

Student Voice, from ‘empty signifier’ to ‘being-in-relation’: increasing belonging in a Master students’ cohort through academic cohort events and relational teaching practice

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Who we are



MSc Mental Health in Children and
Young People (CYP): Psychological
Approaches

Clinical Psychology

School of Health in Social Sciences

60 - 75 PGR students

2 - 5 Student Reps

1 Programme Director

2 Academic Cohort Leads

5 - 7 Teaching Staff

1 Programme Administrator

1 Student Adviser

Our shared pedagogy

- “Learning, at its heart, is a relational process”(Felten & Lambert, 2020, p. 161)
- Approaching teaching as a relational act (e.g., Bovill, 2020; Murdoch et al., 2020)
- Priority to the relational processes as well as to the outcomes of higher education (Su & Wood., 2023)
- Student voice is essential to our development as educators, and to the Programme’s improvement
- Student voice not an ‘empty signifier’, relegated only to certain moments and roles

Mattering in HE

“Students need to be shown they matter through actions and interactions with those who wish to convey to them their value and that someone has an interest in their development and wellbeing.”

(Flett et al., 2022, p. 23)

Why did we need to change?

22/23 decrease in satisfaction rates across school (overall satisfaction: 50.3%, community: 35.9%, health and wellbeing support: 52%)

CYP satisfaction rates: 54.5%, community 21%, health and wellbeing support: 42.5%

Spring 2024 changes at the Programme Team level (new PD, new ACLs, new Administrator)

Radical rethink of student-staff collaborative approach and implementation of activities that show our students that they matter to us.

How did we do it? ACL events

23/24

- Lunch with Teaching team/ feedback on programme
- Career / Dissertation
- Goodbye picnic
- Graduation Catch-up
- 2 student reps



24/25

- Welcome week
- Becoming a Practitioner
- All about assessments
- Winter Holidays event
- Referencing, AI, and Critical Voice
- Staff-student workshop to gather views on improve programme (EDI)
- Picnic in the meadows
- Careers day
- Improving CYP + lunch
- Alumni LinkedIn
- Graduation catch up
- 2student reps

25/26

- Welcome week
- Being a Master Student
- Mental health day (student-led)
- Brazilian guest speakers
- Assessment information session
- Winter Holiday Event
- Welcome back Event & staff student activities
- Good Academic Practice Workshop
- De-stressor Event
- Picnic (sharing of food and culture)
- EDI event
- Careers days
- Planned Prom or formal social event (student-led)
- Graduation catch-up
- 5 Student Reps (2 Academic, 3 Social)



Most of these were attended by the majority of the staff team outwith WAM time!

How did we do it?

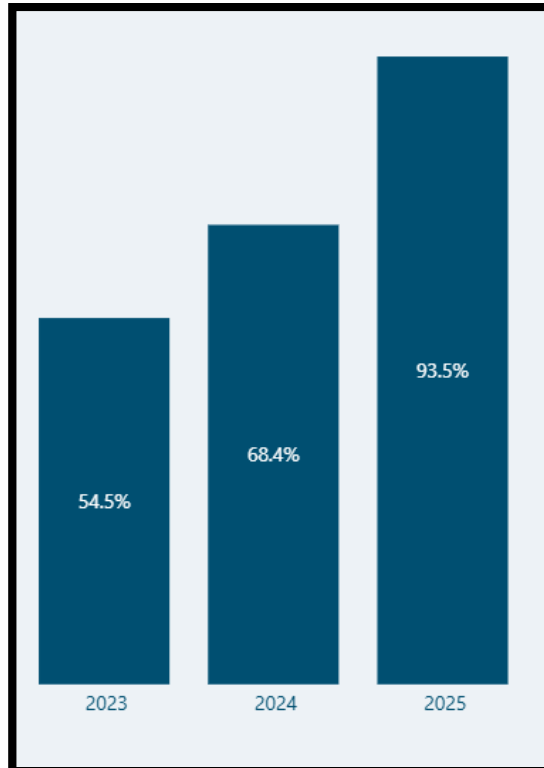
Micro-moments of connection

- Human Bingo + Quiz about the Programme team + Pub Quiz
- Learning students' names, their backgrounds and their aspirations for the future
- Regular drop-in sessions with programme director (career, academic & mental health) - open door policy
- Teaching staff creating safe environments to ask questions within and outwith lecture time – talking with passion for the topics we are teaching
- Expressions of warmth, empathy and responsiveness from staff were seen as essential for feeling part of a community

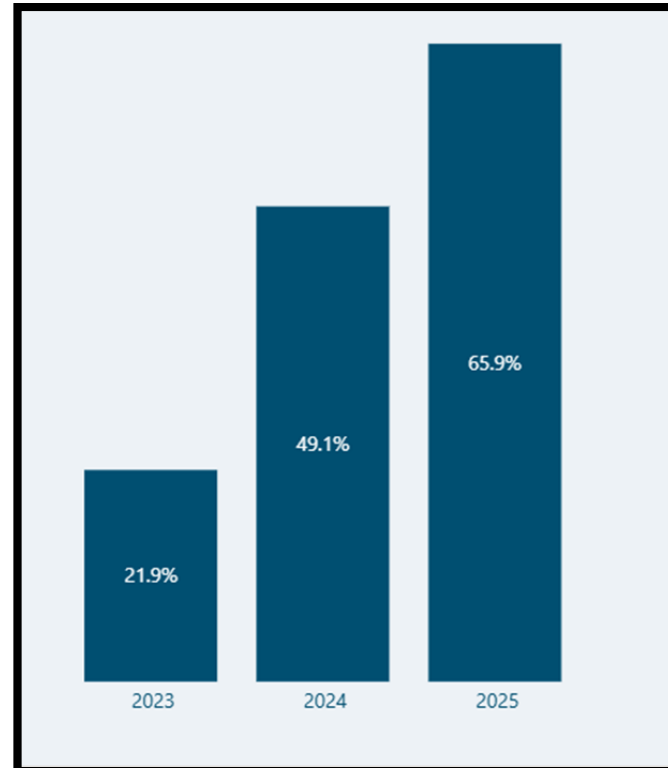


What did it mean to the students?

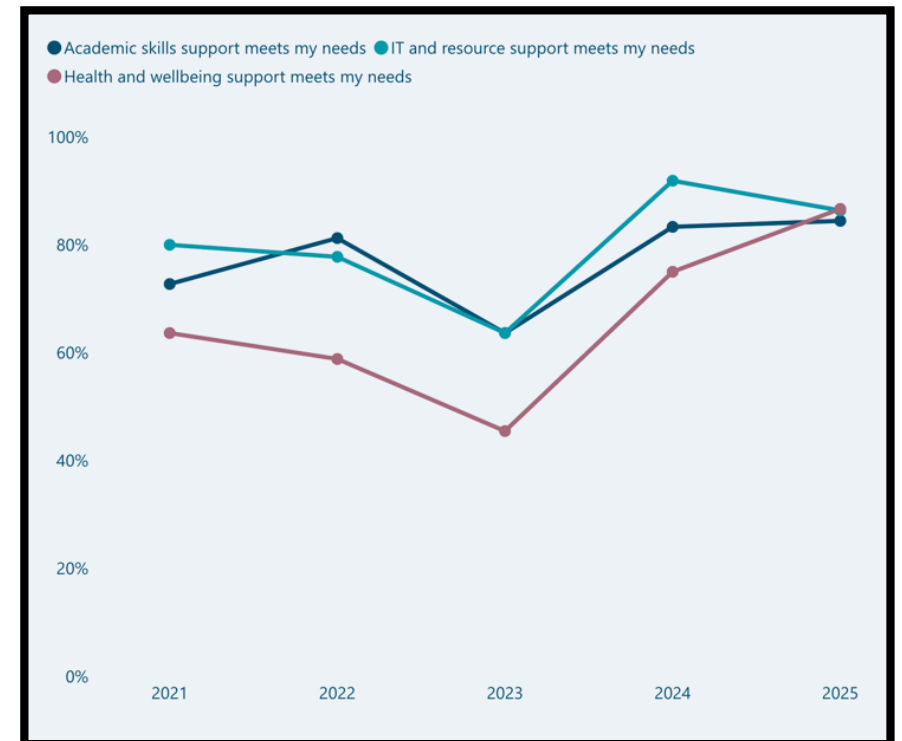
Satisfaction rate



Perceptions of Community



Health and MH Support



Your focus on getting to know students and ensuring this was as much a social as an academic course played a huge role in making this such a lovely experience

I really enjoyed the event where we reflected on the program as a group and talked about things we've learned. It gave me a space to reflect on how far I've come since moving to Scotland, as well as an opportunity to describe how certain aspects of the program worked/didn't work for students and how they can be improved.

Beyond her academic expertise, X genuinely cares about the overall well-being of her students, which made the experience even more enriching.

What sets X apart is her ability to connect with students as individuals. She listens, responds with care, and adapts her teaching to different learning needs without ever compromising academic depth. X's impact extends far beyond module content she models empathy, intellectual rigour, and the kind of inclusive pedagogy that empowers students.

Simply demonstrating active and compassionate listening and providing feedback mattered. Seeing how the team of lecturers and Katie coming together to ensure we understand our system and always asking if we needed anything also mattered. It gave us reassurance that we aren't on this journey alone.

Definitely having us do cohort events to come together and socialise outside of lecturers has also fostered a healthy, safe, powerful, and meaningful environment.

Encourages us to speak on our experiences or voice our curious concerns has also promoted a level of inclusivity.

X is an exceptionally kind and approachable lecturer who demonstrates genuine care for her students. She made a remarkable effort to learn every student's name - something I have not experienced at either this university or my previous one - which immediately created a welcoming and supportive learning environment.



All teaching staff
received EUSA
nominations

I don't think there was an instance this year where it felt like I DIDN'T matter to you!! When planning social events and having discussions about the program in general, **I always felt that my opinions were valued, heard, and respected.**

In addition to this, **the other social reps and I had substantial influence on what activities took place during events**, which definitely made compulsory attendance points engaging, creative, and enjoyable - which makes me feel good and confident about my ability to engage with the cohort!



Why does this matter to all of us?

- Fostering connection in authentic and genuine ways – not treating students as consumers we need to keep satisfied
- Need for social, real life, in person relationships
- Relational pedagogy also as role modelling practice for future practitioners in the mental health sector
- How to keep on building on this pedagogy in the current HE UK climate?
- **A question for us all.**



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