


HEALTHY CAMPUS CASE STUDY	
Name of Institution	RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences
Who led the initiative?	Dean Lennon, the Postgraduate Research Recruitment & International Officer from the School of Postgraduate Studies in collaboration with Celina Flocks Monaghan, a 3 rd year postgraduate research scholar.
Date and timeframe of the initiative	Academic year 2023, February-March.
What was the reach of the initiative?	The RCSI Postgraduate Research Scholar cohort.
Initiative Title	“Let’s Talk About It: A Mental Health Seminar Series for Postgraduate Scholars”
Aims/ Objectives	To provide an educational and supportive space for postgraduate scholars to discuss and address their unique mental health needs during the PhD journey.
The rationale for the action, including any identified health needs	Globally, one-third of all PhD students are at risk of having or developing a mental health disorder during their PhD journey. In Ireland, studies have shown that postgraduate students are less likely to seek professional help for mental health problems, even when they feel help is needed. Surveying of the RCSI Postgraduate cohort from 2021-2022 showed perceptions of gaps in mental health supports provided, and a need for more attention towards appropriately catered discussions.

<p>Identify all frameworks, policies, or strategies this initiative aligns to</p> <p>(Internal, local or national)</p>	<p>This series was formed as an RCSI StEP Programme project to promote student-staff collaboration. As such, the established StEP framework was utilised to prioritise the goals and targets for this initiative:</p>  <p><i>(Credit: RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership Programme)</i></p> <p>This initiative focused on the StEP guiding principles of community, trust, inclusivity, and empowerment within the cohort.</p>
<p>Summary</p>	<p>This initiative had three main goals to work through:</p> <p>Awareness:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide an opportunity for scholars to discuss with an expert, and someone with lived experience, the unique mental health concerns that a PhD creates. • Create a space for scholars to recognise their mental health concerns are shared amongst their peers. • Allow for scholars to self-identify and recognise their own personal struggles. <p>Addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase encouragement for mental health help seeking behaviours. • Raise awareness of available support services both within RCSI and external. • Provide tools for self-management and self-awareness. <p>Assessment:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate scholars' attitudes of support services specific to the unique needs of postgraduates.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to scholars’ voices to understand areas of improvement for future events. <p>Outcome: 35 postgraduate scholars attended the mental health seminars throughout the month of February and the beginning of March. Four seminars were hosted, each around a different topic and providing valuable insight and resources for the scholar attendees.</p> <p><i>Week 1:</i> Centred around understanding, with a guest speaker from Dragonfly Mental Health speaking on “Imposter Phenomenon in the PhD Journey”. This hybrid session was structured on defining the signs and attitudes of imposter phenomenon, and allowed scholars to self-identify how it has impacted each of them.</p> <p><i>Week 2:</i> Focused on self-management, with guest speaker Dr. Padraic Dunne from the RCSI Centre for Positive Health speaking on attention-based training and mind and body wellness. This key session promoted the building of one’s mental health toolkit through a variety of strategies such as seeking therapy, journaling, meditation, improving sleep, and setting work boundaries.</p> <p><i>Week 3:</i> Focused on the aspects of communication during the PhD journey, with guest speaker Dr. Ashley Duggan, a visiting Fulbright professor speaking to the group. This session addressed the various relationships both personal and professional that are impacted by the various stressors of a PhD. The in-depth conversation allowed scholars to discuss positive relationships in their academic spheres that they felt were meaningful and impactful.</p> <p><i>Week 4:</i> Focused on internal supports available for postgraduates, having Noel O’Callaghan a licensed counsellor and head of the CoMPPAS student welfare office speak. This session turned into an in-depth discussion about the challenges faced specifically at RCSI by the cohort and helped establish a sense of community support among attendees.</p>
<p>Did you collaborate with internal and/or external stakeholders to deliver?</p>	<p>Three of the four seminars were hosted by RCSI internal staff, including two professors from the Centre for Positive Health, and one staff member from the Centre for Mastery: Personal, Professional & Academic Success (CoMPPAS) office. Only one speaker was external, a consultant psychologist from the non-profit Dragonfly Mental Health.</p>
<p>How was the initiative organised?</p>	<p>Internal approval for the initiative came in January 2023 at the launch of the StEP Programme projects, with the proposed timeline of the series being one seminar per week for four weeks from mid-February until the beginning of March.</p> <p>The scholar and staff partner met weekly for one month to discuss and plan the initiative. This process included identifying topics to be covered, finding</p>

	<p>and coordinating speakers, allocating room space within the university, organizing attendees, and producing promotional materials advertising the series to the cohort (see Appendix A).</p> <p>The series hosted in-person lunchtime sessions during the month of February, with one session per week for four weeks. Scholar attendees were followed up with after the series was concluded, in order to best inform future initiatives and get feedback on what worked/didn't work from their perspectives.</p>
What resources did you need?	<p>Catering was provided for those postgraduates who attended, as an incentive to come during their lunch hour. This was the largest financial aspect of the initiative.</p> <p>All internal speakers generously donated their lunch hours in-kind, and no financial incentive was given. A monetary donation was made to the non-profit Dragonfly Mental Health for their time.</p> <p>Only one staff member and one postgraduate student organized the series. The RCSI School of Postgraduate Studies provided supplemental funding to cover the cost of catering, and the donation made to the non-profit. The initiative was supported by the RCSI Student Engagement and Partnership (StEP) Programme and the student partner received a bursary.</p>
Has it been evaluated? How successful has it been?	<p>A follow up survey of the student participants yielded general support for the topics, particularly the "Imposter Phenomenon" seminar. Additionally, the attendees emphasized the relevancy that having most of the speakers being internal provided.</p> <p>Those who participated expressed support that a similar series, or a mental health support module should be available yearly to all RCSI postgraduate scholars. Specifically, scholars were interested in having more discussions around lived experiences of those who've completed PhDs while balancing mental health struggles, emotional intelligence, developing student sense of community, and expanding on mindfulness and meditation tools.</p>
Any future plans, including the sustainability of the initiative?	<p>While the student attendance of this series could have been better, the success of the initiative was felt both by the organizers and the attendees. Therefore, there is support for a similar initiative to be hosted each year for the entire cohort to attend. In accordance with student feedback, any future plans for a series should be informed by topics agreed upon by the students themselves.</p>
Key Learning Points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meaningful impact on the mental health of a postgraduate cohort does not have to be grandeur and can be done adequately through small group discussions where a scholar feels supported and understood.

Healthy Campus Framework Categories (please tick all that apply)

Healthy Campus Process	Whole Campus Approach	Topic	Population Group
Commit <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Leadership, Strategy & Governance <input type="checkbox"/>	Alcohol <input type="checkbox"/>	Students <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coordinate <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Campus Environment (Facilities & Services) <input type="checkbox"/>	Substance Misuse <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff <input type="checkbox"/>
Consult <input type="checkbox"/>	Campus Culture & Communications <input type="checkbox"/>	Healthy Eating / Food <input type="checkbox"/>	Wider community <input type="checkbox"/>
Create <input type="checkbox"/>	Personal & Professional Development <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Mental Health & Wellbeing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Other <input type="checkbox"/>
Celebrate & Continue <input type="checkbox"/>		Sexual Health & Wellbeing <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Tobacco Free Campus <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Physical Activity / Active Transport <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Wellbeing on the Curriculum <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Health & Sustainability <input type="checkbox"/>	
		Other <input type="checkbox"/>	

Contact Details

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Links	

Appendix A:

LETS TALK ABOUT IT

A Month of Mental Health Workshops For Postgraduate Students



SCAN ME OR CLICK HERE

Follow the QR code or the link, or contact celinaflocksmonag20@rcsi.ie for more info.

FEBRUARY 9TH

DR. MAYYA SUNDUKOVA DRAGONFLY MENTAL HEALTH

Imposter Phenomenon and the Basics of PhD Burnout



FEBRUARY 16TH

DR. PÁDRAIC DUNNE

Practical tips on how to flourish in the real world – integrating the mind and body through breath work, attention-based training, psychobiotics and sleep hygiene.



FEBRUARY 23RD

DR. ASHLEY DUGGAN

Navigating Relationships During Graduate Studies: Tools from Relationship Science and Human Communication Research



Photo Credit: Carlin Cummingham at Boston College

MARCH 2ND

RCSI COMPPAS



When to Know and Where to Go: Getting Support during your PhD