



COURAGE PROJECT REPORT

(STRAND B: RESILIENCE)

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Between March and July 2019, 1:1 interviews were carried out with PGRs from UEA and University of Suffolk ('UoS')(n=18) as part of the resilience strand of the Courage Project.

Findings reinforced those of the Focus groups previously carried out in 2018 and other studies (see Appendix A) with regards to feelings of isolation, imposter syndrome, strained relationships with supervisors, funding issues and hours worked. However, further information was gained on how the culture of the university and its processes, as well as training and Courage activities can affect resilience.

There is a general perception that PGRs are not cared about, given recognition, or given the same amount of consideration as undergraduates. Greater visibility of senior staff and a charter setting out what PGRs can expect of the UEA/Uos and what the UEA/Uos expects of them would be helpful in clarifying status and rights of PGRs and ATs and ensuring equal treatment regardless of school or faculty.

Although wellbeing activities were well-received, time pressures, particularly from supervisors to produce written work, meant that some felt it would not be deemed good use of time. Furthermore the culture of not taking holidays and working long hours seemed to be an unspoken expectation, although at least 1 supervisor had actually verbalised this. PGRs therefore asked for procedures to be introduced to monitor attendance at wellbeing activities and that holidays had been taken. This could be done at the annual review and would therefore give both activities greater legitimacy with supervisors. A very small change in the annual review questionnaire could have a large impact on the stance taken by supervisors and the wellbeing of their supervisees,

PGRs rely heavily on their peers for support as friends and family more often than not do not understand what it is to be a PGR. The availability of Mental Health First Aid training to PGRs who are interested would help them to help their peers and give them confidence that they are responding correctly.

There seemed to be several areas where things have not gone smoothly regarding the upgrade/progress panel and the viva. Greater clarity is required for both PGRs, supervisors and examiners as to what is acceptable in terms of presentation. There needs to be a check carried out by the PGR hub that internal examiners have sent the report to the external examiners to finalise in order to stop unnecessary delays in PGRs receiving this. UoS need a generic checklist of what is required of the PGR for progress panels as currently they have to read both the UoS and UEA handbook and this has caused confusion. These measures could help reduce anxiety levels at what is often a challenging time for PGRs in terms of mental wellbeing.

UEA Student Support Services ('SSS') have already started to try and address some of the issues mentioned by having a Courage Project Manager placed there specifically to see PGRs. However, many of those participating were not aware of this and needs to be better advertised. Upskilling supervisors by giving them training on how to supervise students as well as the research is also taking place as part of Strand E of the Courage Project. This is important as the point was made on more than one occasion that with friends and family lacking understanding

and peers carrying out different areas of research, if the supervisor relationship fails this leaves the supervisee very isolated.

Concern was expressed about the quality of IT services by computer science PGRs. It therefore seems pertinent to carry out either a survey or focus groups in order to understand the problems that PGRs are facing.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND POTENTIAL AREAS FOR ACTION

Taking into account the narratives provided during the interviews and the suggestions put forward by participants, the recommendations are listed below. Some of the recommendations, are quick wins and would not require much work on the part of the university but could make a large difference to the wellbeing of the PGRs. Please note these recommendations do not take into account any additional context, budget, considerations etc.

Assisting Wellbeing from the Start

- Consider the possibility of having students keep blogs over a period of time that potential students can view to help them understand what it is like to be a PGR.
- To help PGRs manage the emotional impact of studying for a PhD this should be discussed from the beginning, stressing the importance of their mental wellbeing, with training provided.
- Monitor whether supervisee is taking holidays when conducting the annual review.
- Fees payable and funding awarded to be spread over the same time period e.g. 4 years.
- UoS to keep web pages up to date in order to locate members of staff more easily.

Respecting PGRs and ATs

- A written procedure or charter which ensures:
 - The needs of PGRs are given as much consideration as those given to undergraduates
 - PGRs are aware of their rights, such as not being refused holidays and that they are entitled to a writing up year and do not feel pressured to complete in 3 years.
 - ATs are notified well in advance of teaching allocated.
 - ATs are treated with consistency regardless of school or faculty.
 - ATs are recognised as members of staff and treated as such.
 - ATs are paid for all work carried out, including preparation.

Supervisors

- Train supervisors how to supervise, including having conversations regarding wellbeing.
- Supervisors to give clear timeframes as to when work is expected and when they will give feedback.
- Industrial supervisors to be given a contact within the PGR office.
- Processes to be developed so that industrial supervisors are informed if for any reason the supervisee is going to need to be absent for a certain amount of time.

Senior Staff

- Senior staff e.g. Vice Chancellor, to be more visible to PGRs.
- Senior staff to take note of the findings of the Courage Project and to notify PGRs how they intend to act on the findings.

Training

- Make it mandatory for PGRs to attend at least one wellbeing activity per year and monitor at the annual review.
- Set up a forum for those researching emotionally challenging subjects.
- Make the mental health first aid course (or equivalent) available to all interested PGRs to enable them to support their peers.
- UoS to consider training courses that are aimed at specific years as the university grows.

Examinations

- Clear guidance to be given to internal and external examiners and supervisors as to acceptable presentation for thesis.
- Procedure to check that the internal examiners report has been passed to the external examiner and for both examiners to be made aware of expected time limits.
- UoS to provide a summary sheet for the Progress Board procedure.

Student Support Services

- SSS to give equal weighting to the mental wellbeing of all students, whether undergraduate or postgraduate.
- SSS to consider offering therapies other than counselling. If other therapies are provided this should be made clear
- UoS SSS to provide a waiting area for students that is more private.

Computer Services

- Carry out a survey or run focus groups at both UEA and UoS of IT and whether it meets the requirements of computer science PGRs.

Courage Activities

- Consider some basic resilience training at writing retreats.
- Vary times of activities.
- UEA to make activities less campus centric.
- UoS not to pre-emptively cancel activities.

INTRODUCTION

The Courage project has been set up in order to research and pilot innovative approaches to support the mental health and wellbeing of postgraduate research students at the UEA. A joint project with the UEA Student's Union, UoS and Norwich Biosciences Institute (NBI), it has several strands of activity. The main activity to be covered in this strand was to conduct a piece of research regarding resilience, including training needs, barrier and facilitators to, format, timing and tailoring of resilience training to meet the specific needs and experiences of PGRs.

The research took place with participants from both the UEA and the UoS. Before carrying out the required activities time was taken to review previous research. Meetings also took place with School Training Co-ordinators, Student Support Services (SSS) and Careers Central in order to understand what training was available to help students with their resilience. Both of these activities are reported on below before discussing the research carried out with PGRs, including methodology, results and analysis.

Previous Research

Three pieces of previous research carried out at the UEA were reviewed:

- PGR Courage Project Focus Group Discussions
- School of International Development PGR Wellbeing Survey
- Review of Recent Literature of effectiveness of different interventions, practices and institutional arrangements in supporting PGR Mental Health (16 papers between 2001 and 2018) carried out by Dave Watson and John Turnpenny

The main points from these reports can be found summarized in a table in Appendix A. The three studies showed a lot of commonality.

A public health paper, 'Student Perceptions of a Healthy University' (Holt et al, 2015) was another piece of relevant research.ⁱ This was a survey of eleven universities across England, Scotland and Wales. Using both surveys and focus groups 423 students across a range of ages, years of studies and different programmes took part. Findings of relevance to the Courage Project Resilience Strand were the fact that students placed importance on: (a) promoting physical and mental health and well-being; (b) the availability of supportive staff and lecturers that cared about their wellbeing; (c) consultation with students on what made them healthy and what they needed to succeed. As Figure 1 shows, all of these issues are being addressed by the Courage Project and resilience sits at the heart of all of the strands of work. Much of the work on the Courage Project is being led by PGRs and involves either 1:1 interviews, focus groups or surveys with peers. Supervisor training is being carried out under Strand E by a project manager based in Student Support Services.

What Does Resilience Mean?

What is meant by the term 'resilience' is not clearcut. Fletcher and Skarar (2013) who carried out a review of the different definitions of resilience in literature between 1987 and 2009 found that resilience had been 'defined as a trait, a process, or outcome'. However, they found that 'most definitions are based around two core concepts: adversity and positive adaptation'.ⁱⁱ The definition of resilience that I am using is that put forward by Citrin and Weiss (2016): 'Our ability to effectively plan for, navigate successfully, and gracefully recover from challenging and stressful events in such a way that we are strengthened by the experience'.ⁱⁱⁱ By mapping how resilience related to the main points of the UEA focus groups and the different strands of the Courage Project, it was possible to see how resilience was an integral component, cutting across all strands (see Figure 1 overleaf).

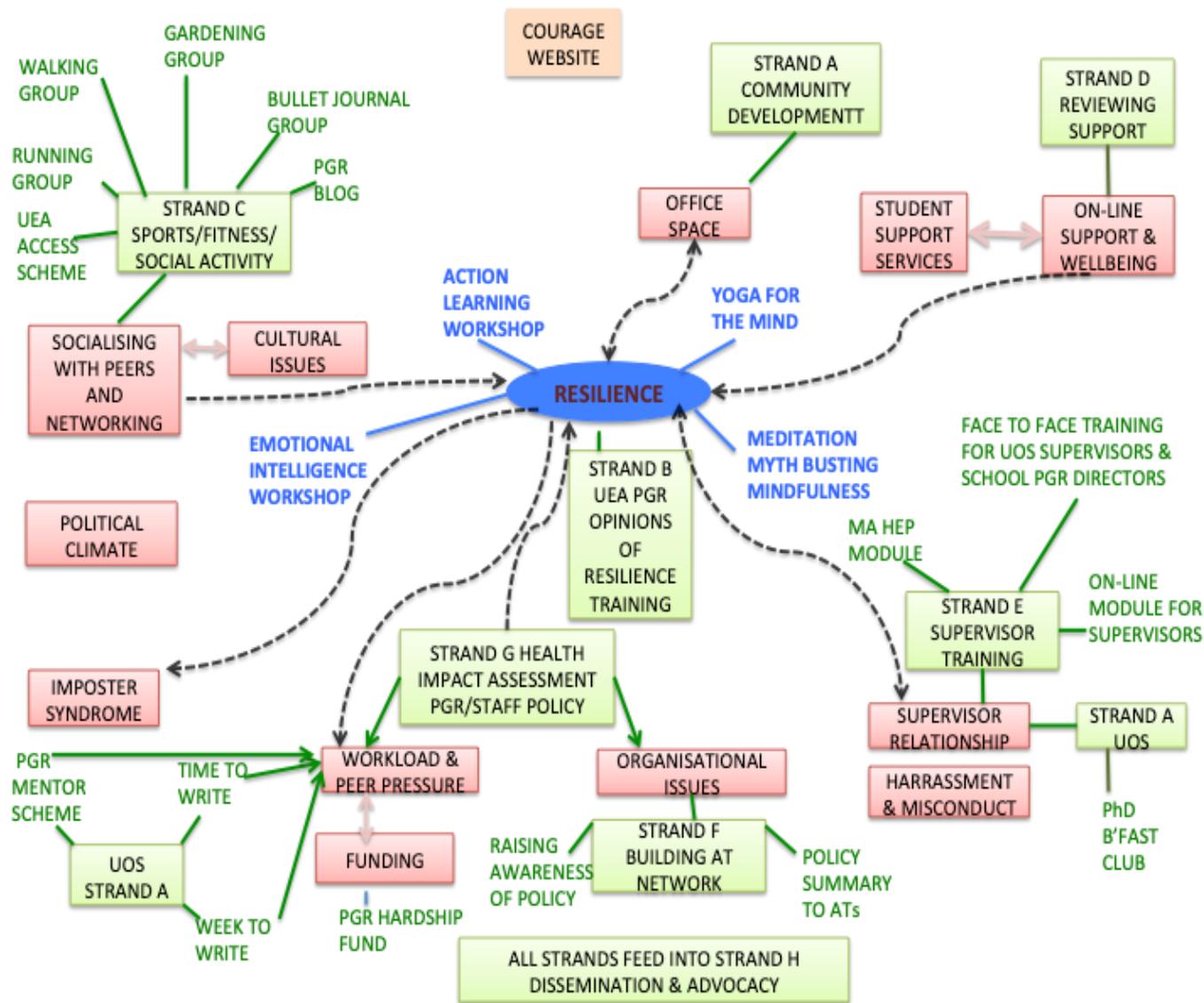


Fig. 1. Resilience and its Relation to Main Points from the UEA Focus Groups and the Courage Project Strands

The pink squares show the main points raised in the focus groups. The green squares show the different strands of activities taking place within the Courage Project. The dotted lines with arrows going away from the resilience sphere can be seen as being negative going towards the sphere as positive, and going in both directions as the possibility of both. For example, the supervisor relationship can have positive or negative affects on one's resilience depending on whether it is seen as supportive or antagonistic. Similarly, a lack of office space can lead to isolation whereas a shared space can be a place of mutual support.

PGR Training Co-ordinators

At the UEA the PPD programme takes into account the requirements of Vitae Research Development Framework ('RDF') (See Appendix B). The needs of the faculty and of the students are also taken into account. All schools do have a course on the supervisor relationship, which as my report will show, has considerable effect on the resilience of PGRs. In some schools this was the only workshop pertaining to resilience and mental wellbeing whereas others have several courses available. One training co-ordinator expressed a willingness to offer a course on resilience if a suitably trained person was available to run it. The benefits of live streaming were discussed as they give those that may be off campus and feeling isolated somewhere to connect with other people.

Careers Central run sessions on resilience and mindfulness. SSS have been using the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework (give/keep learning/take notice/be active/connect) to develop activities. Situating their teaching practices in this framework has been helpful for thinking about how they might attend more closely to the well-being of students and to the links between learning and well-being.

UoS also follow the RDF. Domain B, 'Personal Effectiveness' includes sessions on Getting Started with the PhD, Making Progress with the PhD, Managing the Supervisory Relationship, Living with a PhD and Completing and surviving the Viva.

RESEARCH AIMS

Building on the information available from the literature review and the research carried out in the focus groups, the aim of this research was to understand what affected the resilience of PGRs, both from outside the university environment as well as from within it, what the university as an institution could do for them and the barriers and enablers to resilience training and activities.

METHODOLOGY

A total of 18 semi-structured one to one interviews were carried out with PGRs (UEA PGR n=13, UoS PGR = 5). Those who were interviewed from UoS came from 2 of the 4 schools and there were no international students. Of the PGRs interviewed from the UEA, there was at least one from each faculty and 6 were international students. Of the 18 participants 4 were male and 12 were female.

The main questions asked can be found at Appendix C. These do not include any follow up questions. As UoS do not have PPD modules one question was adjusted slightly for UoS participants.

RESULTS

A number of key themes arose from the interviews and are subsequently outlined. In some sections of the results it has been necessary to separate UEA and UoS participant responses. Where this is the case this is clearly identified. Any suggestions for improvement made by participants are noted at the end of each numbered section of the results.

1. Emotional Impact of the PhD

Opening with the question “How have you found being a PGR?” led to very personal stories being told and enabled participants to talk about the emotional impact of their studies. Often the term used was ‘a rollercoaster’ or the phrase ‘highest of highs and lowest of lows’.

Many participants (n=11) reported getting some enjoyment out of the PhD experience. The enjoyable aspects of the PhD were being passionate about their respective topics, gathering of data and independence of study, attending conferences and teaching.

However it was also found to be emotionally challenging and significantly impacting on individual mental health. Half of the participants (n=9) reported undergoing treatment for their mental wellbeing (counselling/CBT and/or medical/hospitalisation) whilst researching. A further 2 participants reported having had problems with their mental well-being but did not specify if they had sought professional help.

Specific challenges to mental wellbeing identified by participants included researching emotionally challenging subjects (n=1), isolation (n=10), juggling work and family/relationship commitments (n = 5), lack of boundaries on the amount of time spent studying and the inability to switch off (n=5).

“And where you sit as PhD student is tricky because I have tried being involved in staff groups, like staff pride and things like that, where I don’t fit and I have tried fitting in with student body groups, like clubs and things, where I don’t fit. So I am in this grey area on my own doing a project that only I really know, in a city where I don’t know anyone. So I have really had to rely on myself a lot.”

“I know a lot of people who seem to conflate not taking time off with good work ethic and it’s really unhealthy. You just make yourself sick.”

Participant Suggestions

“I think at the beginning there needs to be a realistic conversation about what to expect from the PhD and to provide students with as much training, tools, talking, whatever you want to do, to demonstrate to them that through their PhD their mental health and wellbeing is equally, if not more important, than their PhD”.

2. People (Other than Staff and Academics)

Generally peers were cited as a key source of support (n=10), as were friends and family (n=11). However, they were also reported as an additional drain on limited emotional resources (n=13), including lack of understanding and support or requiring support. Research participants and external councillors were also identified as motivating and supportive.

“The things that benefit my mental well-being are things like the community of peers [...] I personally get a lot out of benefits from associating with other people, being able to discuss progress and problems, have a rant sometimes, you know, realise either that we are all in the same boat, or I am worse, or somebody is worse but at least it puts it into perspective so that there’s a lot of that sort of thing.”

“I also find it really problematic that people outside of the university setting have no idea of what a PhD entails and therefore my friends, that are very lovely, think of me as a student, just a normal student. They get really annoyed when I can’t go for coffee on a Wednesday because, “no I’ve set that up for writing and I need to give myself structure”. And they’re like “no, but you can. You can come out tonight””

“As much as they are a support they are, you know, I’ve got a mum and dad who are getting elderly, I’ve got a sister and her kids that I help a lot. So whilst they are a source of strength, they are also a drain sometimes when there are issues going on.”

3. Supervisors

There were a range of positive (n=9) and negative (n=15) aspects of the supervisor relationship that were highlighted across the interviews. The positive aspects of the supervisor relationship included trust, understanding of issues affecting the supervisees research, understanding of mental health and genuinely interested in the research being undertaken by the supervisee:

The negative aspects of the supervisory relationship covered many areas. This included:

- (a) Pressures around time, such as pushing researchers to complete within three years, holding on to work and giving short notice when work was required.
- (b) Expectation that the PGR would work long hours, including examples where supervisors monitored working hours:

“I don’t think there is an overt ‘you must spend all your time on this’, but I think there is an unwritten expectation that you are not going to have much of a life outside the PhD, especially in the final stages”.

(c) Relationship and power dynamics within the supervisory relationship. It was reported by some of the participants (n=5) that they felt their supervisors were uncaring or unapproachable. Supervisors were seen as uncaring for not asking how the supervisee was generally, not asking how the supervisee was after a bereavement, for example. Participants (n=4) also expressed their perception of supervisors’ attitude towards wellbeing initiatives:

“I think it would be much easier for me to say to my supervisor, “I’ve hurt my ankle and I am going to be working from home for two weeks” than for me to say “I’m not in a good place, I really need to take some space, I am going to work from home”. I don’t think I could do it, I don’t think it is socially accepted.”

“I can think of one student and their relationship they have with their supervisors, I can’t imagine them being very supportive of them going to that kind of training and things because they would say, no you come to me, which is really sad and that’s quite disappointing. So

whether that supervisor relationship has something to do with it. Quite often it is 'oh, you should be doing work, you should be writing, you should be doing other stuff rather than going to this kind of activity'. They wouldn't see it as a priority."

The above comments are closely related to the supervisor being perceived as someone that is powerful, untouchable and someone to be pleased or impressed. Although only 4 participants commented on this, it was noticeable that some participants double-checked they would not be identified, despite having read the ethics form. Furthermore, once the recorder was turned off, many participants went into more detail regarding negative experiences, which ethically I am unable to report.

"Don't ask me to be honest about my supervisory relationship in the annual review when he signs it off. I won't do it."

"I also want him to think I am doing well and I want to impress him and I don't think I could ever say – he has never asked about my mental health and I don't think I could ever bring it up."

(d) Unsupportive behaviour from supervisors (n=10). This included being dismissive of results, always criticizing and never praising:

"You are constantly being told change this, change that, like there is never any positive you are doing well and it's a long journey. So to not have that: "you're doing really well here". [...]I think that feeds into the imposter syndrome."

A perceived lack of guidance or limited clarity in guidance given, as one participant summed up well metaphorically:

"Don't tell me to reflect on thinking about habitats, when what you actually want is a house built."

For some participants supervisors were viewed as lacking flexibility in their approach and 1 reported feeling caught in the middle of the wishes of the PhD supervisor and an industrial supervisor. It is also notable that there was a recognition by some (n=3) that supervisors were under considerable pressures and how these are passed on to their supervisees

"I think that members of staff, they are doing so much, so many things at the same time [...] and in the end they end up either not caring about the PhD students or being blunt or being brutal or being whatever."

"So you hire these fantastic scientists, who are incredibly smart, put them under all this pressure and then wonder why they are pressuring their group really hard. It's almost like a cycle of abuse. I imagine the stuff he [the supervisor] gets pressure wise is probably akin to the pressure he put on us".

Participant Suggestions

Supervisors should be spoken to about resilience so that *"they can talk to their students about it in a positive way"* and it can be embedded into every day conversations.

If you are going to ask a student *“How are you?”* it needs to be asked *“in such a way that they are not going to say “fine thank you”.”*

Supervisors should be trained how to supervise: *“I mean it’s helping them in their career development to become good people managers and to recognize that they are not just supervising a piece of research but they are supervising a person.”*

4. University Staff (other than Supervisors)

Participants from both UEA and UoS mentioned where staff beyond their supervisors had helped them and hence aided their resilience (n=5) and where others had negated that resilience. (n=2) This does not include Student Support Services (SSS), who are discussed separately in section 5 below. PGRs from the UEA mentioned security staff as well as staff in the Library, PGR Office and PGR Directors who had helped to *“incorporate changes”*. However, it was highlighted by one UEA participant that academics outside of the supervisory team had heavily criticised the PRG project even though they had successfully passed the their transfer panel:

“It was like, oh my goodness, like, I just got through my transfer panel and now you are kind of saying none of this is going to work or whatever. It was really difficult to have such conflicting opinions.”

1 PGR from UoS commented how supportive the Post Graduate School had been:

“The Post-Graduate School, has been brilliant in all the support. They can’t do more for you. So that is really good and that’s been great because you know you are doing the right thing, you are going down the right routes”.

5. Student Support Services

Of the UEA participants who commented on the service (n=6), although they viewed the availability of the service as helpful, all identified various problems. These included staff being unhelpful or *‘fobbing’* them off, limited treatments offered, unable to keep up with demand and being predominately focused on undergraduates.

Wanting to seek help from SSS a PGR was advised by their supervisor they were currently inundated with undergrads: *“I thought that’s wrong. We shouldn’t be saying actually the undergrads are more important than the post-grads. Everybody’s mental health is as important. And so the assumption persists that university campus services are not for us, we should just be able to get on with it and sort it out ourselves. It is quite interesting that the Courage Project is trying to dissolve that.”*

“But there was this sense of ‘either you’re not bad enough or we’re not that bothered’ I don’t really know. So you have to be in absolute crisis to be taken seriously and what you say you are experiencing is just PhD life. So I think there needs to be more kind of picking up on that stuff.”

A further participant from UoS commented on the lack of privacy in the support services space on their campus:

“You have to sit in a waiting room, which is behind a glass wall and everyone can see you are there. [...] I just don’t think I would do it.”

Participant Suggestion: UEA

To think about therapies other than counselling:

“It feels like there is a lot of push towards counseling and things but more things should be offered in terms of when you have a medical health issue coming up. That’s not the only therapy available to people and I’m not a big believer in counseling anyway, because I think it makes you focus too much on problems and not on resilience. So maybe thinking about other alternative forms of therapy.”

6. Working Culture and Environment

Several of the UEA participants (n=6) and all of the UoS participants (n=5) identified areas that challenged their resilience. There was a view held by both UEA PGRs (n=5) and UoS PGRs (n=2) that ATs and/or PGRs were undervalued.

“I think the narrative needs to change. I think there needs to be a bit of a cultural shift from “we don’t care about you” to “you are a valuable part of our community”.”

UEA ATs expressed frustration at assumptions being made that they would teach, being informed they had work at late notice, not being paid, having no contact with academics or other ATs teaching the same course. UoS PGRs (n=2) mentioned the exploitation of ATs:

“Don’t sort of exploit these people. Don’t make a martyr out of them as well because I think that’s just not the way to go. I think they can’t expect PhD students to work on the cheap for you or for nothing.”

The challenges of work life balance and the working culture were also raised by both UEA (n=2) and UoS (n=2). It was noted how being under “constant pressure” was accepted rather than questioning “can we do this better” and how “it’s OK to be exhausted”.

1 UEA participant mentioned that the senior executives should be held to account more:

“I think the powers that be need to be held to account. I think if they say “we are going to think about this”. Actually, you are going to think about this doesn’t mean anything to anybody. You need to tell us what you are going to do and when you are going to do it by. And if you don’t do it by that point you need to justify why you haven’t and tell us when it will be done across the board. You know, if you are going to set up a task force for something and say you are going to do something, you need to tell us why you are doing it, how you are going to do it and how it is going to be done. Not just we are thinking about it, or we are thinking about that.”

UoS PGRs (n=3) highlighted the benefits of the recently developed dedicated PGR space as being advantageous to mental wellbeing to have somewhere to go and talk to peers:

“Now we have the room here, over here in the library building, it’s so much better, because it lends itself more to that dynamic of students talking and sharing, brainstorming, you know issues, problems and finding ways of moving forward. So I think that’s been a lot better.”

Participant Suggestions: UEA

"I can see the increase in stuff, more of the walk and talk spaces. I think there needs to be more. Just more and more social stuff. The more I have spoken to other PhD students, I realise everyone feels the same."

[Talking of Senior Staff – vice chancellor etc.] *"They are like this kind of golden globe in a tower somewhere. Come and have lunch. Come and sit in the grad bar. [...] You don't lead by shutting yourself in an office pretending you know what's going on when really you don't."*

"I just think it's really important when this project is written up that it is not focused on the individual. I really would like to see a project that goes, we are challenging this at a higher level; we are challenging this from a cultural level, we are challenging this from, you know, from within the institution. We are taking what you have told us and we are pushing it back up. We are not taking what you told us and then saying 'do mindfulness training' – although that is important. That is going to mean nothing if the structure around them doesn't change."

Participant Suggestions: UoS

A written procedure for ATs *"just so that people know where they stand"*:

"I think there have got to be measures that make sure, if you like, across the board, across the institution, that you will treat your PhD students fairly and that they will be given the opportunities and given the rewards for any work that they do beyond the PhD. [...] From the ways we have chatted in the breakfast club and things like that, I think every department does things their own way and to me it is one of those things that isn't really monitored."

7. University Procedures, Resources and Information

University processes and procedures were highlighted across the majority of interviews (UEA n=11, UoS n=4) as influential barriers to resilience.

Funding for the PhD was viewed of a source of pressure by both UEA PGRs (n=2) and UoS PGRs (n=1). One PGR had been funded over 4 years and but this meant that as the fees were paid over three years meaning they had to *"work all time"* which was *"a challenge"* to their wellbeing. Conversely, those funded for three years found themselves needing to work in the final year which *"dragged the PhD out more"*. Restricted access to funding for conferences and lack of clarity in how to apply for conferences was also mentioned by UEA PGRs (n=3).

Other common areas of concern were IT support (UEA n=1, UoS n=1), lack of resources (UEA n=2, UoS n=1) and lack of practical information (UEA n=2, UoS n=1).

UEA participants (n=7) also raised concerns regarding the amount of bureaucracy in some areas but inadequate procedures for: providing information when starting the PhD, AT allocation, managing supervisors based in industry, booking holiday, the probationary review and submission process, the length of time taken to be told about the outcome of the viva.

"We would often ask our supervisor for time off and we would get "no" [...] The uni should make it that you actually have a mandatory minimum. It should be that you have to take at least some time off."

Particularly pertinent to UoS PGRs (n=4) were issues around lack of access to: parking, areas where staff sit and the PGR room when the library is closed. Also the difficulty in having to navigate two handbooks for the Progress Board:

“it’s just down to serious sensible time management and it’s not smart to read a 50 page article which most of it, it doesn’t apply to me.”

Participant Suggestions: UEA

Bureaucracy: for installing something on a computer:

“maybe the procedure can be easier. Like for example just a request away. Like for example you can have the code or password or something and then they just change it from time to time and when you request it they just send you an e-mail and done.”

To provide students with more information 1 participant was suggested that there should be *“training on what it means to do a PhD”*. A further participant added the concept on a *“day in the life of”*:

“When you get your position can they come and shadow someone in a lab or teaching, or whatever it may be, so they kind of know what they are letting themselves in for. So they think, ‘oh I have done a week of this. Can I sustain this for three or four years?’”

Processes to be developed for monitoring holidays and students to be made aware at induction that they cannot be refused holidays.

Processes which (a) gives the industrial supervisor a contact within the university other than the supervisor and (b) makes sure the industrial supervisor is made aware if the supervisee is off sick.

To avoid work being presented in a way not acceptable to examiners, *“clear guidance for examiners and supervisors.”*

Participant Suggestions: UoS

For the Progress Board: *“A check list. [...] Clearer instructions that aren’t hidden in pages and pages and pages.”*

Funding: *“I think the fees were spread with the expectation of four years – you know, same amount, they needn’t put them up – but same amount over four years so it matched the SFE funding that would make it easier because then there would be a little bit more to live on each month”*

Access to Staff: *We need a third way. We need something which is PGRs, which are more like staff than they are students, because we are a wholly different crowd. [...] I am personally trying to push quite hard to get some kind of charter or some kind of, whatever you want to call it, policy, best practice, something to define how the university should view its PGRs. Because right now it is just a whole load of individuals who are in a framework and the framework says is staff or student. So when they have to make their myriad of decisions they go, well obviously you are a student.*

8. Transferable Skills

Of the 18 participants 10 felt that they had transferable skills from previous jobs and 4 felt that they had transferable skills from previous training that would help with their resilience during their postgraduate research.

9. Extra Curricular Activities – Academic

It was noted that the expectation to be involved in extra curricular activity, such as teaching and conferences added significant time pressure. However, being able to share experiences with other academics around the challenges faced was viewed as beneficial (n=2):

“ That is probably the most resilience building thing I have done, because I realised I am not alone.”

10. Extra Curricular Activities – Non-Academic, Mental and Physical Wellbeing

PGRs identified a range of non-academic activities that were supportive for their mental wellbeing. Half took part in physical activities (n=9). Other activities included volunteering, cooking and eating well, yoga (external to that at UEA), having a positive list to look at, on line games and massage.

A number of activities arranged within the Courage project were discussed. For the UEA: yoga for the mind, mindfulness, walk and talk, PhDiggers, Running Group, Emotional Resilience Workshop, Action Learning, Bullet Journaling, Mental Health First Aid.

“She [the yoga teacher] has obviously done her PhD and it was just brilliant to be able to come into a room and have a practice tailored to those stresses that she understands, not just a blanket thing of chill out and relax, but she will actually acknowledge what those particular things are. So that was really nice to have a teacher who, as I say, has had that experience as well.”

“I did the mental health first aid training recently and that’s just been rolled out. I mean like every person in the world should do it, but like it should just be something that is really encouraged because it made me reflect on my own stuff and also made me very aware of the impact of the PhD more broadly on people. I thought it was excellent [...]I definitely thought a lot about strategies for my own well-being in that. So I didn’t go in thinking about resilience, but it definitely helped with that.”

For UoS: Mindfulness, Walk and Talk, Well-Being Day, UEA day, PhD Mentor Scheme, Breakfast Club and Week to Write. UoS PGRs (n=3) identified that the Courage Project activities had supported the development of community.

“Certainly I think the Courage Project is creating a community here within the postgrad and I think that is down to what [The PGR Placement Rep] has done. Really I do think we are more cohesive as a group of people because of those opportunities.”

However, 1 participant expressed frustration that the fundamental issues were not being addressed:

“Nothing addresses the fundamental frustrations or inequalities, or limitations, or workloads or access to facilities or resources. You know, none of these things are addressed and those are the things that would actually help. That would actually decrease the stressful forces in

the first place. [...] The approach seems to be 'let's just paint it a different colour and everyone will be happy' rather than solving the fundamental brokenness."

The more detailed responses for each of the activities will be reported as part of the report for Strand C (sports, fitness and social activity).

Participant Suggestions: UEA

It should be mandatory to get some PPD credits from a wellbeing activity which would also give it legitimacy with supervisors (n=2):

"If it was a compulsory thing, that would probably make it better. I think if it was like – like when we started we had to get 30 credits in PPD – if it was like you're starting but you have to do resilience training or you have to do this, so we can start understanding from the beginning mental health becomes a priority, maybe that would work. [...] because if it is mandatory it has to be taken seriously by the staff, by the supervisors as well."

Other suggestions included doing the activities at different times and also not just on the main campus but over near the hospital as well; going to PGR rooms and talking face to researchers to tell them what is going on and enabling people to put names to faces; running beginners courses where you are not expected to be an expert but can learn a new skill or language.

Participant Suggestions UoS

Again, varying times of activities was suggested. The point was also made that that activities should not be pre-emptively cancelled:

"The only thing that irks me is that sometimes things either get pre-emptively cancelled, which I think sends the wrong message actually, setting something up and then saying not enough people got back to me so I cancelled it. I think it's a bad move because what I have learned from trying to get groups going and get these kind of things is that you need to build habits and you need people to know that some things happen at a particular time in a particular place so that if they suddenly get a free afternoon or whatever then they can come along and do it."

Not unrelated to this point, another participant suggested having one person that is designated to turn up at a particular event.

A course that would enable PGRs to help their peers:

"You know, how to be able to have a conversation that is helpful to people but contains it in a way that is manageable as well."

11. PPDs and Other Courses/Activities

UEA participants showed a limited awareness of the PPD training opportunities available around resilience that already exist at the university. Participants did not tend to look at PPD modules run by schools other than their own. Training provided by Careers Central, LET Writing Retreats and PGR Conferences were identified as helpful and a support place to share experiences.

UoS participants reported finding the Induction Day and 'Living with the PhD' training helpful. However, it was identified by some (n=2) that it could be challenging to find relevant training, particularly across disciplines:

"I find in terms of training that it's been harder this year to get the relevant training in. Whether that's because of where I am, because I am not a beginner anymore and I am not approaching write up, so I am in that half-way stage. But in the first year I found that training generally, I could access training that was subject based very easily. Now it all seems to have gone down this Vitae path of competencies and this that and the other and I just don't find that useful."

"A lot of what's run is run by the social sciences side and education department academics [...] So sometimes it's not always pitched, the training is not always pitched for the breadth of disciplines. It tends to come from basically the good will of one team."

Participant Suggestions: UEA

More cross-school activities.

Resilience training at the writing retreats as they often have mindfulness session during the breaks:

"I wonder if there could be a resilience activity that could be embedded into the writing retreats? I am just thinking you have kind of got a captive audience there as well, which is quite nice. You know, you might have 20 – 25 PGR students that might not necessarily come to anything else because they might not be aware of it or they might not recognize the importance of it or whatever."

Participant Suggestions: UoS

In the future possibly divide training into those that are just starting and just want "the basics" and those that are further on and want to "think more laterally".

12. Barriers to Well Being Activities and Courses

The most common barrier to accessing wellbeing activities and courses was time constraints and difficulty in prioritizing wellbeing activities above PhD as a priority (n=16). A small number mentioned not knowing anybody (n=3). Other barriers mentioned by one participant in each case were: campus centric, unsympathetic peers, lack of trust, not wanting to be the only one turn up, not addressing the issues, group of people complaining, mobility and paperwork to be done in advance.

Appendix A: Summary of Previous Research

SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS RESEARCH

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Office Space	<p>Having shared office spaces leads to a sense of community</p> <p>Also provides a place where mutual support is given</p>	<p>Lack of space leads to isolation</p> <p>Can also mean frequently being interrupted or bumping into undergraduates</p>	<p>Fellow PGRs can be a source of support (in addition to family and friends)</p>	<p>Spending lots of time alone and not embedded in a research of student community can lead to isolation</p>	<p>Shared wok space helps develop a PGR community and enables peer support</p>	<p>Isolation can challenge motivation and self-management</p>
Socialising with Peers and Networking	<p>Helps prevent isolation</p> <p>Aids sense of community and well-being</p> <p>Helps to reduce stress levels through discussion</p> <p>Buddies helpful to those without contacts</p> <p>Conferences and workshops makes research feel</p>	<p>Many events based around alcohol – those that don't drink feel excluded</p> <p>Can sometimes be cliques, making some feel unwelcome</p> <p>Don't always fit in with work schedules</p> <p>Events often concentrated at start of academic year</p> <p>Lack of mixing across Faculties/Departments</p>	<p>Dean of Students writing club and writing retreats were viewed as helpful for tackling personal difficulties</p>		<p>Social media can connect to a community of practice</p> <p>Taking a peer led approach to mentoring builds a community more directly within the PGR Cohort</p> <p>Writing groups can address lack of confidence in academic voice and identity</p>	<p>Social media can expose people to criticism.</p> <p>Social media can become a distraction and facilitate negative demoralizing experiences</p>

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
	worthwhile Quadram Institute away days	meant some did not feel part of the community and also that they missed out on things PGR Areas often 'swamped' with undergrads What spaces there are often close during vacation			Social events, group training programs helps develop a PGR community and enables peer support, both emotional and for solving practical problems	
Supervisor Relationship	Can act as catalyst towards integration into research community Can actively encourage participation in events – helps to create positive feelings Positive relationship aids motivation Can be approached re: personal	Can act as barrier towards integration into research community Can prevent training thus denying academic and social/peer support Negative relationship demotivating and unsupportive Not enough academic guidance Not always good at noticing there is a	Talking to supervisors re: problems can be helpful Demanding positive feedback	If students have problems they often don't want to talk to supervisor as scared of showing weakness Lack of positive feedback, reassurance and constructive criticism Some supervisors don't seem to care if their studies are having an affect on their students	Forming a good relationship can lead to increased confidence in the supervisee Aligning supervisory style by using a graphical aid to negotiate expectations lead to greater confidence in developing autonomy Planning emotional support is key Gratitude practices	Female students most at risk of relational problems

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
	matters/mental health and provide support	mental health problem Can sometimes be too busy		Lack of structured work plan and clear guidance	helped students feel more confident and resilient which in turn improved relational quality	
Organisational Issues		<p>Not consistently defined as staff or Student</p> <p>Lack of access to CSED courses</p> <p>Part-time PGRs not always treated the same as full time PGRs</p> <p>Those based in NBIs often get different info to those on campus</p> <p>Lack of guidance re: UEA procedures</p> <p>Invisibility of PGR Directors</p> <p>Lack of support in finding suitable accommodation and also practical aspects of living in Norwich</p>		Can feel as if in a limbo of semi-independence – neither student or professional	<p>Developing a sense of academic identity, career progression and personal and professional development are all key to successful wellbeing</p> <p>Coaching sessions can offer a neutral space to help resolve issues in the relationship between supervisor and student, leading to increased confidence and time management</p>	

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
		Those arriving at different times of year felt they did not get support				
Funding		<p>Financial issues common – especially with self-funded students, leading to stress</p> <p>Self-funding students often have to juggle more than one job</p> <p>Those who are funded find funding does not cover 4th year</p> <p>Inequality - CHASE students get more perks/opportunities in comparison to other students</p> <p>International self-funding, adding to pressure</p> <p>Self-funded students often miss out on social/sports activities due to lack of money</p>	<p>Doing AT work can have a positive effect, gaining recognition and getting in contact with other PGRs</p>	<p>Self-funding students particularly had financial difficulties</p> <p>Needing to work leads to high stress, isolation and exclusion from social circles</p>		

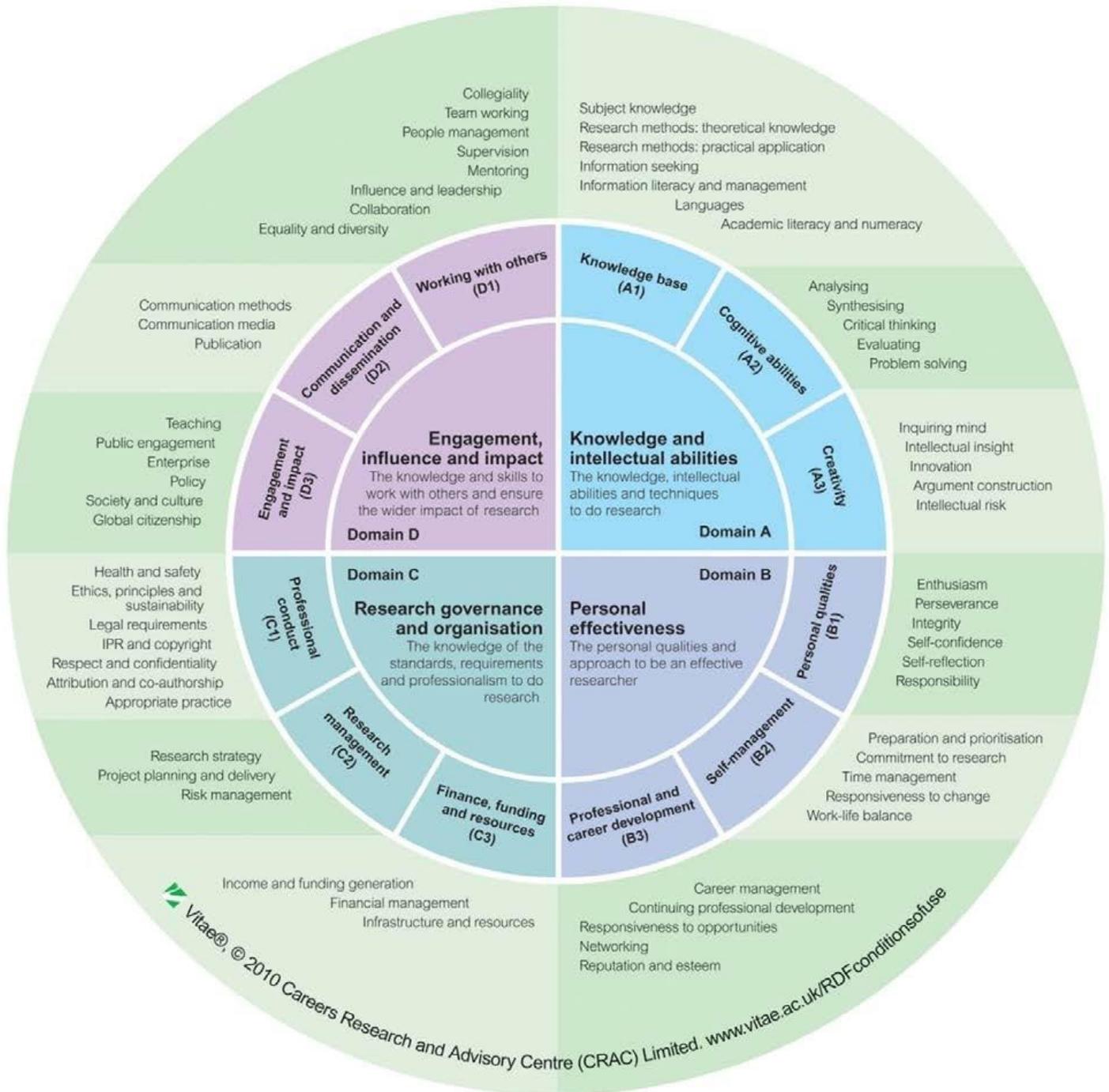
AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Workload and Peer Pressure	<p>Lab work means it is easy to switch off when not there</p> <p>Flexibility to work at home</p>	<p>High workload impacts on work-life balance</p> <p>Pressure from peers and supervisors re: working hours</p>		<p>Meeting deadlines and pressure of performance in general can affect students</p>	<p>Participation in formal training helped students to start writing earlier</p> <p>Cognitive training on Time management training, writing plans and realistic expectations can reduce stress</p>	<p>Pressure of completing modules in addition to PhD</p>
Imposter Syndrome	<p>Religion can play a positive role</p>	<p>Comparing self to peers</p> <p>Rejection of articles can make students question validity of work</p> <p>Non-white students not represented as well, leading to feelings of being sidelined</p>		<p>Comparing self to others can lead to purposeful isolation to avoid a negative self-image.</p>		
Cultural Factors		<p>East Asian Students can feel isolated as they are not around people that speak their language</p> <p>East Asian students</p>			<p>Mentoring approach provides positive outcome for both mentees and mentors</p> <p>Fellow international</p>	<p>Similarity between mentee and mentor can limit integration</p>

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
		<p>feel pressure from home to be 'the best'</p> <p>Cultural shock re: weather</p>			<p>students can benefit from peer support because they might have limited social networks and cultural challenges</p>	
Political Climate		<p>Brexit - not much information available</p>				
Harassment and Misconduct	<p>Male student had received positive comments re: being a parent</p>	<p>Female student with children felt undermined due to comments about being a parent</p> <p>Female students received sexual harassment and bullying.</p> <p>Cannot remain anonymous if wish to make a complaint. Only solution is to change supervisor</p>				
Participation in Sports and Societies	<p>Positive for health, wellbeing, fitness and relieving stress</p>	<p>Often focus is on undergrads, therefore mature students do not participate.</p> <p>Timings also based around undergrads.</p>	<p>Exercise and yoga have been found helpful by PGRs for tackling adverse mental wellbeing</p>			

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
		<p>Not enough time to commit to schedules required for some sports teams</p> <p>Too expensive</p> <p>Not always well advertised</p>				
Student Support and UMS		<p>Lack of awareness of support available Support often targeted at undergrads</p> <p>Long waiting lists for counseling</p> <p>Only four sessions of counseling offered, which is not enough</p> <p>Drop in sessions late in the day</p> <p>Difficult to get help via NHS/UMS</p>	<p>Counselling service was seen as form of support</p>	<p>Lack of information re: where to find support</p>	<p>Focus groups can be useful for sharing experiences</p> <p>Positive psychology intervention can lead to reduced anxiety, stress and fewer wellbeing problems</p>	<p>Embarrassment and uncertainty can act as barriers to seeking mental health support</p>
On-Line Support for Well-being	<p>Can be a positive thing for those too shy to talk in person</p>	<p>Shifts responsibility to individual</p> <p>Those with mental</p>				

AREA IDENTIFIED	FOCUS GROUP REPORT		DEV REPORT		LITERATURE REVIEW	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
	Case studies can be positive because it shows people have been through a similar thing and you are not the only one	<p>health issues often need human contact</p> <p>Case studies not useful as mental health is very personal</p> <p>Those who don't use Apps can be left out</p> <p>Low awareness of UEA nightline</p>				
Personal Issues				Personal health issues, multiple responsibilities with family member, work can all have adverse effects	Action Learning sets can provide a space for sharing problems in a personal way – listening to others can put problems into perspective	Presenting personal issues can be challenging and emotionally draining

Appendix B: The Researcher Development Framework



Appendix C: Main Questions asked at Interview

The interview will open with some general questions:

How are you finding being a PGR?

As you know, the Courage Project is looking at the mental wellbeing of PGRs.

We know what we should do to maintain our physical health. Would you say that you invest in your psychological health as much as your physical health?

As you know I am interested in resilience of PGRs

There are so many different definitions of resilience out there, I wondered what the term means to you?

What external factors (e.g. outside the PGR experience) help support your resilience?

What external factors negate your resilience?

Is there anything that you feel has tested your resilience as a PGR within the UEA?

We do not want you feel that the onus is entirely on you.

Is there anything that you think the UEA as in institution can do that you think would help avoid situations arising that test your resilience?

I'd like to focus on training now

Have you ever thought about seeking out any training courses or activities to help with your resilience?

UEA: Are you aware of any [other] activities/PPD Modules that can help with resilience?

UoS: How did you find the Induction to Postgraduate research: Getting started/Managing the Supervisory Relationship/Living with a PhD

Are you aware of workshops such as the Emotional Resilience workshop/ Action Learning workshop run by the Courage Project?

Have you been to any of the activities run by the Courage Project?

Are there any reasons or perceived barriers to you going to any/some of the course activities?

Is there anything else that perhaps we have not talked about that you would like to add about resilience?

References

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