

Safeguarding and enhancing your personal and academic wellbeing:

A Toolkit for Research Students in Education (& Humanities and Social Sciences)

Theme	Benefit	What research students say	Strategies
<p><u>Being part of the Community</u></p> <p>Research students find that participating in the life of their university, spending time with peers, staff and developing their own academic networks can stimulate learning, makes the experience more enjoyable and ensure they are supported during challenging times.</p>	<p>Break isolation</p> <p>Develop good relationships with staff and peers</p> <p>Develop a support network</p> <p>Opportunities for discussing your work</p> <p>Exchange of knowledge and ideas</p> <p>Develop networking and presentation skills</p> <p>Build up an academic network</p> <p>Share experiences of being a research student</p>	<p><i>'It's not a solo act, a PhD, it's a collective offering of knowledge.'</i></p> <p><i>'Being part of a community makes a big difference to how you feel about your study...your role, the part you play in the wider scheme of things.'</i></p> <p><i>'I think you need to talk to people about your ideas, you need to hear back from people what they think about your ideas and if you don't have that it can have an impact on your wellbeing.'</i></p> <p><i>'I would say that actually informal opportunities for discussion areas influential not only on my wellbeing but on my progress in my doctorate.'</i></p> <p><i>'Support from online communities has helped me a lot... especially where if I have an idea I can very quickly find other people who have had similar thoughts before and see</i></p>	<p>Attend meetings and academic events in your own and other disciplines</p> <p>Get involved in extra-curricular / social activities</p> <p>Find out if there are any online forums for research students or in your topic / methodology area</p> <p>Join relevant emailing lists so you can keep an eye on events it might be helpful to attend, locally and nationally</p> <p>Submit abstracts for conferences / other events – ask your supervisor for advice on writing abstracts and presenting</p> <p>Get involved in events in your department – offer to help</p> <p>Offer to help organize seminars / symposia / conferences</p> <p>Suggest activities which might be beneficial to research students to your department</p> <p>Take every opportunity to develop networking skills</p> <p>Stay in touch with peers / academics who you make a connection with via email / skype & meet where possible</p>

	<p>Insider knowledge of how the institution works and what is available</p> <p>Contribute to a more balanced experience</p> <p>Develop useful contacts and be aware of opportunities</p> <p>Bolster confidence</p> <p>Build resilience</p>	<p><i>where they've taken them.'</i></p>	<p>Approach / contact academics whose work you are interested in and invite them for coffee – people usually enjoy talking about their work and may have an interesting perspective on yours.</p> <p>Ask your supervisor for advice on peers / academic colleagues who are working in a similar area / using similar methodology who you might benefit from talking to.</p> <p>Discuss your work informally whenever possible – talking it through helps develop coherence, stimulate ideas and ultimately prepare for answering questions in the viva.</p> <p>Form your own support group or interest group for peers or those interested in a similar area.</p> <p>Develop your confidence, communication and presentation skills – see what development opportunities are available for research students</p> <p>Be aware of the support services for students in your institution and ask if you need help with anything.</p>
<p><u>Academic / Personal Balance</u></p> <p>It can be difficult to achieve a good work / life / study balance and to maintain</p>	<p>Ensure you don't become overwhelmed by studies and "burn out".</p> <p>Pace yourself</p>	<p><i>'It's important to have very good wellbeing to support you because if you don't have positive wellbeing you will be unable to keep moving in your learning and study.'</i></p> <p><i>'Wellbeing for me really means how</i></p>	<p>Good time management – students often find keeping a diary and planning in, for example, social, relaxation, fitness and family time helps. Some use colour coding to represent different aspects of their life.</p> <p>To do lists – break tasks down into smaller, achievable objectives.</p>

<p>personal wellbeing, especially when juggling studies with paid work and caring responsibilities. Many students find that good time management is essential and that it is beneficial to ensure you are having time away from your studies and looking after yourself in order to study more effectively.</p>	<p>throughout the programme.</p> <p>Manage physical health and emotional resilience.</p> <p>Optimise your chances of learning and success.</p> <p>Develop self-awareness and self-management strategies.</p> <p>Give yourself the best chance of completion.</p> <p>Harness your study energy effectively.</p> <p>Avoid becoming isolated – maintain relationships.</p>	<p><i>effective you are being as a person – I think the learning happens better when you are being effective as a person.'</i></p> <p><i>'I certainly know that if I really want to be performing well as a doctoral student I need to make sure I'm socializing a certain amount during the week and making sure I'm reading other stuff, whether that's fiction or getting inspiration from creative sources.'</i></p> <p><i>'Suddenly there's more value in keeping yourself together and, you know, functioning because otherwise you don't reach the end.'</i></p> <p><i>'I think you have to be kind to yourself, which a lot of people aren't very good at doing.'</i></p> <p><i>'If it's getting too much, okay I can give myself a break, I'll come back and I'll have a fresh face and go at it from a different angle.'</i></p>	<p>Having a break – you might need regular breaks throughout the day or time off from study completely so you can come back to it with “fresh eyes”.</p> <p>Become aware of what time of day you study best and make the most of it – this could save you a lot of time.</p> <p>Planning with supervisor – work with your supervisor to plan realistic deadlines</p> <p>Involvement in non-academic activities – students often find that doing something else completely, such as reading an unrelated book, can be rejuvenating, help keep perspective and stimulate learning</p> <p>Developing stress management techniques – cbt, mindfulness and yoga are examples</p> <p>Ask family / friends for help, for example with domestic chores – make sure they understand how important your studies are to you and that you need their support at this time.</p> <p>Leading a healthy lifestyle – good nutrition, exercise, relaxation, sensible drinking and a good sleeping pattern can all help with stress management and optimize students' ability to concentrate and study effectively.</p>
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<p><u>Developing personal and academic confidence</u></p> <p>Whether you are continuing with your studies after university or returning to study after some time, perhaps time working in a different field, it can take time to develop confidence. It is important to remember you are not alone in this and even the most revered professor probably lacked confidence early in their career.</p>	<p>Share work with others and enjoy the learning benefits of feedback and criticism.</p> <p>Value the learning process.</p> <p>Value your work and learn how it fits in with that of others.</p> <p>Take opportunities for presentation and publication to further your academic development.</p> <p>Take time to become comfortable with the language and culture of your discipline.</p> <p>Develop a sense of ownership of your work.</p> <p>Learn to embrace</p>	<p><i>‘In some ways it’s definitely made me more confident and kind of stronger and I have got more faith in my abilities to manage these things.’</i></p> <p><i>‘That academic self had to be validated by passing things and getting bits of paper and now I had to find a new way into that and to value the learning process.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Before I would have apologized for not knowing enough about x. Whereas now... I can’t know everything about everything and for the purposes of this paper you don’t need to know everything that’s ever been thought of in relation to x.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I think I’m more confident because I’m doing this and I’m surviving and I’m passing assignments so you sort of think oh I’m not too bad and it tends to make you look at everything that’s happening more deeply.’</i></p> <p><i>‘I don’t really make any progress until I find myself in an area of quite significant self-doubt. That’s quite discomfoting because the way I see the world is called into question but emerging through the other side means that I’m happier</i></p>	<p>Keep perspective – you are not expected to know or to have read everything on your topic.</p> <p>See criticism as a learning curve – having your work critiqued is part of being a researcher. Use any opportunity for others to question or critique your work as practice for your viva / presentations.</p> <p>You may need regular supervisions at first while you build your confidence about what you are doing then you may need less. Communicate with your supervisor about how much support you need.</p> <p>Remember it is your own work – it is important to develop a sense of ownership and make informed decisions about its direction.</p> <p>Keep tasks manageable and celebrate each achievement along the way! It might be writing a certain number of words, handing in an assignment, submitting a conference abstract or reading a key text – each step is getting you closer to completion.</p> <p>Talk to peers – they will be experiencing similar issues and you can discuss each other’s work in a safe space.</p> <p>Getting involved and attending as many conferences and other events as possible will help you to get used to the academic culture and the language of your discipline.</p> <p>Remember it’s normal to find yourself questioning previously held convictions or finding ideas problematic – it is an important part of the learning journey and important to talk and write about it whenever possible.</p>
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<p><u>Positive supervisory relationship</u></p> <p>Research students have reported that a good relationship with their supervisor is key to their success and to their overall wellbeing. Supervisors can provide a safe space in which students' work can be challenged and</p>	<p>Get the most out of the supervisions.</p> <p>Ensure you have the support you need to achieve success.</p> <p>Engage in dialogue which will help advance your learning.</p>	<p><i>'I kind of set him an agenda, during the meeting I kind of guide him through what I'm looking for because I view our relationship as a kind of partnership and it's nice.'</i></p> <p><i>'For me as a learner I need to dialogue, the interpersonal relationship is really important.'</i></p> <p><i>'I don't think the [necessary confrontation] can happen if the emotional bond and the safe</i></p>	<p>Take the initiative in organizing supervisions and setting the meeting agenda.</p> <p>Check with supervisors what the best ways / times to communicate with them are.</p> <p>Don't be afraid to ask questions, challenge, argue, discuss, disagree with your supervisor – it is part of the learning process.</p> <p>Listen and respond to feedback, use any negative criticism as a learning curve.</p>

<p>this challenge is an essential part of a successful learning journey. Supervisory relationships work well when both parties take responsibility for the relationship. It is important that students ask for what they need and take responsibility for setting up supervisions and setting the agenda. It is important to let supervisors know if anything is affecting your ability to study so they can provide support and signpost you on to other sources of support as appropriate.</p>	<p>Develop confidence in justifying your work to prepare you for the viva.</p> <p>Benefit from support if you encounter problems along the way.</p> <p>Enjoy advice from someone who has completed the journey you are currently undertaking.</p>	<p><i>relationship isn't in place. A PhD has got to be about transformation, that's the nature of the work and so the relationship is so important.'</i></p> <p><i>'What was missing for me was the emotional support I suppose – "come on... it's Ok... keep doing this from time to time and that challenge about the content.'</i></p> <p><i>'I should have gone out and found people working in the area, like-minded people, but I'm shy and I was also relatively new to the country and it's quite hard to get into cliques like that, especially if you're shy... that's something a supervisor could help you with – introduce you to people, take you to conferences.</i></p>	<p>Let your supervisor know if there are any problems affecting you or your ability to study.</p> <p>Be aware of your rights with regards to supervision and do seek advice and talk to a third party in the department if you experience any problems.</p>
<p><u>Motivation</u></p> <p>One of the biggest challenges of embarking on any</p>	<p>Keep a sense of purpose in what you are doing.</p> <p>Remind yourself of</p>	<p><i>'You know it's stressful and it is a big commitment in your life but then I kind of think how proud I'll be when it's done and how pleased people will be for me and the opportunities it will</i></p>	<p>Focus on your reasons for wanting to do this research degree.</p> <p>Recognise the value of your research and the contribution you are making to knowledge and</p>

<p>long-term research project is keeping the momentum going. It is a valuable skill for research students to learn to pace themselves, manage their energies and keep motivated throughout the journey. It is important to remember that it is normal to feel like giving up at times or to go through phases of being less productive. Sometimes it is best to take a break and resume studies when you are ready.</p>	<p>the benefits of higher study.</p> <p>Value your contribution.</p> <p>Pace yourself throughout the journey.</p> <p>Give yourself the best chance of successful completion.</p>	<p><i>afford me.'</i></p> <p><i>'I get a sense of enjoyment and satisfaction from knowing that I'm learning and I'm actually challenging myself, which perhaps has been lacking in my job.'</i></p> <p><i>'Have courage and keep going and remember it's just a PhD and it feels like your whole life but remember it's a marathon, not a sprint – this is a hard thing to do but it's not a horrendous thing to do, it's a lot better than a lot of other work you could be doing but just be patient with yourself and be patient with the project and, you know, just keep going.'</i></p> <p><i>'It's changed my approach to students and the way I talk about study and learning and approach to learning and ways of learning and I'm coming from a... starting point which says you can achieve anything you want to achieve and it might take some of you longer than others and that doesn't matter and the only problem is if you stop.'</i></p>	<p>understanding.</p> <p>Keep perspective – this is only a relatively small part of your life, taken as a whole.</p> <p>Remember that whatever stress you may be under at times, this is normal and there are ways of managing the stress – seek support and take time out if you need to.</p> <p>Visualise success.</p> <p>Have realistic short-term, medium term and long-term goals. <i>A short-term goal in the first year of a PhD might be completing a literature search; a medium-term goal might be drafting a literature review and sending to your supervisor and a long-term goal might be to prepare your proposal for transfer of status.</i></p> <p>Celebrate success along the way and treat yourself when you've achieved a goal (completed your tasks for the week / month / term / year).</p> <p>Pace yourself – this is a marathon, not a sprint! Keep a good work / life / study balance as far as possible and take a break when you need one.</p> <p>Change tasks if you are stuck – maybe put a chapter to one side and focus on a conference abstract, read an article or plan the next chapter.</p> <p>Don't worry about being perfect when you write – sometimes getting it out can relieve anxiety, it can always be edited later.</p>
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<p><u>Academic Environment</u></p> <p>The environment in which research students work and communicate can have a profound impact on their wellbeing and ability to learn. It is essential for health and wellbeing to find a suitable, comfortable working environment and to take regular breaks. Also, ensure you make the most of opportunities for academic exchange in physical and virtual spaces.</p>	<p>Health and safety.</p> <p>Maintain physical wellbeing.</p> <p>Optimise your ability to study effectively.</p>	<p><i>‘The pain of sitting badly is just phenomenal – it’s absolutely pain and then a panic because if you’re in writhing agony you’re not thinking about your work, you’re not producing any and the clock’s ticking.’</i></p> <p><i>‘Another thing I really value is my shared office and having that really structured space, so that I do feel like I’ve got a work identity.’</i></p> <p><i>‘To be surrounded by other PhD students, this support me when things aren’t going very well but they also make life more enjoyable and fulfilling,’</i></p> <p><i>‘I do think it’s important to have spaces where people, where there is informal mixing. Whether it’s a physical space within a department or just after a seminar, have a little</i></p>	<p>Be aware of health and safety implications for working with computers.</p> <p>Find a dedicated workspace for studying that suits your lifestyle.</p> <p>Ensure you are sitting comfortably without putting unnecessary pressure on your back.</p> <p>Take regular breaks from the computer.</p> <p>Make sure you have adequate lighting.</p> <p>Sharing space with other research students can help you feel part of the academic community.</p> <p>Take advantage of shared spaces and academic and social opportunities whether these are physical or virtual.</p> <p>If you feel adequate spaces are not provided for study or academic exchange, feed this back to your department and / or form a group of research students and approach the problem creatively together.</p>

		<i>social for people to keep up with what you're doing.'</i>	
<p><u>Health and Welfare</u></p> <p>Some research students experience difficulties with their physical and / or mental health while they are studying or they have an ongoing health condition or disability. Others may experience basic welfare challenges such as money, housing or difficult domestic situations. Major life events such as divorce or bereavement can also have a profound impact on students' ability to study. It is essential in these cases that students are aware of and seek support and advice from professionals, from their university</p>	<p>Be aware of what support is available and what you are entitled to.</p> <p>Ensure any problems are properly dealt with / supported.</p> <p>Negotiate extensions / time off if you need them.</p> <p>Give yourself the best chance of dealing with and recovering from any problems that arise.</p> <p>Give yourself the best chance of staying on course and completing.</p>	<p><i>'Your living circumstances are quite important. Last year I didn't feel well in the area and house where I lived, I felt that caused a lot of extra stress and I'm really happy that that's settled now.'</i></p> <p><i>'From my perspective when I'm not well and depression is bad then I just find learning really difficult. I find that I don't want to learn new things – it just seems like I've got enough whizzing around my head already and it can feel like an assault sometimes.'</i></p> <p><i>'A marriage breakdown is not an easy thing for me to face in a strange country but then because of the support from my supervisor, from my co-ordinator from the faculty, from the university, my doctor and mental health team - it's enhanced my wellbeing.'</i></p> <p><i>If I don't take good care of myself, I will be unable to do everything. I experienced three months of severe</i></p>	<p>Be aware from the start of your course what support is available at the university in case you, or a peer, need to access it. Keep the contact details in a safe place.</p> <p>If you have a long-term health condition, disability or mental health issue, ensure you are receiving the support from your institution to which you are entitled.</p> <p>Ensure you seek help from an appropriate professional such as your G.P. immediately if there is an issue with your physical or mental health, disability, welfare or have experienced a difficult life event such as bereavement. The sooner you seek help the better to help manage the situation.</p> <p>Admitting you have a problem and talking about it to someone you trust are important first steps to finding a solution or a way to cope.</p> <p>Postgraduate students are entitled to make use of their university's support services – contact your supervisor / department to find out what is available and / or look online.</p> <p>Ask for suggestions about other useful contacts so you can make the most of support which may be available in your community.</p>

<p>and from supportive others such as family and friends.</p>		<p><i>depression, I couldn't do anything. After that it is important for me to look after myself, to be healthy mentally, physically, emotionally. So that's important – I need to try even though it's not easy.'</i></p>	<p>Communicate with your supervisor / course leader if there is an issue impacting on your ability to study. You may need to negotiate deadlines or take time out of your studies to deal with the problem.</p> <p>Keep personal wellbeing strategies in place, particularly at times of stress to help you recover.</p>
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