Understanding the Mental health of **Doc**toral 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

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First	Last

2. Sussex e-mail address

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮@sussex.ac.uk

4. School and department of lead applicant

MFM

About the proposed initiative

Title of initiative

doctoral researchers' GAME NIGHT

When is the proposed initiative running?
○ On a single date ⦿ On multiple dates

End date	**Start date**

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):

As doctoral researchers we all need some time to breathe and interact with others. We propose a night of taking our minds off the PhD pressure, relaxing and challenging each other in other ways that are not too complicated but are fun and good for our mental wellbeing. We will do this by hosting a games night every month with intermittent support from the University of Sussex's Board Games Society. Doctoral researchers will also be encouraged to bring their own games so as to encourage a culture of sharing. The intention is also that once the project gains momentum, we will be able to fully host game nights using board games and other games brought by doctoral students.

This proposal falls in line with the theme cultivating time to breathe because it gives doctoral researchers a chance to socialise with one another, to be in the company of each other but for non-academic purposes. What this means is they will also be able to create a social community where they can interact and support one another. One of the most important things that one can do as a doctoral researcher is to not isolate themselves, but to actually surround themselves with other students who share similar experiences. The games night will be an excellent opportunity for this.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

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

The game night will be an ongoing event taking place monthly throughout the academic year 2019/20. We plan to organize 8 sessions of the event between October 2019 and July 2020, with two breaks in January 2019 (winter holidays) and June 2020 (Festival of Doctoral Research). The game night will take place on the last Wednesday of each month, with a sole exception for December 2019 when the special holiday session will be held on Wednesday the 11th, before the break starts. The rest of the sessions will happen on the following days:

30th of October
27th of November
11th of December
26th of February
25th of March
29th of April
27th of May
29th of July

Organization: The event will be held at the IDS bar where drink vouchers and snacks will be provided (see the budget). Hence, the first step will consist of contacting the IDS bar to book the back room and order snacks for the above mentioned days between 6-8:30PM. Secondly, we will sign an agreement with the Board Games Society which has already informally agreed to provide board and card games for the event. Thirdly, we will print the drink vouchers.

Promotion: As the last year's Research Hive Scholars we are experienced in publicizing and promoting social and academic events among the doctoral community. Firstly, we plan to set up Twitter and Facebook accounts, where particular sessions will be promoted and documented. Secondly, we will print and spread posters (30 pounds from the budget) announcing a new event each month. We will use the same poster design to secure recognition of the initiative. Thirdly, we will control the number of participants by setting up an EventBrite account- places at the events will have to be booked in advance. We are happy to host more than 20 students per event, however only the ones with the tickets will get drink vouchers.

Evaluation: We plan on running a short feedback survey after each session. Feedback sheets will be printed and handed to the participants at the end of each night. Feedback from the entire year will be gathered and presented as a table. To learn more go to the last point of the application.

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?

The target audience for these events is the entire doctoral community. One thing that we have encountered in feedback throughout our tenure as Hive scholars has been the eagerness for a regular event for doctoral students that would encourage the building of a strong research network. The games night we held on behalf of the Hive was one of our most successful events and there have been many requests for something similar again. We are also keen to make the games night fully inclusive and welcoming with an emphasis that this is a fun night not a hard core gaming event – although of course we will welcome hard core gamers – the whole idea is that this is an event for all doctoral researchers across all schools and disciplines. The idea is to have enough of a range of games that anyone can join in even if they have never played before. The building of a doctoral community is an issue often raised at both Hive events and departmental ones and we feel that a regular games night, at a dependable time will give people somewhere to go. The advantage to having an activity means that even if people turn up alone they will be able to join a game and meet new people. Similarly established groups of friends can come along and play together if they want. Because the emphasis is on taking time out this is an event that would suit doctoral researchers at any stage of their PhD. Whether they are just starting out and wanting to get to know people or at a late stage and needing to let off a bit of steam and have a break.

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

During our time as Hive scholars we have been used to organising events to cater for the entire doctoral community. The major benefit of encouraging socialising among researchers across departments or Schools is that there is more of an opportunity to take a break from your own research. Sussex is a university that has a particularly strong interdisciplinary ethos. By encouraging social bonds across the disciplines we may even be encourage future interdisciplinary collaborations. The games night we organised for the Hive worked precisely because people came from a particularly wide range of disciplines. The beauty of an event like this is the sheer variety. There are so many games that rely on strategy or cooperation which appeal to researchers from all fields. Ideally we will have sufficient range to give a choice between competitive and collaborative games so that all tastes and research temperaments are catered for. While we are already aiming for all doctoral researchers if we were to expand then including early career researchers would be the obvious next step.

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

One way to improve our mental health and wellbeing as doctoral researchers is to surround ourselves with a community and not to live in isolation. It is good for us to get out of our offices, labs and fieldwork sites, take a break and socialise with other people. As human beings we are born into society and the social element is what actually makes us human and helps us evolve. Face to face contact with others helps us deal with things like stress and anxiety. Talking to others, shaking hands can actually help indirectly other forms of our experience as PhD candidates. The experience can actually assist us get used to interacting with people at conferences or in social spaces particularly for those who are not good in public or public speech.

Research conducted at UCLA shows that when we interact with others, we actually train our brains. Social motivation and social contact can help to improve memory formation and recall and protects the brain from neurodegenerative diseases. This are some of the reasons why it would be useful and necessary to have a games night for doctoral students. Additionally, by socialising with one another, doctoral students will be able to form healthy habits or at least challenge their unhealthy lifestyle habits if any. This is because through interacting with others, we learn about how others are dealing with the process, pressure and stress of doing a PhD. Making friends and social ties is basically a good thing which has been attributed to good health and longevity in life. This is what we hope the games night as a social will achieve for doctoral students at Sussex.

Please limit your response to a maximum of 400 words

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

As above mentioned, participants will be asked to fill a short feedback survey after each session of the games night. Each survey will consist of four variables (snacks, games, atmosphere and promotion), and five-stage measurement of satisfaction (very dissatisfied, dissatisfied, natural, satisfied, very satisfied). Any further comments and suggestions can be expressed in 'How can we improve this event' box. The draft of the feedback sheet has been attached to this application.

We plan on reviewing feedback after each session in order to improve the format of the event and apply changes if needed. We will present a final report, including the findings of the feedback survey, at the end of the academic year 2019/20.

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	£	
Snacks: £20 * 8 sessions)	£160.00	
Drink vouchers: £3.5 *20 games * 8 sessions	£560.00	

Posters: £30	£30.00

Total: £750.00

Total requested
£750.00

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)
GAME NIGHT poster.pdf

feedback sheet.pdf

Hive's pilot event.pdf

Hive's pilot photos.pdf