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UKCGE Annual Conference 2026

‘Postgraduate Cultures: Community, Collaboration and Connection’

Primary theme: Wellbeing, Belonging and Mental Health in Postgraduate Education

Presentation Type: Oral Presentation

Title: Supporting the Wellbeing and Belonging of International Postgraduate Students: A Staff-Student-Industry Collaborative Initiative

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ABSTRACT

Recent data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency indicate that international students constitute more than half of all postgraduate enrolments in UK universities. These students often face distinct academic and socio-cultural adjustment challenges, highlighting a need for research on how best to support their wellbeing, sense of belonging and mental health. This paper presents findings from a study conducted within a PGT programme where international students comprise over 95% of the cohort.

The project adopted a multifaceted approach that integrated staff–student partnerships, targeted engagement activities, and collaborations with business leaders and community-based organisations. Two contemporary frameworks, the Integrative Framework for Belonging and the Flourish-HE programme were embedded within the project design. Focus group discussions with 42 international students provided insights that informed the creation of activities aimed at enhancing personal growth, social connection, and community integration.

Furthermore, to strengthen authenticity and student engagement, assessment for an entrepreneurship module on the programme has been aligned with a business management conference. Students will participate in coaching sessions with industry leaders, and those who produce outstanding submissions will be invited to pitch their business ideas at the conference. A concluding survey will gather feedback on the project’s perceived impact and effectiveness.

Planned project outputs include an activity-based training programme and a wellbeing and belonging workbook tailored for international postgraduate students. The project seeks to amplify international student voices and highlight the value of their involvement in shaping postgraduate support strategies. Emerging recommendations are expected to inform future initiatives and contribute to evidence-based policymaking that fosters more inclusive and supportive university environments. Additionally, aligning assessment with an annual conference offers a distinctive model that other postgraduate programmes may adopt, while the innovative start-up ideas generated through this process hold potential to develop into scalable ventures capable of creating meaningful community impact.

