

Placement Wellbeing Toolkit

Supporting student
wellbeing on placement

Developed by the Wellbeing
Service and Physiotherapy
programme at Queen
Margaret University.

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interactive



**Queen Margaret
University**
EDINBURGH

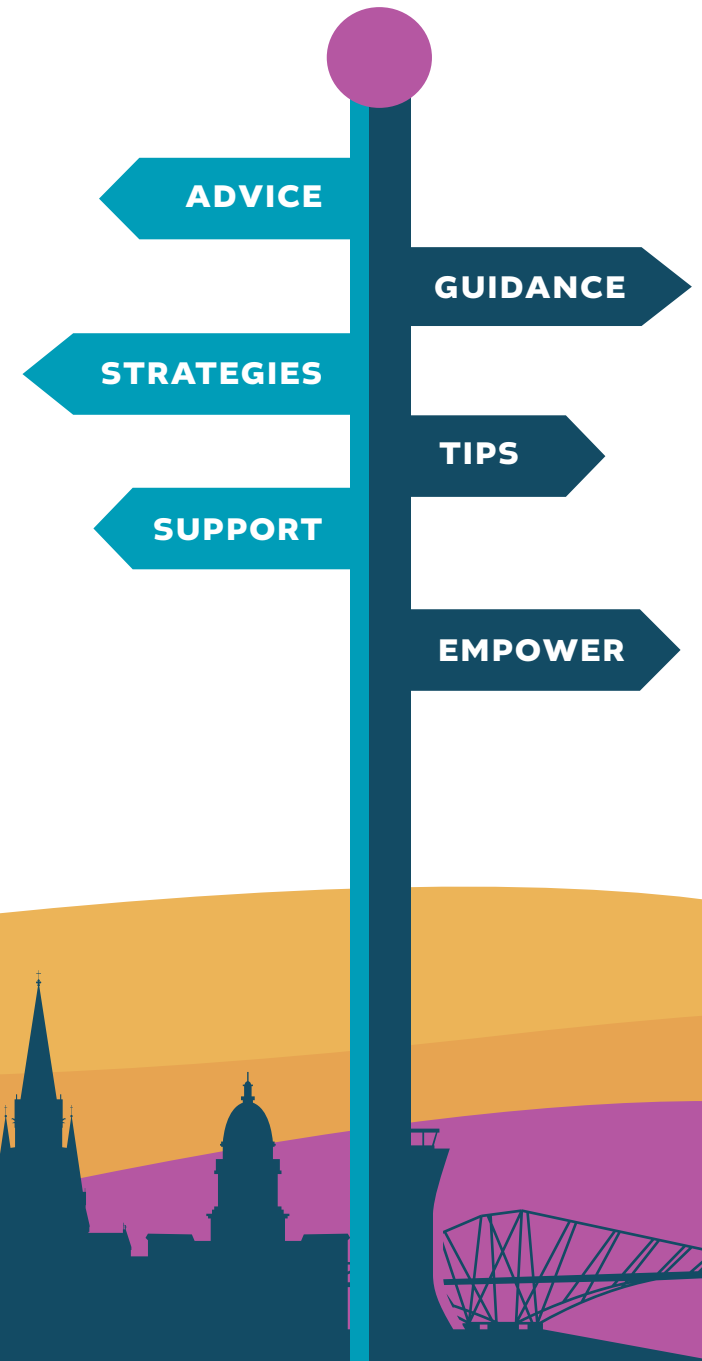
Placement Wellbeing Toolkit

Nurture your resilience and wellbeing on placement

The aim of this Wellbeing Toolkit is to help you feel prepared and supported whilst on placement.

Ultimately, we want you to enjoy your placement and feel that it positively meets your expectations, so you can fulfil your potential.

The Toolkit will also give you the opportunity to reflect on your experiences, reinforcing your positive coping strategies and helping you plan for future placement challenges you may face.



Student feedback on the Placement Wellbeing Toolkit

Signposting to additional support was really helpful. It was essential to know this information as it helped reduce my initial anxiety. I think this toolkit is really useful for students going on placement.

Hannah, student occupational therapist

The toolkit encouraged me to think about my wellbeing and coping strategies far deeper than I would have without it. It was very helpful to talk through the toolkit within a small group to allow me to think about things I wouldn't have thought of.

Collette, student podiatrist

I think the toolkit is a great thing to complete prior to placement, it helped me feel prepared. It was great to remind yourself how to look after your wellbeing.

Asif, student radiographer

Using the wellbeing toolkit on placement and knowing how to access support if I needed it helped my anxiety levels.

Abiba, student dietitian

"I thought the toolkit was great to make students aware of what they might come across on placement but also to give them ways to deal with these situations when they arise."

Sam, student nurse

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How to use this toolkit

This toolkit is for you to use as you prepare for placement and to continue to use throughout your placement experiences.

To make the most of this toolkit you should use it to support a discussion with your fellow students. This may be organised by the programme team, but you can also organise this yourselves.

This toolkit is interactive, when you see this  you can follow the link for more information. When you see this  it indicates an activity for you to complete.



1. Placement Expectations

Whilst it is good to focus on the positives that placement experiences can bring, we understand that going on placement can feel overwhelming and stressful.

Placements may be in a new location far from the students' University campus, so there are travel challenges as well as financial stress if you need to find accommodation.

Students might worry about being assessed whilst on placement as well as their ability to cope personally with the challenges of placement. Away from peer, family and friend support as well as face to face University staff support this can also contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety. On top of this, students may be juggling other responsibilities, for example, childcare/caring roles as well as personal events.

Students may have accessed our QMU Disability Service and have concerns about how their diagnosis may affect their placement experience.

The following activity will help you identify any worries you have relating to placement.





Toolkit activity 1:

This is an activity for you to complete before you go on placement

Concerns I have relating to my placement

For example: There won't be anyone else from my course on my placement at the same time and I feel worried about this and not knowing anyone.

Actions to take

For example: I will set up a support chat with a few other students on placement and I am going to raise this with my Placement Coordinator next time we meet. I might also talk it through with my PAT.



Follow this link for some ideas to get you started:
[Examples of Pre-Placement Student Concerns and Stresses](#)

Easing my concerns

For example: I could set up a 'WhatsApp' group with students who are on my course who will also be on placement and we could support each other, we could arrange a weekly 'Zoom' session to talk through how things are. I know I can rely on family for support through this too.

For example: This will help me to feel less isolated. It will help me to feel connected to my peers and supported. We can share experiences and support each other through our placements.



Toolkit activity 2:

This is an activity for you to complete before you go on placement



Nursing students discuss
First Healthcare Placement



Physiotherapy Student 10 tips
to consider on Placement

Write down what you are looking forward to on placement.

For example: I am looking forward to the opportunity to learn and to apply my learning into practice.

For example: I am looking forward to meeting practicing professionals and learning more about their professional role.

Write down ideas to keep a positive outlook about challenges.

For example: I know there might be things I do wrong or get wrong, but I will focus on this as being a positive and learn from any mistakes, I will remind myself it's a learning opportunity and I am a student.

For example: I will try to reflect daily on the positive experiences of the day and give myself a positive focus on what went well.

What attributes and qualities do you have to offer on your placement? Start each sentence with 'I can' or 'I have'

For example: I have very good organisational skills, I can show this on placement. This will benefit my clinical working as well as my note taking, assessments & reflective learning.

For example: I have been told I am a good 'people' person, I am interested in others and really enjoy meeting new people. This will promote my relationships with colleagues, team members and patients.

2. Exploring placement challenges

We can't always predict and prepare for all aspects of our placement experience. One thing that you can rely on is that the unexpected will occur!

The following section helps you to think about how you might respond to some common placement challenges identified by students.

'The feeling of being assessed all the time'

'Staffing shortages can create a stressful atmosphere and work pressure'

'Having to keep all my emotions inside when something upsetting happens, until there is a space to debrief'

'Placement can be very tiring as you are working so hard'

'Juggling other responsibilities and commitments whilst on placement, for example children/family life'

'Maintaining appointment times and managing a caseload with clients who have multiple, complex issues'

'Responding when a patient shares distressing information'

'Coping with distressing situations, for example, the death of a patient'

'Geographical logistics of accommodation/travel to and from placement'

Coping with death



Video of nursing student discussing her thoughts and feelings around coping with patient death

Coping with the death of a patient

This can feel uncomfortable to think about and not something, prior to placement, you maybe feel you want to dwell on. However, it is best to give yourself some time to think about this and work through how you might identify with your feelings if it was to occur and any coping strategies you think would help you at the time.

Worrying about a patient's diagnosis, prognosis, relatives

This is understandable. Any healthcare professional would admit that this can be particularly hard not to do and 'switch off' from. Sharing your worries with someone can really help. It may help you to do this with someone in the workplace that also knows the patient.

Trigger

The death of a patient may trigger your own loss of a loved one, this is really understandable and can bring strong emotions to the surface which may be upsetting for you. Again acknowledge and share this with support whether accessing University support or support from your Supervisor/colleagues on placement.

Panic Attack

If you find yourself with an acute anxiety attack or 'fight or flight' mode at any time on placement the best thing for you to do is excuse yourself and have a moment, whether that is going to the bathroom or finding a quiet space somewhere. It can also help if you can talk through with someone what might have triggered your response.

Coping with death

Sharing your feelings

If you can share your emotions with someone at the time and it is appropriate to do so, this is a good opportunity to talk it through. Even if you manage to do this it would be a good idea to talk again about your feelings when you have your next session with your practice educator.

If you can also talk through your feelings with a close friend or family member then this will help you work through and express your thoughts. If you don't have someone close to you that you feel able to share with then you do have support staff at the University that you can contact (for example the Wellbeing Adviser or your PAT).

Remember to maintain patient confidentiality at all times.



Managing our feelings

It is okay to feel upset, to cry, to process what you feel and to not feel that you must 'block' your emotional response. However, on placement, we do need to be professional, this means finding your space when appropriate to express these feelings.

Your professional role and your limitations

It is a good idea prior to placement and during your placement that you consistently remind yourself that you are providing a professional role and this does have limitations. It is also good to remind yourself and accept that death is something in your line of work that you will encounter and deal with.

Active listening and empathy

This is an opportunity to practice your listening and empathy skills, silence can be very powerful whilst showing physical signs that you are listening and there for the patient.

Professional role

You can highlight in a sensitive manner your professional role to a patient whilst directing them to other support services/professionals if relevant. Don't feel pressurised into giving advice or support which is out-with your professional role or that you aren't qualified to do.

Managing challenging encounters with patients or carers

Patients and carers accessing services may have feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration which can at times be directed towards you or your team. Handling situations like this is a skill which is developed with experience, however these suggestions may help you to manage situations:

Here and Now

Try to maintain the conversation on the focus of the session, your role in assisting the patient.

Sign Post

Signposting patients to other support services or suggesting that you will feed back on their behalf to the relevant key person involved in their care (eg. GP, Nurse, practice educator) can be very reassuring and proactive.

Post Session Debrief

Debrief with support staff/colleague or supervisor, if this can't take place immediately afterwards then make notes to record any issues raised by the patient. Record appropriately any issues raised in the patient notes, although remember to remain objective and state the facts only.



Effective Listening and
Observational Skills



Communication, Difficult &
Challenging Conversations

Visualisation

This can help to maintain an image of calm even if you aren't feeling it. Visualise the calm, confident professional that you want to be (or if there is a colleague you can base the visualisation on) this can help to calm your feelings or nerves in the moment.

Pause

After a difficult situation always pause. If this means going to find a quiet space for 5 minutes or excusing yourself to the bathroom then do this. Writing your feelings down/record relating to the situation can also help.

De-Stress

What works for you? Do it! You might be able to incorporate some breathing exercises/ mindfulness into the immediate moment or you might need to wait and plan a 'de-stress' walk or run later in the day.

Reward

Remind yourself there will be conversations or situations which are 'difficult', Reward yourself, congratulate yourself and keep learning!

Reflection

After a difficult session with a patient reflect about your state of mind. Were you present in the moment and fully focused? Did it raise any upsetting issues for you?

Managing challenging encounters with patients or carers

Limited time with clients with multiple issues

This section acknowledges that many different issues may arise in your interactions with patients and offers some advice to help you manage these situations in a supportive way.

1. Introduction

When you introduce yourself do so with an emphasis on your time limit and the focus of the session, however, you can highlight that any outstanding issues not addressed will be covered next session/follow-up.

Summarise your session with the patient and suggest you will mention some of their other concerns to their GP or your supervisor to see if there is any other support they can access. You could also check if you can drop them a follow-up call or email with information links, resources etc.

4. Phrases

Prepare and practice some sentences and phrases now that you will feel comfortable and confident in using with patients, this can help you feel prepared, professional and confident.

2. Off-Loading

Don't panic if a patient wants to 'off-load' and share with you their many concerns and issues, allow this to happen, listen with care and empathy and then focus on your professional role and the specifics and positives of what support you can offer them.

Try not to get drawn in to discussing in detail aspects which aren't relevant to your intervention or to share your own personal experiences/stories.
'I am so sorry but we are time limited today so if it's okay for now can we focus on...'

3. Multidisciplinary

Where appropriate you can signpost the patient to other support services or disciplines which they may or may not already be accessing. 'I would like to offer my support specifically with.....however, for your other issues like....I would recommend you speak with.....or I shall pass on your concerns to.....'

5. Ending

Unfortunately we have run out of time, I have enjoyed meeting you so much and next time we can definitely focus on....' Or 'I am so sorry we didn't get the opportunity to discuss in today's session but I will make a note for us to focus on this next time or pass this on to my colleague who will be able to focus on this with you next time'.

3. Your Personal Wellbeing Plan

The purpose of developing your personal toolkit now is to prepare you for transitional times, like going on placement. You can plan and prepare your toolkit to respond to this, creating a plan that will fit into your time on placement helping you to manage challenging situations and look after your wellbeing.

When you return to university post-placement you can review your wellbeing plan and alter your routine and strategies to fit in to university life.

We want to identify strategies that nourish our whole selves which we maintain and practice on a daily/weekly or regular basis dependant on the strategy. For example, have a look at this image encapsulating factors which can influence our sense of 'Wellbeing'.





Toolkit activity 3:

Does the wheel of wellbeing highlight any areas to you that you feel aren't currently in balance? Write down your thoughts about the wheel of wellbeing. Think about your current circumstances and how placement may impact your wellbeing.

For example: I am away from close family and friends in order to be at University and I am feeling isolated and lonely at times....

For example: I am focusing on my academic studies right now and find I have little time for healthy nutrition/exercise, but I have a good group of friends and I feel really connected.



Managing work-life balance

When challenges occur in our lives, we often stop the activities which de-stress us, nurture our bodies and minds and help us cope.

It is important that when these challenges or disruptions enter our lives we respond by maintaining our positive coping strategies which nurture our wellbeing.

You may identify with different strategies at different times. For example, if in general you sleep well, have a positive sleep pattern and routine you might not pay a lot of focus to 'nurturing' this aspect of your health. However, it is because you exercise daily, eat well, drink lots of fluids, limit evening 'blue light' time and follow a good routine that you sleep so well. So, if something disrupts your ability to exercise and eat well you may find your sleep quality is also affected.

The following activity will help you to develop your personal toolkit. Strategies you identify here can help you maintain your wellbeing whilst on placement. You can review your personal toolkit when you return to university and continue to use this for upcoming placements and as you progress through university life.





Toolkit activity 4:

Creating your personal toolkit. Consider your wellbeing strategies – these are personal to you and can be many or few.

Strategies I currently use that help me

For Example: I use a meditation and mindfulness app every day.

For Example: I like to exercise daily, the gym, or a run or walk.

How this helps me

For Example: It calms my busy head and helps reduce my anxiety levels.

For Example: It energises me, helps me de-stress and can make me feel more positive and calm.

How I feel when I don't use this strategy

For Example: I feel more anxious and overwhelmed, I don't cope with challenges as well.

For Example: I can feel more tired, tense and less motivated to do other things like my academic work.

How I will do this whilst I am on placement

For Example: I will use the App when I travel to and from my placement as positive relaxation time.

For Example: I will cycle from the train station to the hospital. I could also have a walk around the grounds in my lunch break.



Podcast the Happiness Lab



QMU Wellbeing Service 'Resilience'



'Student Minds' suggestions for coping strategies

Your personal wellbeing schedule

Think about the balance of activities and strategies that you have – are you focusing all aspects of your whole self, mental, physical and emotional wellbeing?

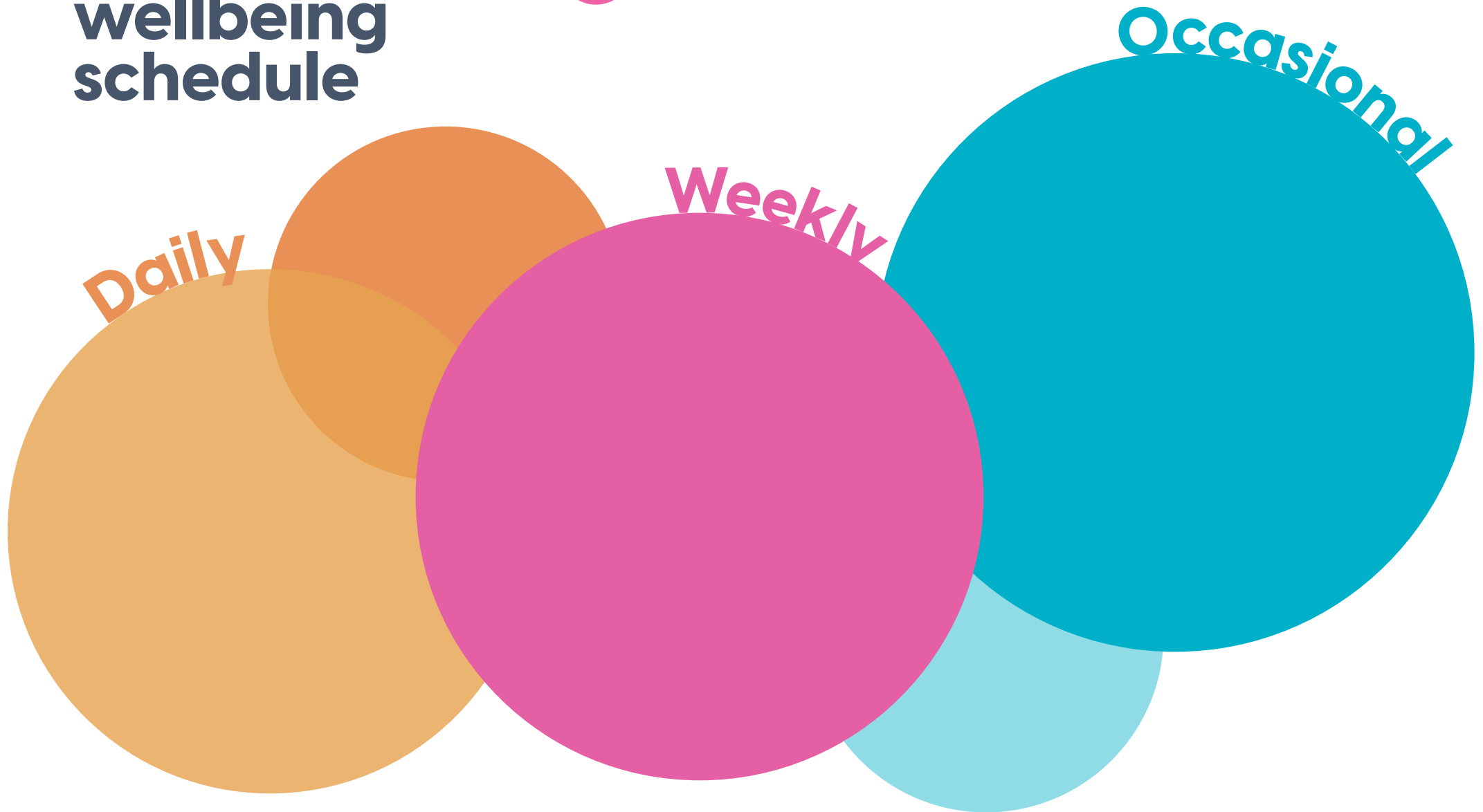
It may help you to create a plan of your wellbeing activities that you will commit to on a regular basis. Think about the balance of activities and strategies that you have – are you focusing all aspects of your whole self, mental, physical and emotional wellbeing? Many activities combine a holistic nurturing impact, for example, a walk in nature may energise your mental, physical and emotional self. Here is an example:



Your personal wellbeing schedule



Toolkit activity 5:



4. Reflection

It might be helpful for you to consider and reflect on your placement experience, consolidating the challenges you faced and how you overcame and managed these.

Did you manage to shift your focus around a perceived challenge from 'I won't/I can't' to a process of planning and managing these challenges.

For Example: 'I had anxiety around feeling that I wouldn't be 'ready' for my placement'.

Did this process lead you to feel more confident in your ability to cope and manage?

For Example: 'I focused on the speciality making sure I had done preparation and background reading which helped me feel prepared, I reminded myself of the qualities I had to bring to my placement. I wrote these down to focus me when I was feeling anxious'.

What were the main threats to wellbeing whilst on placement?

Working full time on placement with a long commute made it hard for me to stay healthy. I would be so tired, I would just come home and eat pizza which made me feel worse. Next time I will prep healthy meals at the weekend to see me through the next week.

What do I need to think about to help me plan for the next placement?

I knew that combining placement and paid work at the weekends would be hard. I started prepping meals at the weekend to make sure I had healthy food for the whole week, which helped me to stay well. Next time I am on placement I need to think about fitting in some exercise into my routine such as a lunchtime walk.



4. Reflection

It might be helpful for you to consider and reflect on your placement experience, consolidating the challenges you faced and how you overcame and managed these.



5. Noticing when you're not coping

As we identified before, a deterioration in our mental health may also have an impact on our physical and emotional health and vice versa. For Example, if we are experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety this may impact on our physical energy levels, sleep pattern and appetite. It may also cause us to feel teary, angry and intolerant of others.



Toolkit activity 6:

Write down signs that you might not be coping well or your wellbeing is deteriorating. These could be physical signs or changes in your emotion e.g. not sleeping well or being snappy with loved ones.

" I have disrupted sleep waking regularly, I get palpitations, I feel irritable and tearful, I am tempted to isolate and cut myself off, I don't feel like exercising, I want to hide under the duvet all day and I get tension headaches..."

Shakir, student
occupational therapist



[Signs of Stress – Mind](#)



['Mental Health Foundation' sign and symptoms of anxiety](#)



[NHS Inform, information on different mental health conditions](#)

Here are some suggestions to consider when you feel you are struggling...

Revisit the strategies you identified in your personal wellbeing plan and check that you are implementing these. Especially if you are feeling overwhelmed and stressed it is good to 'up' the nurturing activities, self-compassion and kindness are key, this can re-energise us and allow us a pause to recharge.

Talking to someone about how you feel can also be supportive, if you have a friend, family member or colleague whom you trust and who is a good listener then it might be an idea to share.

Are there any 'unhealthy' coping strategies that you may have adopted recently or have crept in? For example ..are you drinking too much alcohol? Staying up really late and not having 'time out' from blue screen/social media? Are you under or over eating? Have you isolated yourself from friends/family recently?

Has there been a trigger to your deterioration, something that you can identify may have led you to feel that you aren't coping? If you can identify what this has been or a series of events that may have overwhelmed you then this can help in working through how to get yourself back on track. What can you do now about things to stop yourself from feeling worse? How can you respond to your situation?

Focusing on any solutions to the situation you are in may help you to feel that you are 'doing' something about it – it may be that solutions won't take immediate effect but it can help to know that you have a plan in place to help alleviate how you are feeling.



[Voluntary Mental Health and Wellbeing Score Tool](#)



[Worry Decision Tree Psychology Tools](#)

6. Next steps to take if you are struggling...

You might want to consider engaging with support at QMU and sometimes acknowledging that you are struggling to someone can bring enormous relief.

You can speak with your practice educator and/or your PAT. You can also access our professional support services.

[QMU Wellbeing Service](mailto:wellbeing@qmu.ac.uk) - email: wellbeing@qmu.ac.uk

[QMU Counselling Service](mailto:counselling@qmu.ac.uk) - email: counselling@qmu.ac.uk

[QMU Student Support Services](#)

Please remember if you are on clinical placement you can still access these support services.

It may also be an idea to make an appointment with your GP to share with them how you are feeling.

Additionally, there are many resources and links online which you may find helpful and supportive – these are listed in the Resource Section.



7. Resources

If at any time you feel you are in crisis and require urgent support for your mental health you should make an appointment with your GP. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger please call '999'.



**Edinburgh Mental
Health Crisis Support**

Listening Support

Breathing Space Support Line & online resources
Mind helpline and Support

Financial

SAAS Forms for Funding Support on Clinical Placements
Financial support around Healthcare placements
QMU funding advice and support

Stress Management

Preparing for and managing stress on Clinical Placement
NHS Inform – advice for managing your stress levels
NHS Time management tips and advice and managing stress

Anxiety

Advice and tips for managing anxiety and panic attacks
NHS advice on anxiety
Anxiety in young people
Mindfulness advice
NHS Inform Self-Help Guide to Living with Anxiety

Sleep

NHS advice for Sleep
Sleep advice

Student Specific Wellbeing Support

Student Minds, The Wellbeing Thesis, Support for Post Graduate Student
Student Minds, Looking after your Mental Wellbeing Resources
QMU Wellbeing Service

Resources

If at any time you feel you are in crisis and require urgent support for your mental health you should make an appointment with your GP. If you or someone you know is in immediate danger please call '999'.



**Edinburgh Mental
Health Crisis Support**

LGBTQ+ Support

[Student Minds advice and support for LGBTQ+ students](#)
[LGBTQ+ Support and Helpline Scotland](#)

Support specific for 16-25 yr olds

[The Mix – all aspects of Wellbeing and Mental Health](#)

Coronavirus Specific Support

[Coronavirus Anxiety Workbook](#)
[Psychology Tools - A guide to Living with Global Uncertainty](#)
[Coronavirus and Your Wellbeing](#)
[Insight into AHCP working with Coronavirus pandemic - Blog](#)

Career and Job Advice and Support

[QMU Careers and Employability Support](#)

Self-Help Guides

['NHS Inform' self-help guides to various mental health conditions](#)

Sexual Violence/Domestic Abuse/Interrelationship Violence

[QMU Support for Sexual Violence Harassment and Abuse](#)
[National Domestic Abuse Support and Helpline](#)
[Rape Crisis Support and Helpline](#)
[Revenge Porn Helpline and Support](#)

**Thank you to all the
QMU students
who helped us to
develop and
evaluate
this toolkit.**



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