

The SEDA Blog

Supporting and leading educational change

Tackling mental health and building resilience in higher education.

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Ishwinder Kaur, IIN (Integrative nutrition) health coach

The number of students seeking mental health support in universities is **growing**, while university student support teams are increasingly under-resourced and struggling to keep up with **demand**. Centralised Professional Services within universities which students are advised to access for mental health and wellbeing support have long waiting lists with students in extreme situations rightly prioritised due to high demand. Academic staff, especially those in personal tutor roles, aim to accommodate the diverse needs of students and support student wellbeing while also delivering high quality teaching. However this involves additional time and emotional energy from staff members, who themselves report experiencing **increased levels of stress** and poor mental health at work. How then can we support students that encounter low levels of stress on a daily basis? Adapting a teaching style that can help students overcome daily obstacles is an effective solution.

Coaching has been explored as a **new model** for academic and career achievement. **Coaching**, mindfulness and growth mindset-based programs have shown to increase confidence, clarity, decision-making, problem solving and individual ownership of their career, **success and life**. With **post-pandemic effects** on education there has been a much greater need to introduce coping strategies to support the academic achievement of students by developing resilience at physical, emotional and mental levels.

How do we embed resilience coaching in HE?

To harness the benefits of coaching, I developed a **12 week resilience program** which included a range of coaching models for building confidence, resilience, growth mindset and managing stress with grounding, mindfulness and self-compassion exercises. However, low attendance in these workshops created the next challenge. Delivering workshops on top of a full lecturing load also became too onerous for academic staff.

How do we increase student engagement?

To make coaching part of student lives, it became necessary to embed it in the curriculum so that students' could apply the coaching tools to everyday problems and situations they

encountered during HE life. Whether this was struggling to grasp certain concepts or coping with disappointing exam results, integrating coaching into teaching benefited all students, while also offering a sustainable, cost-effective, and functional model for supporting life-long learning.

How did we integrate coaching into the curriculum?

Embedding coaching in the curriculum allows students to use coaching exercises to counter feelings of self-doubt and fear of failure, while learning the module content. I incorporated resilience coaching activities within the employability context of my module. The [future of jobs report 2025](#) highlights resilience as one of the top 3 Core skills employers are seeking in graduates. The coursework required students to create a resilience toolkit to self-regulate whilst navigating a challenging situation (results to be published).

Given that staff and student wellbeing are [interlinked](#), I also introduced coaching interventions for staff. Based on the observations and reflections from the study on introducing coaching in the curriculum, the following framework outlines all the key areas where coaching can be delivered.



This framework facilitates development of customised coaching pathways across various aspects for a student's wellbeing and success within higher education.

What did I learn and what can others do?

Coaching is a highly effective personal and professional development tool. However, it is challenging to execute as a standalone intervention at an institutional level. The challenges I encountered were time constraints for students as well as staff and evaluation of [tangible impact](#). Despite the challenges, coaching has provided [benefits for me, students and staff](#). For anyone passionate about coaching, I suggest starting small anywhere on this framework and let it evolve. By taking incremental steps it is indeed possible to integrate in the live teaching and learning session structure. For anyone interested in exploring this further, please get in touch.

Author biographies:

Dr Ishwinder Kaur is a Senior Lecturer in biosciences at NTU from September 2019. Ishwinder obtained her master's in pharmaceutical sciences from Panjab University, Chandigarh in India.

She completed her PhD and post-doctoral research at University of Nottingham on multidisciplinary projects. Ishwinder also held industrial positions as Drug regulatory affairs scientist and Innovation skin scientist at Boots, UK.

Ishwinder obtained a coaching certification from Quantum Success Coaching Academy and Institute for Integrative Nutrition. With coaching credentials, Ishwinder has been largely involved in integrating coaching in the curriculum to develop a stronger sense of self, self-awareness and confidence in students. Ishwinder believes coaching is a transformational experience which enables the individual reach their full potential and navigate difficult situations.

[linkedin.com/in/ishwinder-kaur-b7066039](https://www.linkedin.com/in/ishwinder-kaur-b7066039)

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