A new approach to existing challenges: addressing student mental wellbeing from a learning and teaching perspective

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We are a publicly-funded agency for Scotland's university and college sectors which aims to support student engagement in the quality of the learning experience.

We work closely with student officers, student association staff, institutional staff and other sector agencies to do this.

# Student Mental Health & Wellbeing in the UK

- **62,685 more students** in the UK disclosing a mental health condition than in 2007/08 (2007/08: 9,675, 2017/18: 72,360)
- **94% of universities across the UK** have experienced a sharp increase in the number of people trying to access support services, with some institutions noticing a threefold increase.
- Figures from 12 of Scotland's institutions show between a **47%-70% increase** in students trying to access mental health support services and universities and college services are "***struggling to meet this demand.***"
- Only **five of Scotland's colleges have full-time counsellors**, and the remainder rely on external referrals, and part-time and ad-hoc services.
- Academics identified that responding to student mental health problems is now an '**inevitable part of the academic role.**'

Academic Performance & Wellbeing
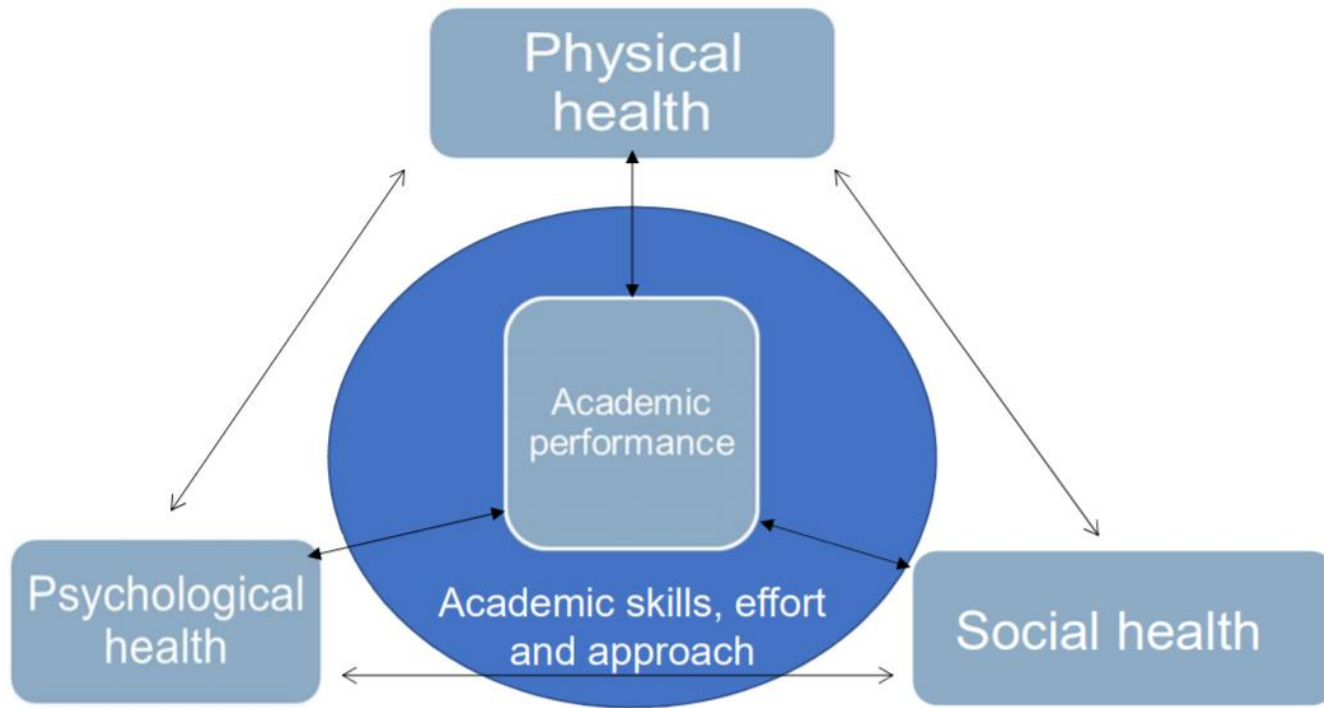
(Hughes & Wilson, 2017)

- Explicit links between mental health and learning
- Acknowledgment that **pedagogy, assessment and learning spaces** all impact on mental wellbeing
- Understanding that **curriculum plays key role** in promoting, and enhancing, a students' wellbeing….from first point of contact.

"Whole-institution approach"

What all the research has concluded, is that to actually make a difference, we need to adopt a **whole institutional approach**. Need to create an environment and culture not to only **reduce poor mental wellbeing** but also promote positive wellbeing and **enhance students' wellbeing**.
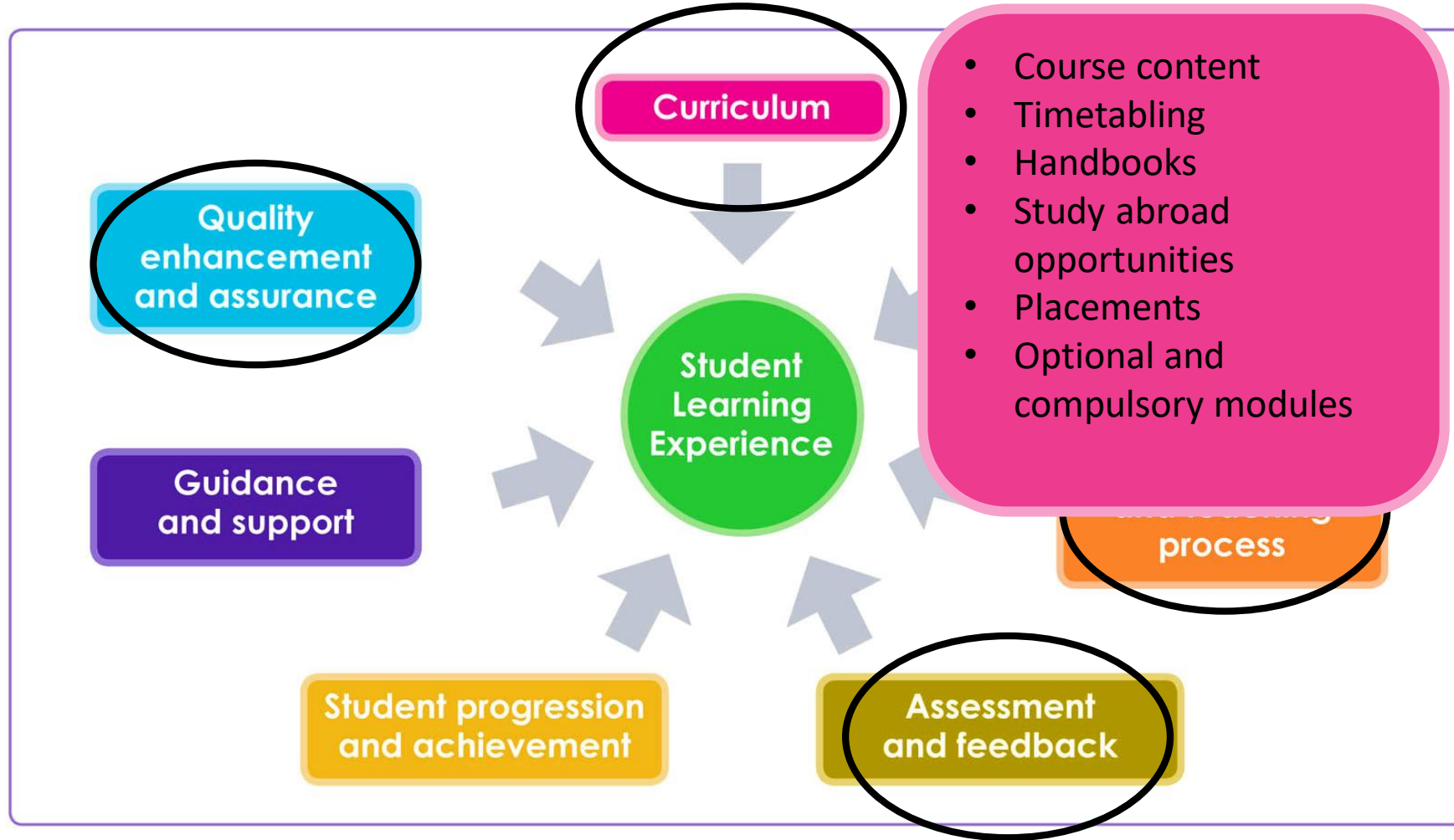
'*Student Mental Wellbeing: A Learning and Teaching Perspective'.*

- Encouraged by 2017 publication '***Embedding mental wellbeing in the curriculum: maximising success in higher education',*** (HEA) – allowed us to consider how we could explore student wellbeing from a learning and teaching perspective.

- Although mental health and wellbeing *traditionally* sits with student support/counselling services, to address the issues a **whole-institutional approach** is required.

- Academic staff and the curriculum are the only guaranteed points of contact between a student and their university.

- Our projects focusses on the challenges around student mental wellbeing in areas such as **curriculum design, learning and teaching processes, assessment and feedback and quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms** and how we can address these.
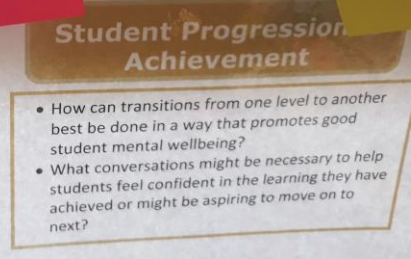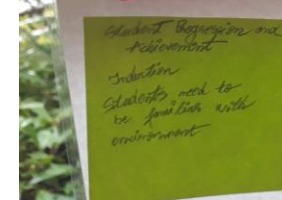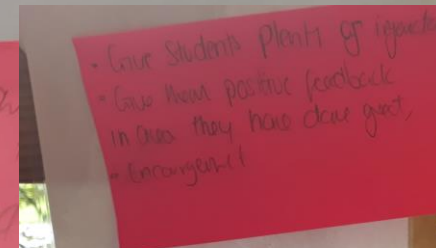
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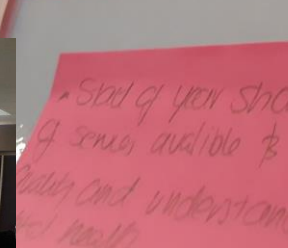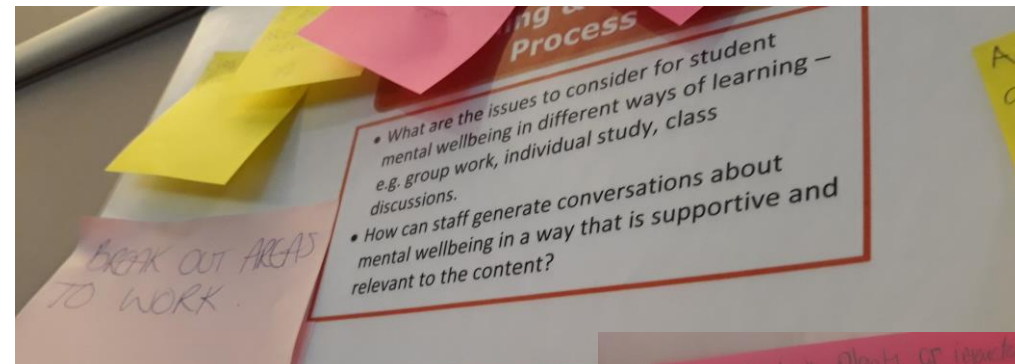# Learning & Teaching Perspective

Workshops & data collection

We hosted four workshops and asked participants two key questions:

1. **What are the barriers and challenges around student mental wellbeing from a learning and teaching perspective?**
2. **What are some of the possible solutions and interventions that could address these?**
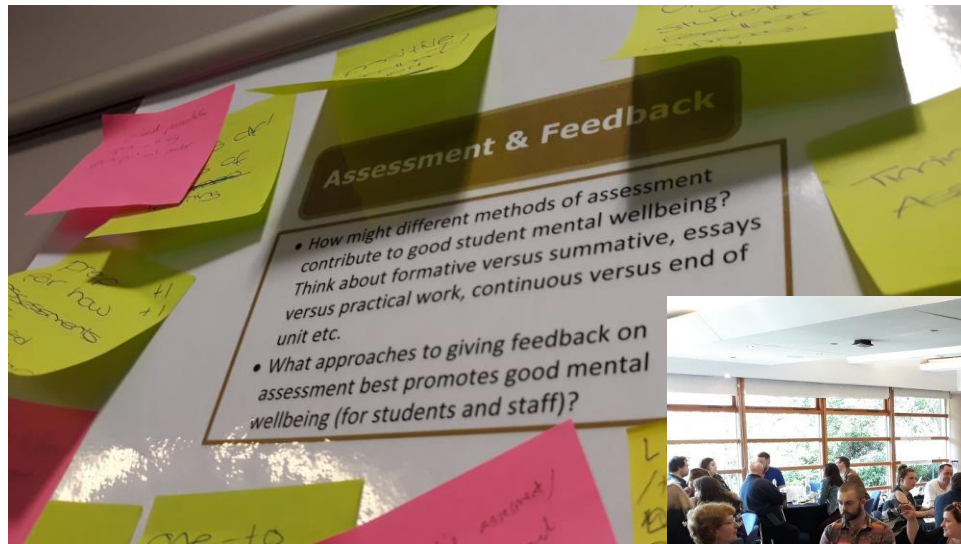
Menti.com – code 44 60 94

Go to **www.menti.com** and use the code **44 60 94**

What are the biggest mental wellbeing challenges facing students with regards to curriculum?

Curriculum
1. Foundatio...
2. Timetablin...
3. Students a...
   of the cur...

Learning & Teaching Processes
1. Variety in learning
2. Learn...
3. Staff t...

Assessment & Feedback
1. Alternative ass...
2. Pre-assessmen...
3. Personalised fe...

Quality Enhancement & Assurance
1. Support for students involved in internal/external quality arrangements
2. Additional qualifications and/or requirements for training
3. Management of Expectations

Quality enhancement and assurance

Guidance and support

Student Learning Experience

Learning and teaching process

Student progression and achievement

Assessment and feedback
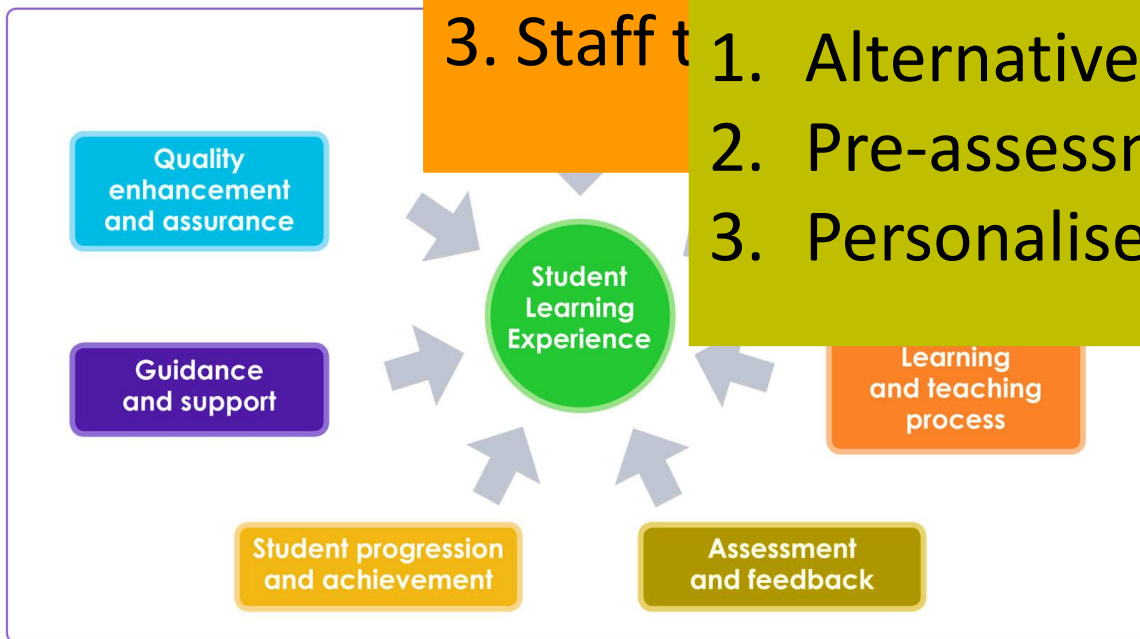
Working Group

- In November 2019, sparqs formed a working group of interested parties from both the college and university sector to come together, discuss the findings from the data and start to develop interventions within institutions that could have a positive impact in student mental wellbeing.
- The group currently has 25 members from across 14 different institutions, both staff and students.

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Methodology and approach

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Data analysis

The data from the workshops was transcribed and then coded to provide a cohesive summary of the key themes that were easily identifiable from overlapping concepts and relationships.

Under each heading, three key themes have been highlighted based on the quantity of responses within the data that aligned to that theme, whilst other themes have also been included that were common (although not top 3) or that posed interesting challenges for the sector.

"Tests of change"

The working group formed mini projects based on the data analysis.

The method of approach, utilising an approach identified by other work in the Sector, is for the projects to take one challenges (such as timetabling) and develop an intervention or solution that can be easily tracked over a period of time to see what impact that change has had.

Evidence & evaluation

Using the method, we hope institutions involved in the pilot projects will be able to clearly identify cause and effect, seeing the correlation between the test of change they have implemented and the impact that has had. Short-term this will be anecdotal and qualitative data, long-term we hope to see statistical shifts in the data through the changes.

AUTHOR:

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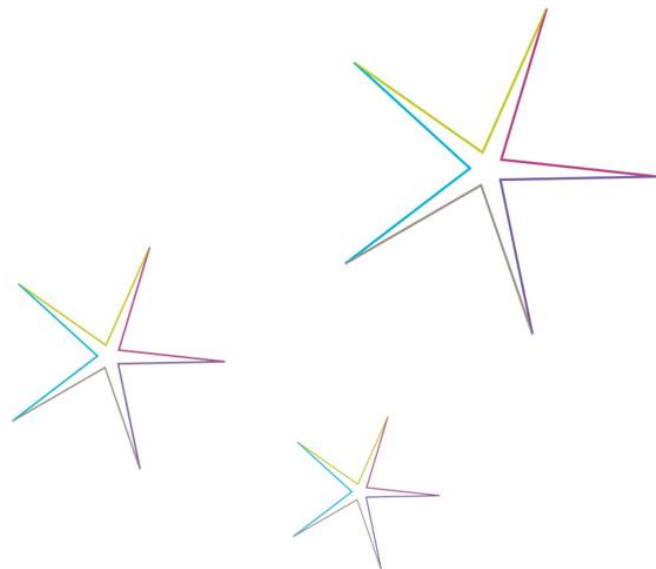
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Student Mental Wellbeing: A Learning & Teaching Perspective

Initial Findings Report

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student partnerships in quality scotland

Student Mental Wellbeing: A Learning and Teaching Perspective

Project 1 – Foundations for Learning
Project 2 – Staff Training
Project 3 – Technology

Name	Institution	Role	Project

A brief overview of the project you are working on?
Things to consider:
- What is it that you are doing/developing or trying to change?
- Who are you working with? Who else is involved?
- What is your plan of action/timeline to implement the changes/development?

Who will the project benefit?
Things to consider:
- Are you testing this change on one particular cohort of students; one module/course or one specific group?

How has the project developed?
Things to consider:
- What have you done: activities, events, training?
- What challenges have you had? How have you overcome them?
- Has the project developed in a different way than you first proposed?

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What has been the initial impact?
Things to consider:
- What impact do you want it to have?
- What impact has/will it have on student experience and student wellbeing?
- How do you plan on measuring the impact?
- How can you capture this? Is it quantitive, qualitative, or both?
- Can you capture student/staff testimonials of the impact?

Going forward, how would you scale-up and roll out this project?
Things to consider:
- What would you say to others looking to adopt your practice?
- What worked well and what didn't? How could it be improved?
- What are your next steps with the project?
- How can this work be shared and celebrated?

This pro-forma should be used as a tool to capture and curate any work relating to the project. It can be a way of recording activity and impact, and a way to put your thoughts, comments, and observations of the project and its development into once place.

Please return, once complete, to stef.black@sparqs.ac.uk

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Projects

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Foundations for Learning

- Core Skills
- Learning to Learn
- Growth Mindset
- Resilience
- Discussing failure
- Skills-building

Staff Training

- Sensitivity/awareness training
- Asking questions like 'how might curriculum content and teaching impact on the mental wellbeing of students'
- Adopting learning & teaching practices to be more inclusive [Universal Design for Learning]
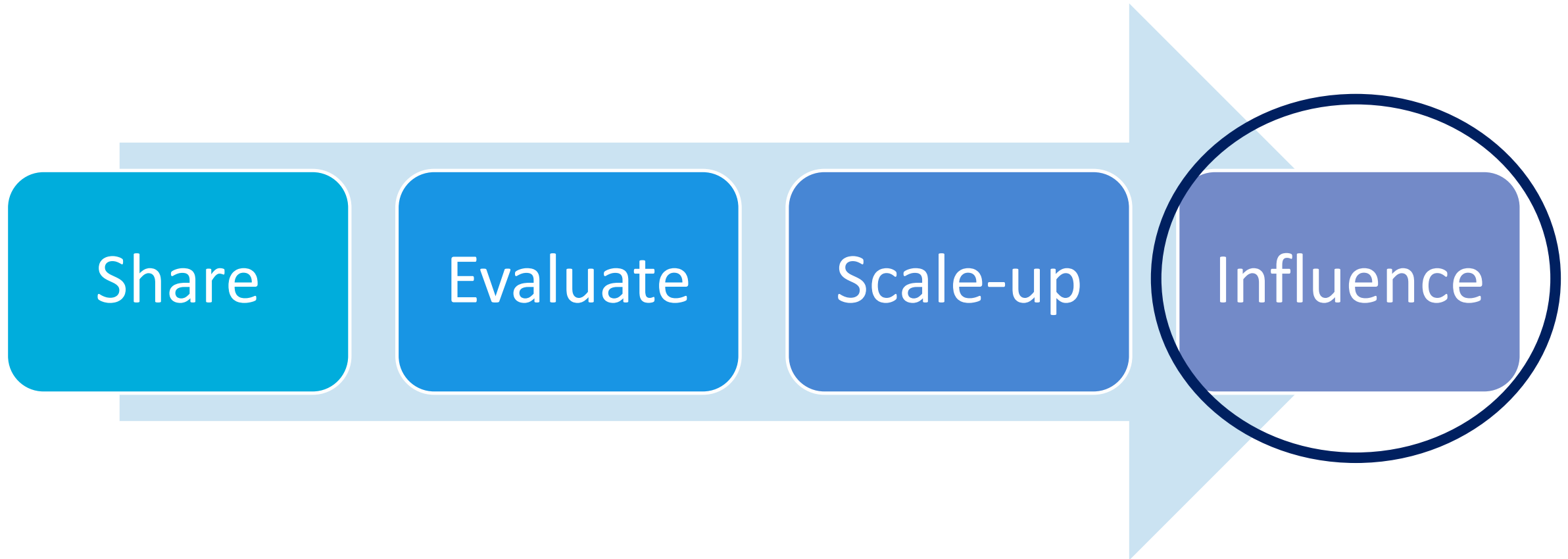- Practical guidance/toolkits to support staff to embed changes in practice

Technology

- Lecture capture
- Policy and structures
- Digital resources
- Use of VLE and online platforms
- Digital accessibility/assistive technology

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Next steps

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Share Evaluate Scale-up Influence

Publications

- Embedding Mental Wellbeing in the Curriculum: Maximising Success in Higher Education [Advance HE/HEA]
- The University Mental Health Charter [Student Minds]
- Student Mental Wellbeing in Higher Education: Good Practice Guide [Universities UK]
- Not by Degrees: Improving Student Mental Health in the UK's Universities [Institute for Public Policy Research])
- Student Mental Health: The Role and Experiences of Academics [Student Minds, University of Derby, Kings College London]

Thank you. Any questions?

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