

SELF FUNDED PHD OPPORTUNITY

‘Positive Higher Education’: The Role of Universities in Developing Character Strengths and Wellbeing

The wellbeing of university students is a topic of avid attention, not surprisingly given the prevalence of student mental health issues and the implications for physical and mental health outcomes, educational attainment and student satisfaction matrices (Macaskill, 2013). One educational approach that is particularly relevant in addressing these concerns is ‘Positive Education’, where the focus is shifted towards fostering student wellbeing and character strengths *alongside* academic performance (Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich & Linkins, 2009).

There is a vast literature demonstrating that the cultivation of character strengths (such as resilience, mindfulness, gratitude, creativity, emotional intelligence) leads to gains in wellbeing (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009), and evidence in primary and secondary education demonstrates that the cultivation of character strengths and wellbeing leads to gains in academic performance (Waters, 2011).

To date, the focus on positive education has been almost entirely directed towards primary and secondary schools. There has been comparably little attention paid to positive education at the tertiary level. This (self-funded) PhD project would combine staff expertise in Psychology and Education to further our understanding of the application of positive education to universities in an approach we have dubbed ‘Positive Higher Education’.

This PhD project would involve an exploration of the role of universities in furthering the positive education movement and whether Higher Education is a context where key character strengths for employment could be cultivated whilst also seeing gains in academic outcomes. In particular, the PhD candidate would be engaged in exploring student, educator and management views on the role of universities in cultivating character strengths and wellbeing and strategies/ routes of implementation.

Supervisory Team:

This PhD project would be supported by an interdisciplinary team with staff from the School of Psychology and the School of Education.

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