 2011; Dale et al., 2009), whilst hierarchal pass/ fail grading systems have similarly been shown to promote collaboration and deep learning that reduce competition and test anxiety (Moir et al., 2018; Jham, Cannella & Adibi, 2018; White & Fantone, 2009). Practical and experiential pedagogy such as electives, volunteering, service learning, and supervised placements may similarly deconstruct

instrumentalist conception of higher education, and 'positively affect student wellbeing by … enhancing the sense of meaning in their work' (Slavin et al., 2014, p.574; Fuller, Schadler & Cain, 2020; Babenko & Mosewich, 2017). In addition, Integration of wellbeing related content and/ or interventions within the curriculum may promote wellbeing by disrupting neoliberal instrumentalism and revaluing academic affect (Hughes et al., 2022; Lawrence, 2021; Slavin et al., 2014).

4. Address Financial Stressors and Inequalities

The evidence presented in this thesis indicates that neoliberal policy has imposed material financial conditions within higher education that demonstrably and differentially increase personal debt, financial difficulties, and exposure to deprived unsafe living and working conditions, with an evidentially negative impact on mental health and wellbeing outcomes. Notwithstanding, recommendations pertaining to financial conditions were strikingly absent from both primary and secondary data in chapter five, nine, eleven, twelve and fourteen, exemplifying how the current operationalisation of a whole university approach is framed and constrained by the discursive parameters of possibility and permissibility within the neoliberal system. Whilst single institutions may have limited capacity to resist neoliberal privatisation (Ball, 2013), pragmatic action in the context of student experience should actively acknowledge and challenge the extensive and disproportionate material and psychological stressors associated with neoliberal privatisation as identified in this thesis, such as the necessity of employment compounding

workload; housing precarities and anxieties; and exploitative relationships with landlords; whilst seeking to ensure maximum resource is allocated to financial hardship and bursary schemes (Dickinson, 2022; Priestley, 2022b).

5. Remain Attuned to Inequalities in Exposure and Access

Where this thesis identified differential exposure to academic, social, and financial determinants of mental health across the neoliberal system, recommendations from students [chapter nine and eleven], stakeholders [chapter fourteen] and secondary evidence [chapters five, six and seven] consistently foreground the diversification of provision responsive to the support needs of the diverse student body. Pragmatic action to address the principles of good practice in the Inclusivity and Intersectionality domain of the University Mental Health Charter within the neoliberal context may pertain, for example, to regular opportunity for student voice and participation to elucidate the socio-material and socio-cultural conditions that mediate exposure to stressors and access to interventions across the neoliberal system (Priestley & Mazzoli-Smith, Under Review).

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Strengths and Limitations
Study One: Theoretical Synthesis

The breadth and depth of primary and secondary evidence is a strength of this thesis, enabling an interdisciplinary and holistic theoretical conceptualisation of student mental health in the neoliberal university attuned to the experience of diverse stakeholders. The multi-phase research design is firmly grounded in the ontological and theoretical underpinning of this study and aligned with the primary research question. Indeed, pragmatist ontology and epistemology provide strong justification for the methodological procedure of each composite WELL@UNI study, purposively producing a language for understanding student experience of wellbeing and living and learning that is situated within the neoliberal context and has consequences for action. The originality of the contribution is a further strength, integrating disparate interdisciplinary knowledge for a new purpose orientated towards context-specific action. However the pandemic created methodological and analytical challenges in delineating mental health trends, stressors, and recommendations from the atypical pandemic context (Bunn, 2021; Ligus, et al., 2021).

Study Two: Interpretative Narrative Literature Review

Whilst the interpretative narrative review strategy is strongly aligned to the ontological and theoretical underpinnings, research question, and objectives of this study, the theoretical sampling and interpretative analysis method may have been exposed to subjective bias wherein inclusion of key texts and

identification of salient themes was influenced by the researcher's pre-conceptions (Baethge, Goldbeck-Wood & Mertens, 2019; Hopia, Latvala & Liimatainen, 2016). Whilst the researcher's experience was purposively mobilised to address stakeholder needs in line with pragmatist ontology (Cornish & Gillespie, 2009), systematic review may have been more appropriate to comprehensively and objectively collate existing evidence on the academic, social and financial determinants of student mental health that could be replicated in future studies (Bearman et al., 2012). Validated quality assessment tools such as the Cochrane Risk-Of-Bias (RoB 2) Tool could have also been applied to rigorously evaluate the methodological quality of existing evidence to increase the robustness of the study (Tawfik et al., 2019; Colquhoun et al., 2014).

Study Three; Cross-sectional Student Survey

Whilst the survey design and analysis were functional for the research aim and question within a concurrent embedded mixed methodological design, several limitations were present. First, whilst survey questions were grounded in the research question and existing literature, item selection deviated from good practice guidance with regards to identification of robust psychometrically validated scales for relevant constructs (Boateng et al., 2018; Robinson, 2017). Moreover, although the survey questions designed for this study were piloted for acceptability, the psychometric properties of the scale items were not empirically tested with regard to test-retest reliability, comparative fit index, split half reliability and Cronbach's alpha (Dima, 2018).

In addition, the survey primarily utilised single item and/or proxy measures which have shown to have a greater degree of bias than multi-scale items (Hood et al., 2012). To overcome this limitation, the WELL@UNI survey could have used existing psychometrically validated and multifactor scales to quantify salient constructs, such as the Test Anxiety Inventory to measure test anxiety (Spielberger et al., 1978).

Second, whilst the survey recruited a large sample size with statistical power and range in line with national student population estimates, the survey sample was inherently vulnerable to systematic self-selection and non-response bias (Kypri et al., 2011). Indeed meta-analysis has concluded that 'studies utilising non-random sampling methods reported a higher prevalence of mild depression and lower moderate depression symptoms than those that used random sampling' (Guo, et al., 2021, p.844). In addition, whilst reflecting gender related barriers to mental health research participation reported across the sector (Woodall et al., 2010), the sample population deviated significantly from the target population on the basis of institution and gender, potentially compromising the validity and reliability of the findings (Kypri et al., 2011).

Third, the validity of inferential statistical analysis was limited by the statistical tests selected and variable operationalisation (Sterne & Smith, 2001). Analysis deviated from good practice through conversion of ordinal data to continuous interval data (Liddell & Kruschke, 2018). T-test analyses of the

association between determinants and wellbeing operationalised binary categories of agree/ disagree, denigrating the sensitivity of the seven point likert scale (Finstad, 2010). The application of inferential statistical analysis was further vulnerable to the 'multiple testing problem' (Bender & Lange, 2001, 345) whereby multiple analysis of the same data increases probability or erroneous inference (Ranganathan, Pramesh, & Buyse, 2015). Simple or multiple linear regression (Mark & Goldberg, 1988), cluster analysis (Leonard & Droege, 2008) or agent based modelling (Bonabeau, 2022) techniques may have been more suitable to analyse the complex relationship between multiple variables simultaneously in a complex system (Castellani et al., 2015).

Study Four: Focus Group

Focus group data collection and recruitment strategy were also particularly vulnerable to researcher bias and 'groupthink' or 'a situation in which the psychological drive for group consensus is so strong that dissent is hidden' (Resnik & Smith, 2020, p.100). The Covid-enforced online focus group method particularly restricted group interaction, increasing the role of the researcher in facilitating discussion and precluding exploration of the social construction of narrative (Colombo et al., 2020). Change in participant availability and attendance resulted in several saturated focus groups (n=15) exceeding good practice recommendations (Morgan & Kreuger, 1998), compromising inclusive participation and obscuring individual lived experience (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). An information power approach to sample size for qualitative research may have produced greater data quality (Morse, 2000). Whilst the

researcher actively encouraged accessible participation through capacity building methods, such as polling, raising hand, icebreakers, calling on specific members with notice, and encouraging engagement through the chat (Carter et al., 2021), power differences between group participants and with the researcher on the basis of gender, class, and ethnic background may have prohibited equal contributions (Longhurst, 2003; Wilkinson, 1998). Other challenges included technological difficulties, poor connectivity, and unsuitable workspace which compromised data quality and the interpretation of non-verbal cues (Barbour & Morgan, 2017), Whilst demographic data was obtained, further analysis of demographic variance in findings would have enriched the analysis and implications drawn (Greenwood, Ellmers & Holley, 2014).

Study Five: Expert Interviews

Whilst the problem-centred expert interviews were selected in alignment with the pragmatist ontological underpinnings of this study and the project research question and aim (Döringer, 2021), the sample size and range was a limitation, resulting in disproportionate weighting of interpretative and analytical inference on a small number of participants (Marshall et al., 2013). A greater range of stakeholder perspectives operating within a whole university approach and a wider range of institutions could have enriched the findings (Mason, 2010). The researcher contained the sample size initially to allow for an independent Delphi study of policy recommendations,

although this method was later disused on the basis of research capacity and scope.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should continue to explore interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological innovations of the conceptual framework propounded in this thesis, exploring gaps, contradictions, and points of expansion. Alternative disciplines and methods such as historical analysis or ethnographic methods may be particularly beneficial to explore specific effects of neoliberal policy reforms and expand the theorisation of socio-psychology and behaviour (Lachmann, 2013; Krumeich et al., 2001). Future research could benefit from methodologically robust interdisciplinary examination of the knowledge gaps around financial, social, and academic determinants of student mental health identified in chapters five to seven. Future research could also fruitfully continue to explore the enactment and evaluation of impactful policy and practice principles within the socio-material and socio-psychological conditions of the neoliberal system (see Priestley & Cowley, 2022; Lawrence, 2021), including an independent Delphi study with a wider range of participants. Future research could also benefit from developing the pragmatist interdisciplinary methods explored in this thesis, particularly given the limitations highlighted in the survey method, to permit plurality of understanding and impactful practice attuned to individual experience (Rosenman & Nasti, 2012; Thomas, Shah & Thornton, 2009). There is also a potential benefit for future research to utilise longitudinal design to infer

relations of causality (Rindfleisch et al., 2008) and repeated measure focus groups validate Foucaultian interpretative narrative inquiry with participants (Nind & Vinha, 2014).

Conclusion

Identifying a limiting trend across existing research, policy, and practice towards individual-level explanations and interventions for student distress, this thesis has presented an innovative, integrative, and impactful theoretical framework to contextualise student wellbeing and experiences of living and learning in the context of the neoliberal higher education system, in order to elucidate the implications for the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach. Grounded in socio-ecological and systems-based theories of mental health, it has been demonstrated that the multi-dimensionality of neoliberal higher education ideology, policy, and social psychology inherently frame and constrain student experience of higher education and mediate exposure, both socio-materially and socio-psychologically, to identifiable academic, social, and financial risk and protective factors which demonstrably, detrimentally, and differentially impact on student wellbeing. In particular, studies two to five illustrate how the neoliberal higher education context conditions and compounds student experience of: test anxiety, perceived workload, and surface learning; social competition, conflict, isolation, and exclusion in relationships with peers, academic staff, and the local community; and debt, financial difficulties, and financial stress. Furthermore, neoliberal ideology, policy, and subjectivity

was found in chapter eleven, twelve, and fourteen to mediate provision, engagement, and effectiveness of student mental health services and interventions.

Given that a whole university approach to mental health policy and practice is principally concerned with differential exposure to academic, social, and financial stressors and access to wellbeing-facilitative interventions, resources, and services, it is concluded that the neoliberal higher education context inherently compromises the implementation of a whole university approach in practice. In pragmatist terms therefore, the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach necessarily demands contextualisation in the neoliberal system to ensure impactful consequences for student and stakeholder experience. Grounded in pragmatist epistemology, this thesis has presented initial theoretical and methodological directions to synthesise multiple perspectives from a range of stakeholders and disciplines to enable enriched understanding of student experience of wellbeing and living and learning in the neoliberal context and, in doing so, elucidate context-specific principles for action pertaining to the conceptualisation and operationalisation of a whole university approach.

Personal Reflections

The neoliberal context, and the implications for student mental health, continue to change rapidly and significantly. As the social, political, ecological, and economic challenges of the neoliberal system become

increasingly apparent, I see two parallel trends emerging: 1. The entrenchment and/or exacerbation of the detrimental and differential risks to student mental health identified in this thesis, and 2. The growing precarity of the neoliberal system and emergent possibilities for socio-political alternatives.

As I conclude this thesis, the UK government continues to grapple with the political and economic consequences of the failed neoliberal 'mini-budget', and its impact on compounding the cost-of-living crisis and associated financial risks to student mental health. Coupled with the emergent economic consequences of Brexit (Mayhew, 2022), funding uncertainties in both the higher education and mental health sectors (Mind, 2022), growing evidence of long-term socio-cultural mental health impacts from the pandemic (Gotlib et al., 2022), fears of escalating global conflict (Riad et al., 2022), and elevated climate anxiety (Leger-Goodes et al., 2022), the risks to student mental health within the socio-political context seem unlikely to abate, and the imperative for socio-political epidemiological research will continue to grow. This thesis can offer some useful direction in this regard.

At the same time however, the current neoliberal system appears increasingly unsustainable and fragile, with proliferating public opposition to austerity, privatisation, and inequality manifest in extensive and extended industrial action across almost every public service in the UK, including the higher education sector. The possibility for alternatives to the neoliberal

system, and potential benefits to student mental health, may yet emerge (although the current trajectory of the UK Labour Party suggests not in the immediate term).

Concomitantly, the consensus around a whole university approach continues to crystallise across the sector. In December 2022, the first UK universities were awarded University Mental Health Charter accreditation and it was a pleasure and privilege to be on the Assessment Team for three of the five awards, with opportunity to explore good practice and recommendations for the implementation of a whole university approach. With a further 60 universities committing to the Charter programme (Student Minds, nd), this initiative offers real potential to develop an effective whole university approach to address some of the structural stressors within the higher education system, and promote better student mental health and wellbeing.

Likewise, I am delighted to be supported by the Charlie Waller Trust to continue to develop the CREATE strategy guidance, building on this thesis to support university policymakers to implement a whole university approach (see Priestley & Cowley, 2022). Going forward, it will be imperative to explore and evaluate how the implementation and evaluation of a whole university approach, and any associated legislation, can take into account the neoliberal higher education context as experienced by students, staff, and stakeholders. I will be thrilled if this thesis can contribute to shaping this process.

Finally, and befitting the pragmatist underpinnings of this study, my own personal experience of the challenges involved during the doctoral journey have taught me several important lessons which may have beneficial implications for future research on this topic (Denscombe, 2008). First, I have experienced both the demand and difficulty of interdisciplinarity and collaborative partnership with multiple stakeholders. It has been both a strength and a challenge during this thesis to incorporate the perceptions, contributions, and expectations from multiple different individuals, disciplines, and professional networks. Whilst indubitably enriching the conceptualisation of mental health and wellbeing, it has been difficult – both practically and conceptually - to navigate these relations. Balancing focus on theory and practice; diverse ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions; macro socio-political systems with a-politicised student and stakeholder needs as expressed; and conceptual plurality with the demand for commensurability, have all been challenges I have progressively learned through experience to better negotiate during this study, informed by pragmatist philosophy.

Second, I continue to navigate – with difficulty - both the benefit and limits of student voice, lived experience, and coproduction in student mental health research, policy, and practice. As a student with lived experience of mental health difficulties and having experienced the benefits of numerous coproductive initiatives, I am inherently drawn to empowering and amplifying the student voice as the means to change. However, the

theoretical implications of this thesis have highlighted challenges around the discursive parameters of permissibility and possibility underpinning student lived experience in the neoliberal system, problematising interpretation of student experience as expressed within a neoliberal context that students may not recognise, whilst still being transparent and respectful of lived experience. Synthesis of pragmatist and Foucaultian theory, with emphasis on critique and action in different contexts, has provided an initial way forward.

Third, I have struggled with the cognitive dissonance involved as I become increasingly self-aware of how socio-psychological neoliberal processes inform my own subjectivity and experience of wellbeing. I must continually challenge my own tendency to perceive self-worth in competition with others and based upon academic outputs, with the resulting drive for perfectionism and risk of burnout this can entail. At times, I have felt like a fraud and a failure in my inability to resist the processes I critique, and in my own (re)production of the outputs, credentials, and certifications inherent to the neoliberal system. Re-asserting space for reflexivity, self-awareness, critique, and connection with others in the neoliberal university is imperative to navigate these challenges and helpfully interrogate student mental health in the neoliberal context.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

Ethical Approval: EDU-2020-09-12T16:28:16-pjnw34

Ethics <no-reply@sharepointonline.com>
Fri 9/18/2020 12:35 PM
To: PRIESTLEY, MICHAEL J. <michael.j.priestley@durham.ac.uk>
Cc: ED-ETHICS E.D. <ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk>; WARD, SOPHIE C. <s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk>

Please do not reply to this email.

Dear Michael,

The following project has received ethical approval:

Project Title: ***WELL @ UNI;***
Start Date: ***05 October 2020***;
End Date: ***31 March 2021;***
Reference: ***EDU-2020-09-12T16:28:16-pjnw34***
Date of ethical approval: ***18 September 2020***.

Please be aware that if you make any significant changes to the design, duration or delivery of your project, you should contact your department ethics representative for advice, as further consideration and approval may then be required.

If you have any queries regarding this approval or need anything further, please contact ed.ethics@durham.ac.uk

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Thank you for completing the registration for a Licence to use WEMWBS for non-commercial purposes.
You now have access to the scales and the associated resources here on our website: https://warwick.ac.uk/wemwbs/using/register/resources
We suggest you bookmark this page for future reference.
The information declared on your Registration Form is documented below. Please retain a copy of this email as a record of your Licence together with the Terms and Conditions you have accepted. https://warwick.ac.uk/wemwbs/using/non-commercial-licence-registration/shrink-wrap_licence_-wemwbs_non-_commercial_v3_8.9.20.pdf.
If you have any questions please contact us via email: wemwbs@warwick.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

Project title: *WELL at Uni: Wellbeing and Experiences of Living and Learning at University*

You are invited to participate in a study that is being conducted as part of a PhD project at Durham University exploring student mental health at university. The study is funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council and has received ethical approval from the School of Education Ethics Committee at Durham University. Before you decide whether to agree to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what is involved as a participant. Please read the following information carefully. Please get in contact if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?
The aim of this study is to explore how higher education policies and practices impact positively or negatively on student experiences of mental health and wellbeing at university.

Why have I been invited to take part?
You have been invited to take part in this study because you are enrolled as an undergraduate or postgraduate student in the UK.

Do I have to take part?
Your participation is voluntary and you do not have to agree to take part. If you do agree to take part, you can withdraw at any time by exiting the page without giving a reason and without penalty. Your rights in relation to withdrawing any data that is identifiable to you are explained in the accompanying Privacy Notice.

What will happen to me if I take part?
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete a short online survey. This is a one-time survey which will take approximately 25 minutes to complete. You can complete this survey in your own time on any computer. The survey will ask questions about your mental wellbeing by asking you to rate how much you agree with seven statements such as '*I've been feeling useful*' or '*I've been feeling relaxed*'. The survey will also ask questions about your university experience

and how much you agree with statements such as *'If I don't get a 2:1 or a first, going to university will have been a waste of money*'. The survey will ask for demographic information such as age, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and about your lifestyle and physical health. You can omit any questions which you do not wish to answer. If you complete the survey you will have the option to enter into a prize draw with a chance of winning a £50 voucher.

Are there any potential risks involved?
It is not anticipated that participation in this study will involve any risks or cause any harm. You will not be asked to recount any distressing experiences and you can withdraw at any time. In the unlikely event that you become upset or distressed as a result of your participation in this study, and would like to talk to someone about any distress, you can contact your local GP, or Samaritans by either freephone on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org. Additional service information will be available at the end of the survey. It is not guaranteed that you will receive any benefit from your participation in this research, although you will contribute to improved understanding of student mental health at university.

Will my data be kept confidential?
The data you provide will be attached to a unique participant ID code that is stored and processed separately to any identifiable information, and kept confidential to the research team.

What will happen to the results of the project?
Active data collection for this study is scheduled for completion by March 2021. The data collected in this project will be written up as a doctoral thesis which is scheduled for completion in the Summer of 2022. Durham University is committed to sharing the results of its world-class research for public benefit. As part of this commitment the University has established an online repository for all Durham University Higher Degree theses which provides access to the full text of freely available theses. On successful submission of the thesis, it will be deposited both in print and online in the University archives, to facilitate its use in future research. The thesis will be published open access and you will have the option to request a copy of the findings. The research findings may additionally be disseminated through academic publications and other research outputs. All research data and records will be stored no longer than the life of this project.

Who do I contact if I have any questions or concerns about this study?

If you have any further questions or concerns about this study, please speak to the researcher or their supervisor using the contact details below. If you remain unhappy or wish to make a formal complaint, please submit a complaint via the University's Complaints Process.

Researcher: Michael Priestley, PhD Student
Department: School of Education, Durham University, Leazes Road, Durham, DH1 1TA
Contact details: michael.j.priestley@durham.ac.uk

Supervisor name: Sophie Ward, Associate Professor
Supervisor contact details: s.c.ward@durham.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this information and considering taking part in this study.

Appendix 3: Trigger Warnings

Author	Year	Country	Design	Findings
Cebula et al.	2022	UK	Cross-sectional single-site survey (n=917)	67% of students reported having received either verbal or written trigger warnings. Qualitative analysis found that, whilst some students reported trigger warnings to be patronising and inappropriate, the majority found them valuable to engage with distressing content.
Nolan & Roberts	2022	UK	Cross-sectional semi-structured interviews with students (n=13)	Some students described how warnings can facilitate emotional regulation of sensitive content and raise awareness of trauma. Concerns with trigger warnings included: nocebo; disruption to delivery; underestimation of coping; facilitation of avoidance.
Bridgland Takarangi	2022	Australia	Randomised control trial of students (n=106) to receive a trigger warning for sensitive content or control	13% of students did not engage with distressing content after receiving a trigger warning. The average time spent viewing content preceded by a trigger warning was not significantly different to controls or for trauma survivors, and not associated with decreased distress.
Kimble et al.	2021	US	Longitudinal repeated measures conducted before and after content engagement (n=355)	96% of participants engaged with triggering material despite a trigger warning and those with triggering traumas did not report more distress although those with higher PTSD scores did. Two weeks later, those with trigger traumas and/or PTSD did not report an increase in trauma symptoms as a result of engaging with triggering content.

Nolan & Roberts	2021	UK	Cross-sectional semi-structured interviews with academic staff (n=13)	Staff identified concerns with trigger warnings, including a nocebo effect; being used as a substitute for support or as self-protection; difficulties in predicting stressors; & facilitation of avoidant coping.
Boysen et al.	2021a	US	Longitudinal repeated measures design conducted before and after content engagement (n=353).	Learning about sexual assault led to significant changes in affect for participants with and without personal experience related to the topic . Trigger warnings had no significant impact on changes in affect or test scores
Boysen et al.	2021b	US	Longitudinal repeated measures design conducted before and after content engagement (n=412)	Trigger warnings had no significant impact on changes in affect or test scores. However, participants who received a trigger warning had significantly increased belief that warnings are necessary and beneficial.
Boysen et al	2021c	US	Cross-sectional single-site survey (n=105)	Trigger warning had no significant effect on changes to affect, but the majority of students believed trigger warnings were necessary
Cares & Hernandez	2021	US	Cross-sectional single-site survey of academic staff (n=791)	Academic staff demonstrate mixed perceptions of trigger warnings, either as a student-centered teaching practice, an academic harm, or compromising content.
Bruce et al.	2021	US	Randomised control trial of students (n=106) to receive a trigger warning for sensitive content or control	Controlling for posttraumatic stress symptoms, exposure to a trigger warning increased heart rate more than exposure to distressing content or control.

Jones et al.	2020	US	Randomised control trial with trauma survivors (N = 451) randomly assigned to receive a trigger warning for sensitive content or control.	No evidence was found that trigger warnings were helpful for trauma survivors or participants with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
Bellet et al.	2020	US	Randomized control trial with participants (n=426) randomly assigned to receive a trigger warnings for sensitive content or control.	Trigger warnings do not have a significant effect on anxiety responses to distressing literature passages.
Cares, Franklin & Fisher	2019	US	Cross-sectional mixed method survey (n=162; response rate 85%)	Students demonstrate mixed attitudes to trigger warnings with some students perceiving benefits to include helping emotional preparation for distressing topics whilst perceived disadvantages include a nocebo effect.
Bridgland et al.	2019	Australia	Meta-analysis of five randomised control trials with participants (n=1600) randomly assigned to receive a trigger warning for sensitive content or control.	Trigger warnings increased anxiety and negative mood. Participants who received a warning reported content to be significantly more positive than they expected
Sanson, Strange & Garry	2019	New Zealand	Meta-analysis of six experiments with participants assigned to receive a trigger warning for	Participants reported similar levels of negative affect, intrusions, and avoidance regardless of whether they had received a trigger warning, and irrespective of history of trauma.

			sensitive content or control (n=1880).	
Beverly et al	2017	US	Cross-sectional single-site student survey (n=259)	31% of students advocating trigger warnings, 30% opposed, and 39% unsure. Qualitative analysis revealed that: trigger warnings benefit students with a history of trauma by providing additional time to prepare and, if appropriate, seek professional help; students need to learn and cope with highly sensitive material; trigger warnings increase awareness of trauma.
Bellet, Jones & McNally	2018	US	Randomized control trial with participants randomly assigned to receive a trigger warnings for sensitive content (n=133) or control (n=137).	Participants receiving trigger warnings reported greater anxiety when engaging with potentially distressing content. Warnings did not affect participants' implicit self-identification as vulnerable, or subsequent anxiety response to less distressing content.
Boysen et al.	2018	US	Cross-sectional multisite student survey (n=751)	Students demonstrate mixed attitudes to trigger warnings with 59% of students perceiving benefits to include helping emotional preparation for distressing topics. 71% of students reported distressing content had little to no effect on learning and trigger warnings can facilitate avoidance coping.
Boysen & Prieto	2018	US	Cross-sectional multisite survey of academic staff (n=284)	Academic staff demonstrate mixed views related to trigger warnings, identifying benefits for content engagement but challenges relating to avoidance coping.

Bentley	2017	UK	Cross-sectional mixed methods design using survey (n=59) and focus groups (n=6) following use of trigger warnings.	31% of students agreed that they felt better prepared to take the module as a result of the trigger warning, 31% disagreed, and 38% identified as neutral. 13% reported feeling more apprehensive and anxious as a result of the trigger warning. Qualitative analysis found some students opposed trigger warning as patronising and facilitating avoidance coping.

Appendix 4: WELL@Uni Survey Design

Part One: Demographic and Lifestyle

Category	Construct	Question	Response Items	Survey Measure Used
Demographics	Age	What is your age?	- 18-24 - 25- 29 - 30-34 - 35-39 - 40+	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	Gender	What gender do you identify as?	- Male - Female - Transgender - Non-Binary - Self-Describe - Prefer Not To Say	Advance HE Guidance on the Collection of Diversity Monitoring Dat
	Ethnicity	How would you describe your ethnic origin?	- Asian [Asian British; Bangladeshi; Chinese; Indian; Pakistani] - Black [British; African; Caribbean] - Mixed - White [British; European] - Any Other Ethnic Group - Prefer Not To Say	ONS, 2020
	Sexuality	What is your sexual orientation?	- Asexual - Bisexual - Homosexual/ gay/ lesbian - Heterosexual/ Straight - Pansexual - Self-Describe - Prefer Not to Say	ONS, 2020
	Disability	Do you identify yourself as having a disability, long-term illness, or health condition?	- Yes - No - Unsure - Prefer Not Say	UCAS, 2020
	Religion	Which of the following religious affiliations do you identify as?	- Buddhist - Christian - Hindu - Jewish	ONS, 2020

			- Muslim - Sikh - Other - No Religious Affiliation - Prefer Not to Say	
	Social Class	What is your approximate total household income per year?	- Less than £20,000 - £20,000 to £39,999 - £40,000 to £49,000 - More than £50,000 - Prefer Not To Say	Adapted from ONS, 2020
	Widening Participation	Do any of the following apply to you? Please select all that apply.	- First generation student - Mature student - Student carer - Care experienced - Estranged Student - Student with professional placements - None - Don't Know - Prefer Not To Say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
Education	Institution	Which university are you currently studying at?	- Free Text	Created by Author
	Year	Which year of your degree programme are you currently in?	- Undergraduate 1st Year - Undergraduate 2nd Year - Undergraduate 3rd Year - Undergraduate 4th Year - Postgraduate Taught 1st Year - Postgraduate Taught 2nd Year - Postgraduate Research (PhD, 1st year) - Postgraduate Research (PhD 2nd Year or Above).	Created by Author
	Status	How are you currently enrolled?	- Full Time - Part Time	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	International	Are you a home student or international student?	- UK/ Home Student - International Student from the EU - International Student from Outside the EU - Prefer Not To Say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	Course	Which faculty do you study in?	- Arts & Humanities - Science - Social Science	Created by Author

			- Other [Please specify] - Don't Know	
Lifestyle and Context	Relationship Status	*How would you describe your relationship status?*	- Single - In a relationship - Engaged - Married - Divorced - Widowed - Other - Prefer Not To Say	ONS, 2020
	Employment Status	*Do you have a part time job during term time?*	- Yes - No - Prefer Not To Say	Adapted from Benson-Egglenton (2019
		Approximately how many hours a week are you employed during term time?	- 1-2 - 3-5 - 6-10 - 11-16 - 17-24 - 25+	
	Living Status	*Where do you currently live during term-time?*	- In my own home - With a parent or guardian - In privately rented accommodation - In university owned accommodation - Other - Prefer Not To Say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	Adverse Experiences	Since becoming a student, have you personally experienced any of the following? Please select as many options as apply or select 'none' if no options apply to you.	- Bereavement - Bullying - Burglary - Debt - Domestic Abuse - Family Conflict - Hate Crime or Discrimination - Housing Insecurity or Eviction - Physical Assault - Relationship Break-Up - Serious Illness or Injury - Sexual Assault - Verbal Abuse - None - Prefer Not To Say	Created by author.

Physical Health	Alcohol	*How often have you had 6 or more units of alcohol if female, or 8 or more units of alcohol if male, on a single occasion in the last year?*	- *Never* - *Less than Monthly* - *2-4 Times Per Month* - *2-3 Times Per Week* - *4+ Times Per Week* - *Don't Know* - Prefer Not To Say	ONS, 2020
	Drug Use	How often do you take recreational drugs?	- I have never taken drugs - Less Than Monthly - Monthly - Weekly - Daily or Almost Daily - Prefer not to say	ONS, 2021
	Diet	Approximately how many portions of fruit and/or vegetables do you eat on a typical day during term time?	- 0 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5+	ONS, 2021
	Exercise	During term time, how many days do you do a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity?	- 0 - 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5+	GOV, 2020
	Sleep	During term time, approximately how many hours of sleep do you get per night?	- Less Than 4 Hours - 4-7 Hours - 7-9 Hours - More Than 9 Hours - Don't Know	Created by Author.

Part Two: Mental Health and Wellbeing

Construct	Question	Response Item	Survey Measure Used
Mental Health Difficulties	Have you ever been diagnosed with a mental health condition?	- Yes - No - Unsure - Prefer not to say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	How long ago were you diagnosed with this condition?	- Less than 6 months ago - Between 6 months and 1 year ago - More than 1 year ago - Prefer not to say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	Which option best describes your diagnosis? Please select all that apply.	- Depression - Anxiety - Psychosis - ADHD - Eating Difficulties - Personality Disorder - Bipolar - OCD - Other [Please Specify] - Prefer Not To Say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	Since starting university, have you ever sought professional help for your mental health?	- Yes - No - Prefer not to Say	Student Minds Student University Mental Health Charter Survey
	I think the Covid-19 pandemic has had a positive impact on my university experience	- Strongly Agree - Agree - Somewhat Agree - Neither Agree Nor Disagree - Somewhat Disagree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree	Created by author.
	I think the Covid-19 pandemic will have a negative impact on my mental health in the long-term	- Strongly Agree - Agree - Somewhat Agree - Neither Agree Nor Disagree - Somewhat Disagree - Disagree	Created by author.

		- Strongly Disagree	
	Studying at university is bad for my mental health	- Strongly Agree - Agree - Somewhat Agree - Neither Agree Nor Disagree - Somewhat Disagree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree	Created by author.
	Studying at university is good for my mental health	- Strongly Agree - Agree - Somewhat Agree - Neither Agree Nor Disagree - Somewhat Disagree - Disagree - Strongly Disagree	Created by author.
	What has your university done and/or should your university do to support student mental health?	- Free Text	Created by author.

Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

Below are some statements about thoughts and feelings. Please tick the box that best describes your experience of each over the last two weeks.

	None of the Time	Rarely	Some of the Time	Often	All of the Time
I've been feeling optimistic about the future					
I've been feeling useful					
I've been feeling relaxed					
I've been dealing with problems well					
I've been thinking clearly					

I've been feeling close to other people					
I've been able to make up my own mind about things					

Section Three: Wellbeing Determinants								
Construct	**Item**	**Response Scale**						
Surface Learning	Most days I feel a sense of enjoyment in what I'm studying [R]	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Surface Learning	I feel able to explore my own academic interests at university, even when I know it will not be assessed [R]	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perceived Workload	I often find the academic workload at university exhausting and stressful	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Surface Learning	I memorise information for assessments even if I do not understand it	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Surface Learning	The most important reason for coming to university is to learn new knowledge and skills [R]	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Test Anxiety	I feel worried about failing my exams	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Belonging	I feel a sense of belonging at my university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Loneliness	I often feel isolated and/or lonely at university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Perceived Workload	I am too busy with my studies to socialise at university or get involved with sports or societies	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Relationship with Academic Staff	I would feel confident that my tutor would support me if I approached them with difficulties	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Belonging	The culture at university is inclusive	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Relationship with Local Residents	I feel connected to the local resident community at my university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Relationship with Academic Staff	Academic staff are more interested in research than my work and wellbeing	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Belonging	My university values me as an individual	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Anxiety	I often worry about money to pay for essentials	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Difficulties	I am able to afford comfortable living arrangements including a healthy balanced diet at university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Difficulties	I have considered dropping out of university due to financial difficulties	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Debt	I am worried about paying off student debt in the future	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Debt	I am not worried about my student loan, because I might not ever have to pay it back	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Difficulties	I have felt excluded at university because I haven't been able to afford to participate in extracurricular activities	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Financial Difficulties	Money worries often put a strain on my social life or relationships at university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Section Four: Neoliberal Socio-Material and Socio-Psychological Conditions								
Construct	Item	Response Scale						
Instrumentalism	If I don't get a 2:1 or an equivalent high grade going to university will have been a waste of money	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Instrumentalism	If I don't get a 2:1 or equivalent high grade, going to university will still have been a valuable experience [R]	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consumerism	Lecturers should adjust teaching, learning, and assessment to minimise student stress	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Competition	I need to get the best grades possible so that I will have a competitive edge when I look for a job	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Instrumentalism	The most important reason for coming to university is to increase employment opportunities after graduation	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Privatisation	Students should pay the majority of university funding as they benefit most from university	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Privatisation	The government should pay the majority of university funding because students contribute positively to society and the economy	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Performativity	More choice and competition would help to increase the quality of university provision	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Competition	I dislike group work because I am anxious I will look stupid if I get the answer wrong	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consumerism	Learning at university should not be stressful	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Instrumentalism	Getting a degree is more important to me than the student experience	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Instrumentalism	The main reason I get involved in extra-curricular activities at university is to boost my CV	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consumerism	My university values me as a consumer	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Privatisation	I have paid extra for resources necessary to complete my course	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Competition	I have paid extra for resources to get an advantage on my course	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Privatisation	Student loan repayments are an extra tax on higher graduate earnings	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Privatisation	Any financial troubles at university are worth it because I am confident of finding work after I graduate	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Consumerism	My course represents good value for money	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Appendix 5: WELL@UNI Variance in Physical Health Outcomes

	Measure	Prevalence	General Population		Sexuality		Ethnicity		Gender		Disability		Status		International		Age	
					Heterosexual [1]/ LGBTQ+ [2]		BAME [1]/ White [2]		Male [1]/ Female [2]		Disability [1] No Disability [2]		UG [1]/ PG [2]		Home [1]/ International [2]		18-24 [1]/ 25+ [2]	
					T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P
Alcohol Consumption [10]	How often have you had 6 or more units of alcohol on a single occasion in the last year?	Mean 17 units of alcohol per week. 25% never	Mean 18 units of alcohol per week. 20% never	ONS, 2020	0.14	0.89	-5.227	<0.001	-2.702	0.004	-1.623	0104	2.839	0.002	-3.376	<0.001	3.509	<0.001
Drug Use	How often do you take recreational drugs?	20% less than monthly 7% monthly/ weekly/ daily 71% never	21% less than monthly 4% monthly/ weekly/ daily 75% never	ONS, 2021	-1.979	0.024	1.222	0.222	4.344	<0.001	-0.012	0.990	1.610	0.108	-0.877	0.380	0.647	0.518
Diet	Approximately how many portions of fruit and/ or vegetables do you eat on a typical day during term time?	Mean 2.9 portions per day 17% met NHS guidelines of 5 per day	Mean 3.7 portions per day 22% meet NHS guidelines of 5 per day	NHS Digital, 2018 ONS, 2021	-1.199	0.231	-3.63	<0.01	0.632	0.528	-0.171	0.864	-0.924	0.356	-2.73	<0.01	-1,556	0.121
Exercise	During term time, approximately how many days per week do you do a total of 30 minutes or more of physical activity?	27% met NHS England guidelines of at least 5 days per week	62% meet NHS England guidelines of at least five days per week	GOV, 2020	3.313	0.001	-1.115	0.265	2.896	0.001	-2.276	0.023	-1.589	0.112	0.592	0.554	0.717	-0.717

[10] Students with caring responsibilities (T=-2.232; P= 0.023), estranged students (T=-2.182; P=0.012), and first generation students (T=-1.995; P=0.047) were all found to consume significantly less alcohol than the sample population.

Sleep[11]	During term time, approximately how many hours of sleep do you get per night?	57% met National Sleep Foundation's recommended 7-9 hours per night	53% met National Sleep Foundation's recommended 7-9 hours per night	YouGov, 2020	-2.870	0.004	0.703	0.482	-0.106	0.916	-2.714	0.003	-2.565	0.005	1.348	0.178	-0.875	0.382

[11] Students with caring responsibilities (T=1.731; P=0.044) and first-generation students (T=1.856; P=0.032) all reported significantly fewer hours of sleep per night.

Appendix 6: WELL@UNI Variance in Self-Reported Wellbeing Challenges

Challenge	Reported by [%]	**Sexuality** Heterosexual [1] / LGBTQ+ [2]		**Ethnicity** BAME [1]/ White [2]		**Gender** Male [1]/ Female [2]		**Disability** Disability [1]/ Non-Disability [2]		**Status** UG [1]/ PG [2]		**International** Home [1]/ International [2]		**Age** 18-24 [1]/ 25+ [2]	
		T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P	T	P
Alcohol and/ or Substance Misuse	52%	1.61	0.05	-1.940	0.026	0.26	0.80	0.44	0.66	3.37	<0.001	2.40	0.02	3.18	0.002
Bullying and/or Discrimination	39%	1.13	0.26	1.63	0.12	-0.15	0.88	1.33	0.19	-2.34	0.009	-3.17	<0.001	2.07	0.13
Conflicts with Family Members	20%	1.75	0.08	1.82	0.07	- 0.73	0.46	1.36	0.18	-0.42	0.67	-1.91	0.06	-0.38	0.71
Conflicts with Flatmates	58%	0.95	0.34	-0.03	0.98	- 2.90	0.005	2.20	0.014	4.43	<0.001	2.48	0.01	6.41	<0.001
Conflicts with Friends	33%	0.82	0.41	2.044	0.021	-0.05	0.96	0.85	0.40	0.67	0.50	0.45	0.65	3.18	<0.001
Conflicts with Lecturers	17%	-0.12	0.91	2.377	0.018	-1.87	0.06	2.70	0.004	-1.33	0.18	1.25	0.21	-2.92	<0.001
Conflicts with Romantic Partners	32%	0.85	0.40	-0.46	0.65	0.95	0.34	1.43	0.15	-0.02	0.98	0.14	0.88	-0.10	0.92
Debt	52%	0.25	0.80	2.859	0.004	-1.69	0.09	-1.22	0.22	-0.22	0.83	0.02	0.99	0.68	0.51
Employment Demands and/or Career Prospects	50%	-0.50	0.62	-0.12	0.90	-1.05	0.30	1.50	0.13	3.63	<0.001	2.88	<0.001	1.56	0.20
Exams and/or Assessment	75%	0.47	0.63	3.18	<0.001	-4.12	<0.001	0.43	0.66	4.18	<0.001	3.99	<0.001	3.04	<0.001
Financial Difficulties	66%	0.83	1.97	-0.917	1.97	-2.99	<0.001	2.12	0.03	1.33	0.19	1.33	0.19	0.76	0.47
Homesickness	40%	-2.70	0.003	-1.84	0.07	-2.22	0.032	0.97	0.33	2.42	0.002	0.80	0.42	4.35	<0.001
Housing	39%	2.01	0.022	-2.03	0.04	-0.85	0.39	2.348	0.009	-1.01	0.29	3.17	<0.001	2.37	0.09
Loneliness	74%	0.79	0.43	-1.37	0.17	- 2.342	0.002	0.19	0.85	0.25	0.80	1.50	0.14	2.29	0.02
Physical Health Difficulties	21%	1.48	0.14	1.80	0.07	-2.28	0.02	1.97	0.05	0.24	0.81	-0.42	0.68	-0.18	0.86
Sexual Violence	36%	3.48	<0.001	-1.21	0.23	- 2.79	0.005	2.31	0.02	1.07	0.28	0.50	0.62	5.69	<0.001
Social Media	30%	-1.16	0.25	0.52	0.60	0.17	0.86	-0.64	0.52	-1.48	0.14	0.71	0.48	-2.34	0.02
Workload	66%	-0.43	1.97	3.00	0.003	- 2.92	<0.001	0.32	0.75	3.425	<0.001	4.29	<0.001	2.10	0.04

Appendix 7: WELL@UNI Survey Responses

Determinants							
Item	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
Most days I feel a sense of enjoyment in what I'm studying	88 [11%]	257 [32%]	283 [35%]	55 [7%]	69 [9%]	49 [6%]	13 [2%]
I feel able to explore my own academic interests at university, even when I know it will not be assessed	97 [12%]	218 [27%]	202 [25%]	113 [14%]	105 [13%]	54 [7%]	24 [3%]
I often find the academic workload at university exhausting and stressful	203 [25%]	256 [31%]	196 [24%]	82 [10%]	53 [7%]	21 [3%]	4 [1%]
I memorise information for assessments even if I do not understand it	75 [9%]	188 [23%]	220 [27%]	114 [14%]	102 [13%]	77 [10%]	30 [4%]
The most important reason for coming to university is to learn new knowledge and skills	184 [23%]	316 [39%]	232 [29%]	46 [6%]	25 [3%]	9 [1%]	3 [0%]
I feel worried about failing my exams	292 [36%]	214 [26%]	147 [18%]	72 [9%]	37 [5%]	32 [4%]	18 [2%]
I feel a sense of belonging at my university	73 [9%]	194 [24%]	260 [32%]	83 [10%]	84 [10%]	77 [10%]	44 [5%]
I often feel isolated and/or lonely at university	96 [12%]	157 [19%]	226 [28%]	87 [11%]	131 [16%]	96 [12%]	22 [3%]
I am too busy with my studies to socialise at university or get involved with sports or societies	69 [9%]	101 [12%]	146 [18%]	105 [13%]	177 [22%]	153 [19%]	64 [8%]
I would feel confident that my tutor would support me if I approached them with difficulties	158 [19%]	213 [26%]	213 [26%]	94 [12%]	73 [9%]	37 [5%]	25 [3%]
The culture at university is inclusive	59 [7%]	161 [20%]	201 [25%]	157 [19%	120 [15%]	67 [8%]	48 [6%]
I feel connected to the local resident community at my university	23 [3%]	70 [9%]	109 [13%]	151 [19%]	176 [22%]	143 [18%]	143 [18%]
Academic staff are more interested in research than my work and wellbeing	56 [7%]	91 [11%]	145 [18%]	211 [26%]	160 [20%]	112 [14%]	39 [5%]

My university values me as an individual	32 [4%]	88 [11%]	174 [22%]	201 [25%]	135 [17%]	102 [13%]	79 [10%]
I often worry about money to pay for essentials	99 [12%]	138 [17%]	165 [20%]	78 [10%]	111 [14%]	139 [17%]	84 [10%]
I am able to afford comfortable living arrangements including a healthy balanced diet at university	119 [15%]	256 [31%]	241 [30%]	65 [8%]	76 [9%]	33 [4%]	25 [3%]
I have considered dropping out of university due to financial difficulties	34 [4%]	40 [5%]	53 [7%]	61 [8%]	87 [11%]	183 [23%]	354 [44%]
Having to work to afford university has negatively impacted on my studies	70 [9%]	56 [7%]	89 [11%]	285 [35%]	69 [9%]	83 [10%]	156 [19%]
I am worried about paying off student debt in the future	116 [14%]	123 [15%]	157 [19%]	99 [12%]	90 [11%	97 [12%]	130 [16%]
I am not worried about my student loan, because I might not ever have to pay it back	91 [11%]	107 [13%]	148 [18%]	164 [20%]	92 [11%]	104 [13%]	105 [13%]
I have felt excluded at university because I haven't been able to afford to participate in extracurricular activities	45 [6%]	62 [8%]	106 [13%]	145 [18%]	130 [16%]	155 [19%]	171 [21%]
Money worries often put a strain on my social life or relationships at university	62 [8%]	86 [11%]	161 [20%]	114 [14%]	122 [15%]	135 [17%]	132 [16%]

Neoliberal Socio-Psychological Beliefs							
Item	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Somewhat Agree**	**Neither Agree Nor Disagree**	**Somewhat Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**
If I don't get a 2:1 or an equivalent high grade going to university will have been a waste of money	202 [25%]	227 [28%]	179 [22%]	85 [11%]	64 [8%	33 [4%]	22 [3%]
If I don't get a 2:1 or equivalent high grade, going to university will still have been a valuable experience [R]	82 [10%]	172 [21%]	264 [33%]	108 [13%]	101 [12%]	62 [8%]	23 [3%]
Lecturers should adjust teaching, learning, and assessment to minimise student stress	215 [26%]	257 [32%]	187 [23%]	86 [11%]	46 [6%]	13 [2%]	9 [1%]
I need to get the best grades possible so that I will have a competitive edge when I look for a job	202 [37%]	264 [33%]	143 [18%]	56 [7%]	26 [3%]	7 [1%]	11 [1%]

The most important reason for coming to university is to increase employment opportunities after graduation	211 [26%]	209 [26%]	194 [24%]	74 [9%]	68 [8%]	33 [4%]	25 [3%]
Students should pay the majority of university funding as they benefit most from university	10 [1%]	38 [5%]	100 [12%]	158 [20%]	179 [22%]	168 [21%]	157 [19%]
The government should pay the majority of university funding because students contribute positively to society and the economy	272 [33%]	249 [31%]	179 [22%]	75 [9%]	22 [3%]	9 [1%]	8 [1%]
More choice and competition would help to increase the quality of university provision	62 [8%]	149 [18%]	166 [20%]	283 [35%]	92 [11%]	42 [5%]	18 [2%]
I dislike group work because I am anxious I will look stupid if I get the answer wrong	138 [17%]	125 [15%]	168 [21%]	80 [10%]	145 [18%]	108 [13%]	49 [6%]
Learning at university should not be stressful	150 [19%]	182 [22%]	193 [24%]	124 [15%]	115 [14%]	37 [5%]	12 [2%]
Getting a degree is more important to me than the student experience	104 [13%]	141 [17%]	180 [22%]	125 [15%]	169 [21%]	73 [9%]	23 [3%]
The main reason I get involved in extra-curricular activities at university is to boost my CV	51 [6%]	82 [10%]	142 [18%]	153 [19%]	162 [20%]	127 [16%]	96 [12%]
My university values me as a consumer	125 [16%]	174 [22%]	223 [28%]	178 [22%]	47 [6%]	34 [4%]	26 [3%]
I have paid extra for resources necessary to complete my course	117 [14%]	220 [27%]	160 [20%]	68 [8%]	108 [13%]	91 [11%]	49 [6%]
I have paid extra for resources to get an advantage on my course	43 [5%]	96 [12%]	104 [13%]	120 [15%]	149 [18%]	185 [23%]	117 [14%]
Student loan repayments are an extra tax on higher graduate earnings	104 [13%]	197 [24%]	154 [19%]	236 [29%]	48 [6%]	28 [4%]	40 [5%]
Any financial troubles at university are worth it because I am confident of finding work after I graduate	41 [5%]	79 [10%]	179 [22%]	153 [19%]	168 [21%]	112 [14%]	78 [10%]
My course represents good value for money	37 [5%]	110 [14%]	204 [25%]	180 [22%]	126 [16%]	92 [11%]	64 [8%]

Appendix 8: Focus Group Topic Guide

Discussion Topic	Follow-Up Prompts
What would the ideal approach to student mental health be like in 10 years' time if money and resources were no issue?	What would be different about teaching, learning, and assessment in the ideal university?
	What would be different about the university culture, environment, and day to day living in the ideal university?
	Would anything be different about how students and university are talked about in the ideal university?
	What would be different about student mental health and wellbeing support services at university?
	In the current university, what have been the biggest threats and challenges to your mental health and that of your peers? [How] have these been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic?
	What are the biggest opportunities to improving mental health? What are your top three priorities to change the state of student mental health?

Appendix 9: Interview Topic Guide

Discussion Topic	Follow-Up Prompts
How do you/ your organisation consider and support student mental health?	How is the support you provide integrated with other services and/or organisations? What support do you receive in your role?
	How/ is support tailored for minority student groups? Do any student groups present more often or with particular issues?
	How do you evaluate and demonstrate the impact of your work?
What do you think are the biggest threats to student mental health and wellbeing at university?	What issues do students most commonly present to you with?
	Do you think these issues have changed during your time in post?
	Do you think these issues will change as a result of the coronavirus pandemic?
If money was no object, what, if anything, would you change to support student mental health over the next five years?	Do you believe university culture and environment has the capacity to positively or negatively impact on student wellbeing and if so, how?
	Do you believe it would be beneficial to consider student wellbeing in curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy? Why/ Why Not?
	How do these priorities co-exist alongside the other demands of your role?

Appendix 10: Participant Reported Service Provision

Category	Indicative Quotation
Practitioner Diversification	The University Mental Health Advisor role provides '*advice for people managing long term conditions … risk and safety management … a bridge between external services like the NHS and social care'* **[P2]** and '*acts as liaison with academic staff … which is quite a different function to what a counsellor would have*' **[P1].**
Provision Diversification	Provision includes '*a psychological wellbeing service for people who didn't want to access counselling services in the traditional sense of 50-minute sessions exploring their feelings in depth for insight … [involving] 'a more symptomatic sort of practical-based approach both to ensure that we had a shorter-term intervention for those that didn't need very much but needed something, but also to meet the needs of students that didn't necessarily want full counselling'* **[P1].**
Modality Diversification	Online provision '*enable us to offer students something they can access 24/7, over holidays and vacations, or indeed if they were going on years abroad'* **[P1].**
Biopsychosocial Framework	*'It is really important to get a sense of the whole three psychosocial and biological domains in the patient's words and not just get focused on diagnosis'* ***[P3]*** because '*sometimes a mental health label is [actually] what we unofficially call "shit life syndrome" when people are just living in poverty with not much support and just a lot of stressors'* **[P5].** 'I dole out antidepressants and all that stuff as a GP. But I don't think that is the key …. The drug is just for the issues in the here and now, but it doesn't solve the underlying social issue' **[P4]**
Person Centred	'[Case formulation] '*is most importantly not in our own words but in the patient's words'* **[P3]**
Strengths-Based	'[Case formulation] *is done with the person rather than done to the person'* **[P3]**

Appendix 11: Participant Reported Impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health Determinants

Theme	Category	Indicative Quotation
Covid-19 and Student Mental Health	**Compounding Effects**	*'The biggest challenge to student mental health at the moment is the whole Covid-19 context; there are two levels, there is the normal context in which students would experience mental health, physical health, and wellbeing issues, and then there are the exceptional circumstances caused by this particular environment in which we are working which generate additional anxieties and frustrations'* **[P8].**
	Universal Effects	*'It's a chronic stress on the population'* **[P4].**
	Long-Term Effects	*'[It] is going to have an impact on mental health for a good year or two'* **[P4].**
Social Determinants	**Isolation**	*'[Some students are] in self-isolation for four or even six weeks, and that causes stress and anxiety'* **[P8].**
	Online Communication	*'The way in which we communicate will change, and communication is key around mental health; we'll sit in front of a screen rather than having human contact'* **[P6].**
Academic Determinants	**Online Learning**	*'When technology is not great … these things are very stressful, they cause stress, they cause anxiety'* **[P8].**
	Transition	*'The learning curve for technology enhanced learning has been enormous, which also has impacts and consequences for the learners'* **[P8].**
	Unemployment	*'We've got students who are dependent upon having small part-time jobs to supplement their financial income, and with the lockdown, not being able to help out in things like bars or restaurants, shop work causes stress and causes financial anxiety'* **[P8].**
	Living Essentials	*'[Some students] are worried about access to food and supplies'* **[P8].**

Financial Determinants	**Employment Anxiety**	*'The massive thing is a huge dip in the opportunities for graduate employment …. I think that's quite challenging because you've got debt, you've got all these different expectations of achieving, and then you can't get a job - you can't even get a job; let alone a job you want and I think that is the legacy of the pandemic in particular'* [**P7].**
	Precarity	*'What the future holds for young people is very uncertain'* **[P6].**
	Financial Difficulties	*'After the pandemic and Brexit, the job situation [could] have a big effect on people's mental health, whether they can find paid work, and whether they are getting paid enough to survive on'* **[P5].**