

Understanding the Mental health of Doctoral Researchers

Researcher-Led Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiatives - Application Form

Thank you for your interest in applying to the Researcher-Led Mental Health and Wellbeing Initiatives funding scheme.

The deadline for applications is Friday 8th November 2019.

Please ensure that you have read the application guidance before completing your application.

1. Name

First

Last

2. Sussex e-mail address

@sussex.ac.uk

4. School and department of lead applicant

School of Education and Social Work; Department of Education

About the proposed initiative

Title of initiative

Monthly Video Call Support Groups for up to 4 PhD Students

When is the proposed initiative running?

On a single date On multiple dates

End date

01/05/2019

Start date

30/04/2022

Which theme(s) does your proposed initiative best align with?

- Theme 1: Creating and maintaining community belonging
- Theme 2: Cultivating time to breathe
- Theme 3: Celebrating self and successes
- Theme 4: Constructing "other groups, other routes, other ways to be free"
- Theme 5: Curating experiences of research process

Please describe your proposed initiative (including how it aligns with the theme(s) you have selected above):

Our initiative is based on our experience of setting up a Skype Support group for ourselves in the first year of our PhD. We have now been running it successfully, monthly, for 1.5 years. We came together to form the group because we all found it difficult to regularly attend the weekly meeting groups that were set up for first year PhD students in the School of Education and Social Work. For the first term we followed the readings and discussions that were set for the formal meeting groups taking place on campus but since then we have supported each other through submitting out research proposals, ethics review and fieldwork. We intend to continue with our group until the end of our PhDs.

I am a full-time PhD student and [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] are part-time. We are all older students and have caring responsibilities. Three of us have jobs and one of us lives a long way from the university and finds it particularly difficult to come to campus. We have given each other more than just support through the PhD research process, we have created a community for ourselves – four people who were all feeling isolated and nervous about the way ahead. We have shared experiences and discussed the challenges of managing a PhD around our other commitments and celebrated our successes together. All four of us have even continued to ‘meet’ when one of us had to intermit for a few months due to illness.

The group has also provided a space to discuss our research. We always take turns to update each other on what we have been doing and to raise any particular challenges that we have been facing. It has been extremely useful to do this with someone other than our supervisor – just talking things through has helped to clarify our thoughts and given us confidence.

Please provide a project timeline, outlining the steps you would take to organise the initiative, including promotion and evaluation of the activity

We use Skype because it is free. There may be another video calling platform that is better in terms of maintaining a connection throughout the whole call, however, there would be a cost attached to this. The University may want to look into the possibilities.

The initiative could be set up within a couple of months. We would write guidelines that could be distributed to staff administering PhD programmes in each School. After that it would be the responsibility of the School to inform students of the initiative at the Induction and get involved in matching people up with similar circumstances and research interests. We do not think that it should be compulsory, but that it should be recommended by staff as a way of managing well-being. Although it is not aimed just at first year PhD students, it would make sense to have it up and running by the next intake in September 2019. We would recommend that the initiative is evaluated at the end of each academic year and could run indefinitely.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

Please describe the target audience. For example, would your initiative be suitable for all doctoral researchers or only those at a particular stage and/or in a specific discipline?

This initiative is suitable for all PhD students in any department. It may be particularly useful for those in Arts and Humanities where the experience of doing a PhD can be more isolating than the Sciences. It may also be particularly helpful for those who spend little time on campus, which tends to be those who are older, part time or have caring responsibilities. Having said this, we believe that it would actually be suitable for, and benefit, everyone. For those PhD students who are regularly on campus, it may work better for group members to meet face-to-face in a cafe or other venue. We would recommend setting it up at the beginning of the first year and continue until the end.

We would suggest that the Video Call Support group should be made up of a maximum of 4 people from the same School and in the same year of their PhD. The composition of the group should be flexible but we believe that there should be some homogeneity, for example, people who are part-time, international students or those who have a similar research interests. Having said that, it is important that there is flexibility and that the participants themselves should be given the opportunity to decide which group they would like to be a part of.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

If your target audience is within your department or School, please set out how the initiative could be scaled up (in future projects) to reach a broader range of doctoral researchers across Schools

As mentioned above, we would write guidelines that could be distributed to staff administering PhD programmes in each School. We would be happy to have a meeting with School representatives to discuss the guidelines. After that it would be the responsibility of the School to inform students of the initiative, recommend it to them and get involved in matching people up with similar circumstances and research interests.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

Please outline how your proposed initiative will promote awareness of, support, or improve doctoral researcher mental health and/or wellbeing at Sussex

As described above, our experience over the last 1.5 years of the Skype Support Group has been very positive. It has kept us connected, made us feel supported during the highs and lows of PhD life and, most importantly, has improved our mental health in what feels like a very isolating, intense and stressful period of our lives. We really hope that other people can benefit from our initiative.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

Describe how the success and impact of the initiative will be evaluated:

We would write a short online questionnaire which could be used to evaluate the initiative. It would be the responsibility of each School to provide students with the link at the end of each academic year or a year after the group is set up. Each School would also be responsible for analysing the findings. If necessary a meeting could be set up with us and the School representatives at the end of the first year to discuss the evaluation results and whether or not it is necessary to make any amendments to the guidelines.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

Budget

Please provide a detailed budget indicating what you would spend the funding on if you are successful in your application.

Your budget should include a breakdown of costs and justification for each item (e.g. lunch for 30 people at

£6 per head from Sussex Food; accommodation for external speaker at £80 per night at a University approved hotel or guest house). See the guidance notes for further advice on your proposed budget.

Budget details

Item details	£
There are no costs attached to this proposed initiative unless the University is able to pay us for writing the guidelines and questionnaire and attending meetings with School representatives.	£0.00

Total: £0.00

Total requested

£0.00

Do you have additional funding for the proposed initiative (e.g. from your School or Department?)

Yes No

Please attach any additional documents here relevant to your application (e.g. to assist the panel in understanding the activity) (optional)