SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATIONS
FOR STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Laura Fernanda Betancourt Basallo, Angela Maria Cortés Moreno
LSE Change Makers

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Background

While LSE has made strides in improving its student support services, the challenge of consistently communicating the available support to foster a supportive community within the School remains. This is a crucial issue, especially in light of the 2023 National Student Survey, which ranked LSE low, in the 20th position among other universities, with only 67.49% of students responding positively to how information about the school's mental wellbeing services was communicated. This research aims to answer the following question: **What are the key components of effective internal communications related to Student Mental Health and Wellbeing (SMHW) at LSE?** It was proposed by the Internal Communications Team and is situated within the context of LSE's Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework (SMHWF).

Literature Review

When considering mental health conditions among students, it's crucial to acknowledge the 25% increase in anxiety and depression worldwide in 2022, as reported by the World Health Organisation. This increase has had a severe impact on young people and women, compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a call for institutional efforts to promote wellbeing and develop strategies that foster equality, diversity, resilience, integration, social support, and work-life balance. The UK Government's efforts are channelled through the Higher Education Mental Health Implementation Taskforce established in 2023, which aims to drive the adoption of best practices among higher education providers in England and alleviate the impact of mental distress on students. The Taskforce and the Office for Students has been promoting a strong emphasis on communication in how students access mental health support, underscoring the need to improve how information about mental distress and student support is communicated. The five C's of effective communication and the MINDSPACE frameworks are valuable resources for effectively communicating about student mental health and wellbeing and go beyond just providing information and driving change.

Methodology

The study used an interdisciplinary and mixed-method approach, combining insights from the **social sciences**, **design thinking**, and **foresight**. The methodology was intentionally designed to ensure each method could inform the next, creating a comprehensive and inclusive research process. Methods included initial desk research, literature review, semi-structured interviews, an on-campus survey, Conversation Starters during Mental Health Awareness Week, and a Futures workshop. The research included **90 participants**, including undergraduate and postgraduate students and staff. It employed a **thematic analysis** on all inputs, employing inductive and semantic approaches to allow the data to uncover patterns and key themes while focusing on its explicit content rather than delving into the underlying assumptions and subtext.

Findings

The findings indicate that students are aware of available mental health and wellbeing services and consider them somewhat effective. However, there is a gap between internal communication strategies and student expectations. This gap arises from a reality where there are (a) perceived differences between the information received and the information available when students want to access the services and (b) varied perceptions and individual factors that shape their interaction with it.

LSE's current strategy for promoting student wellbeing involves co-creating messages between Internal Communications and Student Services, and sharing information through Student News, Student Hub, social media, the webpage, and departmental newsletters. Their actions are guided by the SMHWF Theme C, focused on supporting students through prevention and promotion initiatives and direct support.
The community's interaction with the information resulting from the approach above differs across the School. Students and staff access and engage with SMHW and have diverse expectations. Yet, the respondents' views revolve around three crucial communication elements: senders, channels, and messages. Here are the main points, including quotes from the respondents in burgundy:

- When it comes to the senders of information, participants suggested that support information for SMHW should be provided during Welcome Week and regularly throughout the year through digital and physical formats, for example, using a "big diagram/map with all the services offered by Student Support". They also emphasised the need for updated and consistent communications to prevent discrepancies between the advertised services and the actual availability experienced by students.

Findings (continued)

Participants also highlighted the need to "streamline communications" and suggested creating monthly content schedules for Communications and Marketing Officers and a dedicated team in Student Services. Additionally, they suggested periodic interactive sessions with students to gather feedback and improve communication strategies.
- From the students' viewpoint, their preferred communication channels are LSE News and the departmental newsletters. However, they find them overwhelming, as it's "a list of various things". They suggest the creation of a specialised newsletter focused on SMHW. Students often resort to "Googling it" to seek support services and find the current web design 'discouraging'. They recommend a redesign focused on "user experience". After receiving initial information, some students are unsure how to contact Student Wellbeing Services and are unaware of their physical location, and those who know it are considered "hidden in the towers". They propose the establishment of a well-known physical space and the promotion of information about SMHW in the library.
- In the survey, students found the SMHW support messages to be clear, correct, complete, concise, and compassionate. However, they also criticised their scarcity and accessibility. Some students struggle to navigate available services and figure out what they need, and the wait to access wellbeing services is discouraging. Participants recommended a human-centred communication approach, "putting a face" to the advisors and students who have engaged successfully with SMHW services, and tailoring messages to specific audiences to address structural inequalities and cultural differences.

A cross-cutting element of the findings is the need to improve strategies for communicating and promoting wellbeing services while balancing research with action to avoid getting stuck in a cycle of continuous research without implementing changes.

Key Takeaways

This study suggests using a human-centred approach aligned with what students and staff want (**desirability**), what is technologically possible (**feasibility**), and what is economically **viable** to improve internal communication about student mental health and well-being.

To effectively carry out this solution, we recommend focusing on six strategic priorities:

Boost internal communication strategies for both **preventive and reactive mental health and wellbeing services**. Promoting a holistic wellness service model involves raising awareness of and access to more low-level interventions and strengthening existing service provisions when students experience a crisis.

Provide complete information about the available support and ensure smooth access to SMHW services. The effectiveness of communication can be decimated if the first contact with wellbeing services is not clear and concise, which can demotivate students seeking information and assistance.

Tailor messages to diverse audiences to create inclusive and welcoming information for all students to feel addressed. Students form a diverse community with various lived experiences, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, abilities, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

Enhance coordination between Internal Communication, Student Services, and Academic Departments to improve information flow.

Assure internal communication is in tune with service availability. If the School enhances the information, more students may be aware of the wellbeing services and want to access them, so the mental health and wellbeing support offered should meet this new demand.

Involve the entire LSE community in improving internal communication strategies, from continuous student feedback to engaging with senior decision-makers.

Acknowledgements

Want to learn more about this Change Makers project? The full Final Report is available here!