U-Belong

Insights from research, practice, and student voice

January 2024

King's College LONDON

UKRI Medical Research Council

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Welcome to the first U-Belong bulletin!

➢Keep up to date with the activities and findings from the U-Belong research project

➢Catch up on the latest research evidence

➢Share examples of good practice across the sector

➢Learn from the student experience

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What's New at U-Belong?

➢ We have:

   ➢ Designed a survey and recruited over 800 first-year students from across the UK to understand the predictors of loneliness and belonging. Preliminary findings coming soon!

   ➢ Piloted photo-based interviews to explore student experience of belonging and loneliness at university.

   ➢ Completed the first stage of a systematic review to identify the best measures of belonging to use when evaluating interventions.

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What is the latest evidence telling us?

➢ Every month, we will breakdown some of the latest evidence.

➢ In September 2023, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport published a rapid systematic review of loneliness interventions across the life course. It found:

➢ Consistent evidence that social support interventions, social interaction interventions, and psychological interventions reduce loneliness in the short-term.

➢ Social skills interventions (including group-based relationship building and interpersonal skills); befriending, mentoring, peer-support; arts-based interventions & therapy-based interventions had the strongest effect

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What is the latest evidence telling us?

➢ A YouGov survey in Sept 2023 found that 43% of UK students have hidden

feelings of loneliness from peers because they fear no one will understand.

  ➢ However, 87% of students disagreed they would judge someone who said

  they felt this way.

➢ Vytniorgu et al., (2023) found that the built environment and student

accommodation play a vital part in how, when, and where students experience

loneliness and belonging.

  ➢ Students also expressed a desire to have more opportunities to

  connect to the local community,

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What good practice is happening across the sector?

➢ Sense of Belonging group at University of Edinburgh are working on a number of big events for students and targeting small cohorts through their new Community Champions scheme, partly funded by QAA.

➢ The theme of funding from QAA is supporting resilient learning communities which we are giving to extend our Community Champions Scheme. Our 3 successful Schools are targeting PGRs; the online cohort and Widening Participation students as a priority

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What good practice is happening across the sector?

➢ A Community Champion is a paid, part-time student role within a School/Deanery for a set number of hours. The role of a Community Champion is to work with staff and students in the School/Deanery on specific activities/projects to promote a sense of community among students in the School/Deanery, enhance students' experiences and foster a sense of belonging to the University.

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What are students telling us?

➢ Student voice is at the heart of everything we do at U-Belong.

➢ This month our student research team produced recommendations to improve belonging and address loneliness at university.

  ➢ 1. Create ways for students to make friends on their course.

    ➢ The curriculum can be a key point of social interaction for isolated students.

    ➢ Isolated students may lack skills or confidence to actively initiate interactions

    ➢ Many students expect to make most of their friends on their course, but in actuality have never had a conversation with most of them.

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What are students telling us?

➢ 2. Promote a culture of work-life balance where you aren't made to feel guilty for socialising.

➢ Expectation from the university that they should be studying all the time and socialising should not be a priority.

➢ 3. Change the unhelpful messaging and activities associated with Fresher's week.

➢ Expectation to make lots of close friends during Fresher's week: feel isolated and excluded if this does not happen.

➢ Pressure to binge drink during Fresher's week to make friends.

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Have questions about U-Belong or research/practice you want to share?

Get in touch with us!

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