European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology
Vol 3, Article 7, 2019
ISSN 2397-7116
www.nationalwellbeingservice.com/journals

RESEARCH PAPER

Time to Flourish: designing a coaching psychology programme to promote resilience and wellbeing in postgraduate students

Gisele P. Dias[1], Juliet Foster[2] and Patricia A. Zunszain[2]

Corresponding author
Gisele Pereira Dias
Department of Psychology, Social Work and Counselling, University of Greenwich, Old Royal Naval College, Park Row, London SE9 2UG.
Email: g.dias@gre.ac.uk

Affiliations
[1] Department of Psychology, Social Work and Counselling, University of Greenwich

[2] Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London

Funding
This work was supported by the Education Initiatives Fund (King's College London)

Declaration of conflicting interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest in respect to their authorship or the publication of this paper.

Acknowledgments
None declared

Abstract
Background: Poor mental health within the student population has become increasingly prevalent, with research suggesting that these figures are set to rise rapidly in the coming years. In this context, the search for evidence-based strategies to equip university students with the necessary skills to improve levels of resilience and wellbeing has become paramount.

Objectives: To describe the results of a pilot run of 'Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential', a coaching psychology programme designed to enhance wellbeing and help prevent mental health issues in university students.

Method: The programme was based on the integrative cognitive-behavioural coaching model and delivered in 10 x 2-hour sessions to taught postgraduate students in the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience at King's College London, between October 2018 and February 2019.

Results: Students' appraisal of the pilot suggested that it was effective in teaching them important practical tools for an enhanced experience of living, within and outside academia.

Conclusions: Based on these students' feedback, an updated version can now be formulated, which will allow an evidence-based evaluation of its effectiveness.

Keywords: coaching psychology, integrative cognitive-behavioural coaching, positive psychology, resilience, student wellbeing.

Abstrait
Contexte: *Les problèmes de santé mentale au sein de la population étudiante sont de plus en plus répandus. Les recherches suggèrent que ces chiffres devraient augmenter rapidement dans les années à venir. Dans ce contexte, la recherche de stratégies factuelles pour doter les étudiants universitaires des compétences nécessaires pour améliorer les niveaux de résilience et de bien-être est devenue primordiale.*

Objectifs: *décrire les résultats d'un projet pilote intitulé «Il est temps de s'épanouir: atteindre son potentiel», un programme de psychologie de l'entraînement conçu pour améliorer le bien-être et aider à prévenir les problèmes de santé mentale des étudiants universitaires.*

Méthode: *Le programme s'appuyait sur un modèle d'entraînement cognitif et comportemental intégratif et était offert en sessions de 10 x 2 heures à des étudiants de troisième cycle de l'Institut de psychiatrie, psychologie et neurosciences du King's College de Londres, d'octobre 2018 à février 2019.*

Résultats: *L'évaluation du projet pilote par les étudiants a montré que celui-ci leur permettait de leur enseigner d'importants outils pratiques pour améliorer leur expérience de la vie, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur du monde universitaire.*

Conclusions: *Sur la base des commentaires de ces étudiants, une version mise à jour peut maintenant être formulée, ce qui permettra une évaluation factuelle de son efficacité.*

Mots-clés: *psychologie du coaching, coaching intégratif cognitivo-comportemental, psychologie positive, résilience, bien-être des étudiants.*

INTRODUCTION

Student mental health, particularly during university studies, has received growing attention in recent years. Transition to adulthood is a challenging period, and while levels of poor mental health within the student population used to match those in the general population (Macaskill, 2013; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010), this appears to be changing. Despite some concerns regarding sampling methods, including self-selection and self-report in some studies, recent data show an increase in mental health difficulties in this group.

The Student Academic Experience Survey of 2017 evaluated responses from 14,000 UK university students and reported that they scored worse in measures of anxiety, life satisfaction, happiness and how worthwhile life was, not only in comparison with age-matched individuals in the general population but also in comparison with the student survey results of the previous year (Neves & Hillman, 2017).

More recently, a survey of more than 2000 PhD students and 200 Master's students from 26 countries reported that they were more than six times more likely to experience depression and anxiety than the general population (Evans et al., 2018). Furthermore, research suggests that poor mental health figures are set to rise rapidly in the coming years with an increasing trend reported in the number of severe mental health case referrals to university counselling services (Association of University & College Counselling, 2011).

Past research has shed light on some of the features that characterise mental health in university students. For example, it has been shown that students with lower quality social support are more likely to experience mental health issues (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009) and that the effects of emotional distress include poor grades, social isolation, and reduced emotional and behavioural skills (Storrie, Ahern, & Tuckett, 2010).

Interventions appear to be useful: an online programme based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) showed benefits to university students in self-reported measures of stress and depression, with gains in life satisfaction and self-esteem (Räsänen, Lappalainen, Muotka, Tolvanen, & Lappalainen, 2016). Furthermore, a meta-analysis published in 2013 revealed that cognitive, behavioural, and mindfulness interventions were associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression and stress in this student population (Regehr, Glancy, & Pitts, 2013). More recently, a mindfulness-based intervention has also been shown to reduce psychological distress during examination periods (Galante et al., 2018).

One emerging field in the context of mental health and wellbeing in university students is that of positive psychology-based interventions. Positive psychology is a relatively new sub-discipline within the psychological sciences which is focused on understanding the factors that enable people to experience optimal psychological functioning and to thrive. Positive psychology interventions aim to draw on at least one of the five pillars underpinning wellbeing, as suggested by Seligman's PERMA model (2011; 2018): positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and achievements (Table 1, page 3). In this context, both positive activities around optimism and gratitude (Lyubomirsky, Dickerhoof, Boehm, Sheldon, & Kennon, 2011) and strengths-based training (Duan, Ho, Tang, Li, & Zhang, 2014) have been shown to increase wellbeing and life satisfaction in university students.

Despite promising results from the aforementioned studies and others alike, most of the studies in the field of university student mental health and wellbeing are conducted with the undergraduate population. Little is known about the effectiveness of interventions designed to help postgraduate students to manage pressure and stressors that are more characteristic of this population, such as overcoming procrastination around research and final dissertation and making a decision on goals such as the possibility of continuing their postgraduate studies through a doctorate degree.

Added to the high academic expectations and time pressures felt by all students during university studies, those on postgraduate courses face some additional specific challenges. These include dealing with the higher levels of critical analysis required, the increased social participation expected, the exposure to various nationalities and intercultural demands that are common in MSc programmes, as well as the high level of language proficiency required. In addition, there is a prevalence of personal problems in preparation for a life stage with increased levels of independence (Brown, 2007; Wu & Hammond 2011).

To address this gap and drawing on previous evidence suggesting a role for cognitive-behavioural and positive psychology-based interventions in enhancing wellbeing in university students, we designed a 10-session face-to-face coaching psychology programme named 'Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential' for delivery to postgraduate taught (PGT) students in the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience (IoPPN) at King's College London.

In this paper, we describe the programme and discuss the preliminary results of its pilot run between October 2018 and

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116

Table 1
Five pillars to wellbeing: The PERMA framework

Positive emotions	Emotions usually associated with wellbeing, such as joy, gratitude, serenity, awe, love, pride, inspiration and hope
Engagement	Taking part in activities that create flow, a state of mind characterised by full absorption and engagement. These activities are usually aligned with a strong sense of meaning and purpose
Relationships	Cultivating constructive relationships and building social connection
Meaning	Identifying one's core values and engaging in personal projects that are aligned with these
Achievements	Working towards attainment of meaningful goals and experiencing the associated positive emotions, such as pride, inspiration and gratitude

February 2019. By stimulating conversations around meaningful values and how these may reflect our social and cultural backgrounds, as well as by equipping students with positive psychology and solution-focused techniques to promote wellbeing and goal achievement, 'Time to Flourish' aimed to support postgraduate students to deal more effectively with the demands they face during this important stage of their lives, therefore aiming to improve their experience within and outside of academia.

METHODS

Participants

PGT students in the IoPPN were recruited for participation in Time to Flourish through: i) a stand in the induction week event at the start of the academic year 2018-19; ii) an advertisement poster on the Institute wellbeing message board, and iii) by word of mouth. There was no restriction on age, gender or other variables for inclusion in the programme (such as minimum number of modules previously undertaken in their MSc courses) but participants experiencing severe mental distress were encouraged to use the college's counselling services instead.

Interest in taking part in the module was recorded by 131 MSc students, 47 of whom confirmed their registration in the programme due to timetable availability. Of the 47 students registered, 16 completed the whole programme and 14 also completed the programme evaluation questionnaire. Participants were mostly white, heterosexual women studying full time: this is representative of our PGT students, as white women are over-represented in our programmes in general. Participant characteristics are reported in detail on Table 2, page 4.

Procedures

Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential

The programme was underpinned by principles of the integrative cognitive-behavioural coaching (ICBC) model, as proposed by Dias, Palmer, and Nardi (2017). The ICBC model can be considered one of the branches of positive psychology coaching (Green & Palmer, 2019). The model is mostly based on a cognitive-behavioural approach but it actively draws on the strengths of both positive psychology coaching and solution-focused coaching approaches to deliver a more holistic, multimodal coaching process. In this sense, Time to Flourish brought together topics such as signature strengths, values, goal setting and action plans, as well as identification and reframing of wellbeing- and resilience-blocking beliefs, as shown in Figure 1, page 5.

Sessions were organised around the PERMA model (Seligman, 2011; 2018) and included a theoretical account of the topics, as well as experiential exercises completed in-session with peer support, resembling a co-coaching process. Further practice of the topics covered in the sessions was also encouraged through weekly practice exercises to be completed between sessions. These weekly exercises composed a final portfolio; presentation of the portfolio with at least 50% of the exercises completed was set as a

Table 2
Participant characteristics

Age N (%)	
20-24	4 (28.6)
25-34	6 (42.9)
35-44	1 (7.1)
45-54	1 (7.1)
55-over	1 (7.1)
Prefer not to say	1 (7.1)
Gender N (%)	
Male	1 (7.1)
Female	10 (71.4)
Prefer not to say	3 (21.4)
Is your gender identity the same you were assigned at birth? N (%)	
Yes	14 (100.0)
No	0 (0.0)
What is your sexual orientation? N (%)	
Heterosexual	12 (85.7)
Homosexual	0 (0.0)
Bisexual	1 (7.1)
Prefer not to say	1 (7.1)
Ethnicity N (%)	
Arab	1 (7.1)
Asian	4 (28.6)
Black	1 (7.1)
White	7 (50.0)
Prefer not to say	1 (7.1)
What is your religion or belief? N (%)	
No religion	6 (42.9)
Religion/belief	5 (35.7)
Prefer not to say	3 (21.4)
Do you have a mental or physical impairment, health condition or learning difficulty? N (%)	
Yes	0 (0.0)
No	13 (92.9)
Prefer not to say	1 (7.1)
Programme of study N (%)	
MSc in Addiction Studies	1 (7.1)
MSc in Affective Disorders	1 (7.1)
MSc in Clinical Psychiatry	2 (14.3)
MSc in Early Intervention in Psychosis	1 (7.1)
MSc in Genes, Environment & Development in Psychology	2 (14.3)
MSc in Mental Health Studies	2 (14.3)
MSc in Neuroimaging	2 (14.3)
MSc in Psychology & Neuroscience of Mental Health (Distance Learning)	2 (14.3)
MSc in War & Psychiatry	1 (7.1)
Mode of study N (%)	
Full-time	10 (71.4)
Part-time	4 (28.6)

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116

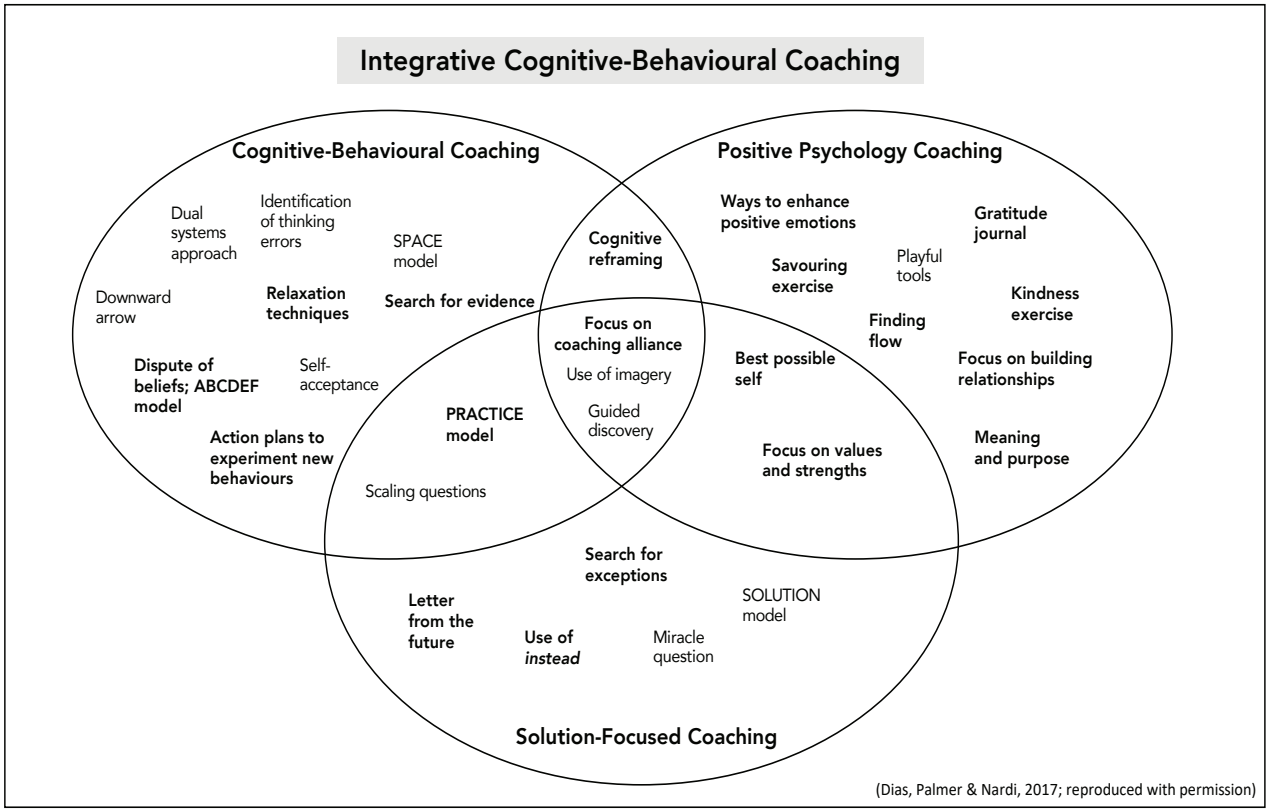

Figure 1: Tools and techniques from the Integrative Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching model proposed by Dias, Palmer and Nardi (2017), as used in Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential. The Integrative Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching model (ICBC) can be seen as both a branch of positive psychology coaching and as a multimodal version of the more mainstream cognitive-behavioural approach to coaching but which actively integrates tools and techniques from the positive psychology and solution-focused coaching frameworks. In the diagram, the techniques in bold are those included in Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential, either within sessions or as weekly practice exercises.

requirement to receive a certificate of completion to be added to students' own employability skills portfolio.

From a pedagogical perspective, the programme's learning outcomes were for students to:

- Become acquainted with the scientific underpinnings of wellbeing and flourishing;
- Develop valuable academic and life skills that are safe and can be easily applied to enhance academic performance and wellbeing;
- Become confident about evidence-based ways to reduce stress and enhance resilience;
- Identify key personal resources, such as signature strengths, and acquire a better sense of meaning and purpose for thriving in and outside of academia;
- Demonstrate skills such as creating a vision, setting goals, devising action plans and achieving meaningful goals;
- Support wellbeing in their personal life and career.

Sessions and topics are described in further detail in Table 3, page 6.

Programme delivery

Time to Flourish was delivered as 10 face-to-face sessions in lecture theatres in the IoPPN. Each session lasted 2 hours; overall, they were delivered weekly, the exception being a 4-week break around the Christmas period. Sessions were delivered by experienced academics in the fields of mental health and wellbeing. In the ninth session, students were given a programme evaluation form and were instructed to complete it by the end of the tenth session. As part of the programme evaluation, students were asked the following questions:

Table 3
A session-by-session overview of Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential

Session	Key PERMA domain	Topic description	Examples of exercises and activities
1. Positive psychology and the science of wellbeing	Positive emotions	Programme overview; group contracting; an introduction to positive psychology, positive emotions and flourishing; the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson,2001); signature strengths	Strengths x weaknesses debate; discussion on top 3 signature strengths *This week's practice: using your strengths in a new way*
2. Stress management and resilience	Positive emotions	This session covered common stressful situations and common responses to stress; the concept of stress; the acute stress response to physical and psychosocial threats; dealing with stress: breathing exercises, eating well, doing physical exercises regularly, relaxation techniques, cognitive reframing, reducing commitments; emotional intelligence; resilience and associated factors; exploring ways to build resilience; psychological flexibility; expectations; dealing with setbacks	Listing strategies to deal with identified stressors and make an action plan to increase time and effort dedicated to self-nourishing activities; personal resilience plan *This week's practice: savouring exercise*
3. Self-directed learning and goal setting	Engagement	This topic explored the main attributes that characterise a self-directed learner and ways to develop these important skills for a successful experience as a student and in the workplace. These skills included understanding one's own values for setting meaningful goals and identifying meaning through the 'three-question process'	The 3-questions process: what gives you meaning?/what gives you pleasure?/ what engages you?; analysing a meaningful learning experience through the Gibbs Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988); exploring ways to do more activities under the identified/integrated/intrinsic motivation categories; peer reflection on core values *This week's practice: best possible future self*
4. Developing solution-focused skills	Engagement	This topic explored the main assumptions and practical aspects postulated by the solution-focused approach and related frameworks, such as the GROW (Whitmore, 1992) and PRACTICE (Palmer, 2001; 2011) models	Setting up SMART goals; using GROW (Whitmore, 1992) and PRACTICE (Palmer, 2001; 2011) to explore goal setting and attainment; devising action plans *This week's practice: gratitude visit or letter*
5. Positive communication & interpersonal relationships	Relationships	Relationships; communication components; mindful conversations; listening skills; voice inflections; communicating difficult topics/managing conflict; finding common ground through shared reality; open x closed/misleading questions; feedback techniques; expressing constructive criticism; assertiveness	Communicate a feeling to a peer; debate on finding common ground with different people and social groups; giving constructive feedback to a colleague through the 'Situation-Behaviour-Impact' framework; practising saying 'no'; exercising assertiveness skills *This week's practice: unexpected acts of kindness*

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116

Session	Key PERMA domain	Topic description	Examples of exercises and activities
6. Building a meaningful life and career	Meaning	Personal projects (Little, 2016); personality and free traits (Little, 2008); social identities and social representations as origins of meanings we give to projects	What does meaningful mean for you? What would your meaningful life look like? What do you need for your meaningful life?; listing personal projects and identifying if or which of them are most meaningful to students and aligned with personality and core values; peer reflection on the origins of meanings given to five top personal projects; peer reflection on ways to advance the personal projects considered most important to the student *This week's practice: enhancing pride through reflecting and sharing on the student's most significant achievement*
7. 'On being me'- what's your formula for success?	Meaning	Great minds: Their passions…. do they think alike to reach their goals?; understanding the conditions under which human talent will flourish; methods, rituals and processes: examples from science; finding passion	Self-exploration exercise: 'My way' to achievement (peer reflection on the methods which have been instrumental towards the student's most significant achievement) *This week's practice: gratitude journal*
8. Improving the way we live	Accomplishment	Principles of essentialism; core mindset of an essentialist: explore, eliminate, execute, transtheoretical model of change (DiClemente & Prochaska, 1982)	Peer reflection: can we purposefully and deliberately choose where to focus our energy?; being part of projects that are bigger than ourselves; fighting social injustice *This week's practice: social connection/ making a new connection every day*
9. Overcoming procrastination	Accomplishment	What is procrastination; what holds you back; causes of procrastination; typology of procrastination and cognitive-behavioural techniques to tackle procrastination (Dryden & Neenan, 2013)	Exploring what could be holding the student back from starting a meaningful personal or academic project; debating whether self-development or personal maintenance goals have been disadvantaged by procrastination; identifying avoidance behaviours and accompanying rationalisations; identifying types of procrastination in the student's routine; using the ABCDEF model (Palmer & Szymanska, 2007) to challenge unhelpful thoughts and take action *No weekly exercise*
10. Taking risks and making decisions	Accomplishment	An introduction to taking risks; common reasons behind avoiding risk; patterns of thinking underlying risk-avoidance; decision making: self-defeating attitudes underpinning indecisiveness; being creative; using a cost-benefit approach towards making decisions; taking risks and making decisions (Dryden & Neenan, 2013)	Identification of situations where fear of failure or rejection prevented the student from taking action towards meaningful goals; identification of unhelpful thinking patterns; cognitive reframing; self-awareness of self-defeating attitudes underpinning indecisiveness *No weekly exercise*

Table 4
Evaluation of each session in terms of usefulness and enjoyability

Session 1:	Session 2:	Session 3:	Session 4:	Session 5:	Session 6:	Session 7:	Session 8:	Session 9:	Session 10:
Positive psychology and the science of wellbeing	Stress management and resilience	Self-directed learning and goal setting	Developing solution-focused skills	Positive communication & interpersonal relationships	Building a meaningful life and career	'On being me' - what's your formula for success?	Improving the way we live	Overcoming procrastination	Taking risks and making decisions
M = 8.43; *SD* = 1.50	*M* = 8.86; *SD* = 1.61	*M* = 8.93; *SD* = 0.10	*M* = 9.00; *SD* = 1.04	*M* = 8.38; *SD* = 1.71	*M* = 7.86; *SD* = 1.79	*M* = 8.09; *SD* = 1.97	*M* = 8.92; *SD* = 1.11	*M* = 9.23; *SD* = 1.42	*M* = 9.73; *SD* = 0.65

- Were your expectations met?
- What did you like the most?
- What would you change?
- On a scale of 1 (I definitely will not) to 10 (I definitely will), how likely would you recommend the module to a friend?
- Regarding your goal achievement established in the beginning of the module, where are you in a scale of 0 (no progress) to 5 (completely achieved)? Please specify your goal, if possible.
- Do you think the module helped you improve your wellbeing?
- Considering how useful and enjoyable the session was, how would you rate each of the programme's sessions?

Descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken using IBM SPSS Statistics 25, and a brief thematic analysis using identification of themes that emerged from open-ended questions was also undertaken.

RESULTS

The majority of participants (92.9%) reported that their expectations for the programme were met. With regards to the question 'What did you like the most?', five themes were identified in a total of 16 meaning units. Themes categorised as 'friendly environment' ('the peer to peer talks and the kindness of lecturers'; 'the ease with which lectures were explained'), 'personal skills' ('using your strength'; 'that it was personally relevant') and 'interactive sessions' ('discussions and sharing ideas together') were most frequently reported (25% of occurrences, each). Other themes, like 'content' ('valid knowledge') and 'weekly practice' ('homework tasks') were also identified, although at a decreased rate of occurrence (12.5% each).

For the question 'What would you like to change?', 14 meaning units were identified, and six themes emerged. Most answers indicated that participants would not change anything in the programme ('nothing'; 42.9%); others reported that more content could be added ('more on assertiveness'; 'more theory'; 14.3%), that an online version of the programme should be made available ('I wish there was a recording'; 14.3%) and that more group work should be included in the future (7.1%). Another response mentioned a potential change to the title ('perhaps the title of the course. It might attract more females than males'; 7.1%) whilst other two evidenced a misunderstanding of the question where students believed that what was being asked was what they would change in themselves, rather than in the programme ('knowing how to achieve my potential'; 'think more positive'; 14.3%).

When asked whether they would recommend the programme to a fellow student on a scale from 1 ('I definitely will not') to 10 ('I definitely will'), participants rated the programme quite highly (*M* = 8.86; *SD* = 1.17). Participants were then asked to rate their goal achievement on a scale from 0 ('no progress') to 5 ('completely achieved'); the mean goal achievement reported was 3.48 (*SD* = 0.54). With regards to changes in wellbeing, 85.7% participants reported a positive change and 14.3% reported that the programme somewhat helped improve their levels of perceived wellbeing ('it helped me become aware and gave me tools/strategies to use'; 'not in a great way but it made me think more').

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116

Finally, participants were asked to rate each of the ten sessions on a scale from 1 to 10, taking into consideration how useful and enjoyable the session was. Results are reported in Table 3, page 6.

DISCUSSION

Academic success walks hand-in-hand with student wellbeing. Stress can have a negative impact on academic performance and is associated with high levels of anxiety, depression and other mental and physical health issues (Misra & McKean, 2000; Adams et al., 2008). Designing and offering students effective initiatives for the development of skills to improve self-confidence, wellbeing and resilience are fundamental for the establishment of a positive culture in the institution, one that supports thriving and flourishing and that facilitates student success, retention and employability. Overall, sessions were rated highly with regards to usefulness and enjoyability, suggesting that the programme was well-received by PGT students.

As reported in the Results section, one participant mentioned that the title 'Time to Flourish' could be changed in order to attract more males in future runs, since the term 'flourish' could be seen as somewhat associated with the feminine gender. This was an on-going conversation that emerged during the programme and not only at the evaluation stage. We asked participants to suggest new names, with some examples emerging around 'life coaching', 'positive psychology' and 'the science of wellbeing'. Drawing on students' comments during these discussions, the next run of the programme will have a new title, in an attempt to promote greater gender equality in participant recruitment.

Another interesting point to make is that around the mean score given by participants to the likelihood of recommending the programme to a friend. If we consider the mean score obtained (M = 8.86) being above 7 on a scale from 1 to 10, then in the context of metrics such as Net Promoter Score® benchmarks Time to Flourish would be considered among the best services of its kind (Yan, 2019).

When we look at the goal achievement scores, however, we notice that there is clear room for improvement in upcoming offerings of the programme. Goals disclosed by participants in the programme evaluation included submitting PhD applications, achieving a better work-life balance and starting healthy habits (such as healthy eating and undertaking physical exercise more regularly). One participant stated that sessions 9 and 10 (on overcoming procrastination and making decisions) were instrumental in them moving forward with their goal, which raises the hypothesis that better ratings for goal achievement could be obtained in follow-up measures. It is also possible that by addressing the points raised by students taking part in this first run (more emphasis on the cognitive-behavioural topics highly rated by students, adding more content on assertiveness and adding a Moodle page with supporting material and forums for peer discussion between sessions), goal achievement should also increase. It is also possible that goal achievement ratings were not measured accurately enough, something that could be addressed by encouraging participants to choose a very specific goal from the beginning of the programme and focus on achieving this goal across the different practical exercises that followed. Encouragement to monitor progress towards goal achievement more regularly could also have been a useful skill for participants, one that could improve their perception of their progress and goal achievement and that could likely lead to increased motivation.

With regards to participants' preferred sessions, those on developing solution-focused skills ('Very relevant for practical application to study-based anxiety, which I think was a high priority for many of the students on the course') and cognitive-behavioural skills to overcome procrastination ('Very helpful as it was not a subject I have explored in depth before. Clearly presented. Good mix of theory and practical exercises') and make decisions ('Made me think at my current goals and the reasons as to why maybe I do not take risks often. Favourite lecture') received the highest ratings from participants. Also highly rated was the session on 'Improving the way we live' which explored essentialism and the importance of staying focused, as well as the transtheoretical model of change ('Great session made me think differently'). In terms of areas for improvement, participants pointed out they would appreciate exploring more the theory and evidence from positive psychology studies on the topic of meaning/purpose and more time discussing what success means personally to each one of them.

The majority of participants (86%) reported that the programme helped them improve their perceived levels of wellbeing. This is encouraging and provides us with preliminary evidence supporting the effectiveness of Time to Flourish in promoting wellbeing in PGT students. Nevertheless, findings should be interpreted tentatively given the small sample size of this pilot run of the programme and considering that no standardised measures of wellbeing or mental health were used

in the study. Self-selection of participants is a limitation that cannot be excluded, and the lack of data from those students who chose not to complete the programme also needs to be considered when interpreting the findings reported herein. Furthermore, it is also important to keep in mind that all participants were PGT students in the IoPPN and were therefore already familiar with some of the concepts presented in the programme. It is part of the future perspectives for this project to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme in other faculties. This should enable us to reach a better understanding of how to promote student wellbeing as a whole, as opposed to promoting it exclusively among students who already have a demonstrated interest in the field.

Finally, other points that could be taken into consideration for the next run and evaluation of this wellbeing programme include: 1) possible delivery in areas of the university that are different from those where students normally have their mainstream module delivery (i.e., lecture theatres) in order to avoid contextual association with stressors and in this way boost the potential effectiveness of the intervention, 2) the inclusion of short mindfulness meditation practice (Galante et al., 2018) and 3) the use of other well-established cognitive-behavioural models, such as SPACE (Edgerton & Palmer, 2005) for an in-depth assessment and change of wellbeing-blocking cognitions and behaviours. SPACE is a psychological framework used in the assessment and unblocking of unhelpful cognitions and behaviours in therapy, stress management and also in coaching psychology settings (Edgerton & Palmer, 2005; Williams & Palmer, 2013). It is an acronym presented as a diagram to clients which illustrates and stimulates discussions around the five key elements that interact and determine one another in psychological processes: Social Context, Physical, Actions, Cognitions and Emotions (Edgerton & Palmer, 2005).

In the context of student mental health and wellbeing, SPACE could be used to stimulate discussions on topics reported to be the top concerns among university students, such as academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans (Beiter et al., 2015). Moreover, finding ways to engage other minority groups in the programme, through surveys and focus groups, could help improve the programme by enhancing diversity in the group, considering that needs can be group-specific. As recognised by Baik and co-workers, analysing and acting on students' suggestions can help foster their sense of inclusion and empowerment (Baik, Larcombe, & Brooker, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Promoting resilience and wellbeing in university students at all levels is paramount for student success, retention, and employability and it is also part of the academic citizenship duties expected of higher education institutions. Here, we described Time to Flourish: Achieving your Potential, a coaching psychology-based programme for PGT students to achieve more satisfactory levels of resilience and wellbeing and build a life that is more fulfilling and meaningful inside and outside of academia. Our preliminary results suggest that the programme contains a number of elements that are useful for students in achieving these aims. Suggestions made by students will be incorporated in future runs of the programme to ensure optimal stakeholder engagement in the design and evaluation of this intervention.

Future research will be able to unravel whether and how the programme in its modified version will be effective in promoting resilience, wellbeing, goal achievement and hopefully, in also tackling other issues of concern in this population, such as loneliness. Our approach and any future improvements support the suggestion by the UK Healthy Universities Network, "to create a learning environment and organisational culture that enhances the health, well-being and sustainability of its community and enables people to achieve their full potential" (Dooris, Cawood, Doherty, & Powell, 2010). ■

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116

Citation

Dias, G. P., Foster, J., and Zunszain, P. A. (2019). 'Time to Flourish: designing a coaching psychology programme to promote resilience and wellbeing in postgraduate students.' *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology*, 3, 7, 1-12. Retrieved from: http://www.nationalwellbeingservice.org/volumes/volume-3-2019/volume-3-article-7/

Biographies

Gisele P. Dias is a chartered psychologist (British Psychological Society), coaching psychologist and neuroscientist. She is a Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Greenwich and has a special interest in developing and evaluating psychological interventions to promote wellbeing, resilience and positive mental health in different groups and communities.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7276-2010

Juliet Foster studied social psychology and works on understandings of health and illness, and in particular mental health. She specialises in qualitative research methods and analysis, and, as Deputy Dean of Education at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience has a particular interest in student mental health and wellbeing.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0801-4429

Patricia A. Zunszain studied chemistry and works on elucidating the underlying mechanisms of mood disorders, using her experience in medicinal chemistry, biophysics and neuroscience. She has a strong interest in the formative development of students and researchers, both academically and as individuals. As Senior Tutor (Student Experience) at the Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, she generates and implements new initiatives to improve the overall experience of undergraduate and postgraduate students, including mental health, diversity and education.

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8853-5680

References

Association of University & College Counselling. (2011). *Annual survey of counselling in further and higher education, 2006/07.* Rugby: British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy.

Baik, C., Larcombe, W., & Brooker, A. (2019). How universities can enhance student mental wellbeing: The student perspective. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 1-14.

Beiter, R., Nash, R., McCrady, M., Rhoades, D., Linscomb, M., Clarahan, M., & Sammut, S. (2015). The prevalence and correlates of depression, anxiety, and stress in a sample of college students. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 173: 90-96.

Brown, L. (2007). A consideration of the challenges involved in supervising international masters students. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 31(3): 239-248.

Dias, G. P., Palmer, S., & Nardi, A. E. (2017). Integrating positive psychology and the solution-focused approach with cognitive-behavioural coaching: The integrative cognitive-behavioural coaching model. *European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology,* 1(3): 1-8.

Dooris, M. T., Cawood, J., Doherty, S., & Powell, S. (2010). *Healthy Universities: Concept, model and framework for applying the healthy settings approach within higher education in England.* Working Paper. UCLan, Preston / London.

Duan, W., Ho, S. M., Tang, X., Li, T., & Zhang, Y. (2014). Character strength-based intervention to promote satisfaction with life in the Chinese university context. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 15(6): 1347-1361.

Dryden, W., & Neenan, M. (2013). *Life coaching: A cognitive behavioural approach*. Hove: Routledge.

Edgerton, N., & Palmer, S. (2005). SPACE: A psychological model for use within cognitive behavioural coaching, therapy and stress management. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 1(2): 25-31.

Evans, T. M., Bira, L., Gastelum, J. B., Weiss, L. T., & Vanderford, N. L. (2018). Evidence for a mental health crisis in graduate education. *Nature Biotechnology*, 36(3): 282.

Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist*, 56(3): 218.

Galante, J., Dufour, G., Vainre, M., Wagner, A. P., Stochl, J., Benton, A., ... & Jones, P. B. (2018). A mindfulness-based intervention to increase resilience to stress in university students (the Mindful Student Study): A pragmatic randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet Public Health*, 3(2): e72-e81.

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by Doing: A guide to teaching and learning methods.* Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic FEU.

Green, S., & Palmer, S. (2019). The future of positive psychology coaching. In S. Green & S. Palmer (Eds.), *Positive Psychology Coaching in Practice* (pp.197-202). Oxon: Routledge.

Hefner, J., & Eisenberg, D. (2009). Social support and mental health among college students. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry,* 79(4): 491-499.

Hunt, J., & Eisenburg, D. (2010). Mental health problems and help-seeking behavior among college students. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 46(1): 3-10.

Little, B. R. (2008). Personal projects and free traits: Personality and motivation reconsidered. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2(3):1235-1254.

Little, B. R. (2016). Well-doing: Personal projects and the social ecology of flourishing. *Handbook of Eudaimonic Well-being* (pp.297-305). Springer, Cham.

Lyubomirsky, S., Dickerhoof, R., Boehm, J. K., & Sheldon, K. M. (2011). Becoming happier takes both a will and a proper way: an experimental longitudinal intervention to boost well-being. *Emotion*, 11(2): 391.

Macaskill, A. (2013). The mental health of university students in the United Kingdom. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 41(4): 426-441.

Neves, J., & Hillman, N. (2017). *Student academic experience survey.* Higher Education Policy Institute and Higher Education Academy, 12.

Palmer, S. (2007). PRACTICE: A model suitable for coaching, counselling, psychotherapy and stress management. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 3(2): 71-77.

Palmer, S. (2011). Revisiting the P in the PRACTICE coaching model. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 7(2): 156-158.

Palmer, S., & Szymanska, K. (2007). Cognitive Behavioural Coaching: An integrative approach. In S. Palmer and A. Whybrow (Eds.), *Handbook of Coaching Psychology: A Guide for Practitioners*. Hove: Routledge.

Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1982). Transtheoretical therapy: Toward a more integrative model of change. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research & Practice*, 19(3): 276.

Räsänen, P., Lappalainen, P., Muotka, J., Tolvanen, A., & Lappalainen, R. (2016). An online guided ACT intervention for enhancing the psychological wellbeing of university students: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 78: 30-42.

Regehr, C., Glancy, D., & Pitts, A. (2013). Interventions to reduce stress in university students: A review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Affective Disorders,* 148(1): 1-11.

Seligman, M. (2011). *Flourish*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Seligman, M. (2018). PERMA and the building blocks of well-being. *The Journal of Positive Psychology,* 13(4): 333-335.

Storrie, K., Ahern, K., & Tuckett, A. (2010). A systematic review: Students with mental health problems - A growing problem. *International Journal of Nursing Practice*, 16(1): 1-6.

Whitmore, J. (1992). *Coaching for performance.* London: Nicholas Brealey.

Williams, H., & Palmer, S. (2013). The SPACE model in coaching practice: A case study. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 9(1): 45-47.

Wu, W., & Hammond, M. (2011). Challenges of university adjustment in the UK: A study of East Asian Master's degree students. Journal of Further and Higher Education, 35(3): 423-438.

Yan, J. (2019). *Good Net Promoter Score (NPS): What is it?* Retrieved 24 May 2019.

European Journal of Applied Positive Psychology 2019, 3, Article 7 ISSN 2397-7116