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Mental Wealth and Professional Fitness: Reimagining the University Curriculum for 21st Century Students

Introducing the Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness Curriculum

The Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness curriculum (MWPF) development toolkit is a university endeavour that reimagines an institutional culture that enables 21st century students to thrive in their future professional environments. The toolkit equips staff to embody their own MWPF in their courses.

Team: Team London

Team members

Christina Perouli, Gabriella Buttarazzi, Jonathan Tulloch, Kevin Pike

Members roles and background

Gabriella Buttarazzi - Academic Developer

Christina Perouli - Learning Technology Advisor

Jonathan Tulloch - Learning Technology Advisor

Kevin Pike - Learning Technology Advisor

We all work in the [Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at the University of East London](#)

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Solution Details

Solution description

The solution is a 50-hour online curriculum development toolkit, which comprises 10 micro courses, for first-person staff development. These micro courses are designed to support the implementation of the Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness (MWPF) framework at the University of East London (UEL). They incorporate asynchronous and synchronous online and blended active learning activities. The framework is built around the following eight competencies: physical intelligence, cultural intelligence, cognitive intelligence, social and emotional intelligence, digital proficiency, entrepreneur and enterprise, industry connections and community connections.

The curriculum development toolkit enhances digital education in higher education in two ways:

1. By exemplifying the practical application of pedagogical theory to online course design through the use of the Learning Designer tool: A curriculum planning tool that engages Diana Laurillard's six types of learning in the Conversational Framework with a 70/20/10 distribution. This distribution is as follows: Practice, Collaboration, Production and Investigation (70%), Discussion (20%), and Acquisition (10%).
2. By bridging the interpersonal gap that is often created by digital learning by weaving reflective, mindful and meditative practices into the teaching design. The aim of this is to equip both students and educators with life skills to deal more effectively with the strains of competing and ever-changing demands. Alongside other activities, this will be done by incorporating elements of creative, reflective and meditative practices. The purpose of the incorporation of these practices is three-fold:
 - i. First-person learning experiences enable staff participants to understand the eight competencies more actively in practice as they are experiential rather than purely theoretical;
 - ii. In turn, staff participants are more likely to embody, model and integrate these competencies into their professional lives with their students;
 - iii. This in turn also means that staff participants are more likely to teach the eight competencies in this way with their students on their Mental Wealth modules at UEL.

The effectiveness of the solution will be measured through:

- Ongoing formative feedback from staff participants;
- Course evaluation surveys.

The benefits will be a pattern of online learning activities, both asynchronous and synchronous that:

- uses established online learning platforms;
- is based on widely-recognised pedagogical theories about effective learning;
- is focused on the development of soft skills and a broad range of intelligences;
- incorporates intrapersonal, reflective and meditation practices that overcome helps balance employability and wellbeing.

Solution context

In a changing world, universities need to focus on the skills that will set future graduates apart in the job market. These include soft skills, such as critical thinking, emotional intelligence and resilience, alongside practical skills, such as digital proficiency and industry connections. These skills we refer to as a [Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness](#) (MWPF), and the aim is to embed them in every course taught at UEL.

It is common to find training courses on workplace skills, but rarely do those courses help students or staff with ways to assimilate new practices and methods into their work without risk of increased stress or anxiety. Therefore, in this curriculum development toolkit the content of the 10 micro courses will focus on the terminology of mental wealth and the delivery will focus on a methodology of mental wealth.

The eight Mental Wealth competencies provides us with the terminology that can help students to survive: They express the things we teach, and the things our students learn in terms of soft skills and employability that employers are most likely to understand and value.

Making the most of this terminology will demand a methodology that can help students to thrive. The aim of this is to equip both students and educators with skills to deal more effectively with the strains of competing and ever-changing demands. Alongside other activities, this will be done by incorporating elements of creative, reflective and meditative practices.

To this end, we have outlined (although not finalized) a series of 10 micro courses for university teaching staff to help them design and teach mental wealth skills.

This toolkit represents one of these 10 micro courses, and the design of it will form the template for the other 9.

There are two key challenges:

1. Students can often feel resentful towards content that is not directly related to the discipline of their discipline-specific courses and modules. Generic skills can be perceived as unrelated, unnecessary, and therefore as an increased source of anxiety;
2. Teaching staff can often feel disenfranchised by being required to include skills content that is outside of their perceived specialisms, or comfort zones. In addition, they can feel that such requirements are an unsupportable additional burden to an already-excessive workload.

Solution target group

Initially, the target group is university teaching staff who need to embed soft skills and employability skills both integrated into the university modules and their day-to-day pedagogical practice, hence, the creation of the toolkit for staff development. However, long-term the students are the target group as this educational endeavour is a means of enabling our students to flourish, thrive and be prepared for their professional lives beyond UEL.

Solution impact

The impact of the solution will be measured both explicitly and implicitly:

Explicitly:

- We will get immediate feedback from staff enrolled onto the curriculum development toolkit through course evaluations and surveys. These will feed back into the course itself, enable us to evaluate the effectiveness of the course and make continual improvements, and give us information about the value and impact of the pedagogical approaches taken;
- A more generic assessment of the impact of the toolkit can be measured through completion rates;
- The impact of the toolkit will be seen in an increase of Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness skills being embedded into the curricula of all university courses at the University of East London (UEL).

Implicitly:

- Student satisfaction surveys relating to Mental Wealth: Professional Fitness modules;
- Student employment data.

Solution tweet text

Can you imagine a curriculum toolkit containing 10 micro courses that supports university staff to teach for employability of the future? A toolkit that does not create stress or additional work, but instead enables staff to flourish personally and professionally in the process?

Solution innovativeness

The 10 micro courses aim to embrace and build on first-person experiences in addition to third-person experiences that extend on prior knowledge. Innovative practice encompasses soft skills contextualised within curricula, including creative and embodied innovative approaches experienced in the curriculum development toolkit, such as meditative and reflective practices on real-life personal and professional situations.

Solution transferability

The project focuses on the development of one of the ten micro courses . The active online learning planning and structure that goes in great depth in terms of duration, digital tools, learning types and activity design, is then replicated across all units that allows for scalability. Group work activities allow for teamwork and the building of communities of practice fosters interpersonal skills. Supported by learning lunches, informal small group discussions where academics share experiences. Furthermore, students are invited to participate in the dialogue and input student views for a student voice.

Solution sustainability

The curriculum development toolkit is designed by Academic Developers and Learning Technologists from the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching (CELT) at UEL. It will run online over a series of months to support academic delivery, costs are measured for time spend of the project. Ongoing reviews can further develop the content. The toolkit is adaptable for a blended and online depending on the requirements at the time of running.

Solution team work

The team used Microsoft Teams and Zoom to great effect, and worked really effectively together. We brought to the challenge a range of different skills and personality types that complimented each other really well. We would definitely work together again, and found it an extremely rewarding and insightful experience.

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