Coming towards the end of teaching and learning weeks for this academic year, attention shifts towards how we can support students ahead of and during exam season.

Featuring in this newsletter will be a piece by Simone Gold - one of our Counselling and Mental Health team - on how you can support your student in the coming months with exam stress, and a reminder to be mindful of your own stress responses. Michael Jones will introduce the Students' Union upcoming ‘Make it Happen’ exam support programme, Zee Osman will highlight some of
the successes of a new peer to peer Student Callers project, we will give a reminder about the support that our Learning Enhancement Team can offer, and all of the support available from our Careers and Employability Service (MDXworks) for those students starting to think about next steps, or those in need of some employability and careers guidance.

We would ask you to continue to encourage students to look after themselves as we come into exams season. We host a wealth of resources on UniHub under health and wellbeing, on our #TeamMDX wellbeing toolkit page, from our online wellbeing support platforms, and of course through University and Students’ Union teams. If you are not sure which avenue of support your student could most benefit from, please direct them to UniHelp who will be able to either resolve the query or refer your student on directly.

Vanessa White
Student Wellbeing Coordinator

How you can support your student in the run up to exams.

Student supporters know that in the run up to and during exams, students will feel stressed. They may bring negative thoughts and associations to the idea of doing exams and have some really difficult feelings about them. They may
feel that their future depends on getting good grades, or that they will let
everyone down if they don’t. Sitting and trying to revise can often bring the
feeling that they know nothing about the subject, or they may hate the idea of
being judged by the examiner.

Exams represent important moments in students’ lives and supporters want to
help when and however they can. But helping people who are feeling stressed
and under pressure isn’t easy and it’s worth remembering that you too might
be feeling anxious and more emotional as you feel the weight of this
responsibility. Potentially then, a perfect storm!

**How to help and support:**

Under stress, our adrenalin levels rise and our rational brain tends to take a
back seat. That’s why in exams themselves, it can become hard to think and
to recall what we normally find easy to remember. Our basic evolutionary
survival instinct means that we go into flight-flight mode – there’s no room to
be thinking about complex ideas or formulations! So, when a student is
stressed, rational arguments from you won’t be heard. Saying things like: ‘just
do your best’ or ‘you’ve worked hard all year’ may well be true – but they won’t
reassure! So – allow students to vent if they want to. You might feel a little
anxious about this, as if it might make things worse. But letting them feel their
emotions and talk through their fears gets them back into the rational, thinking
part of their brains.

Try not to interrupt or give advice, but instead listen and ask open questions –
this will really help them to start to think again! Notice your own breathing and
how relaxed or anxious YOU feel. Remember, anxiety can breed anxiety so try
to slow your own responses down. Try to role model a less heightened
emotional response without seeming detached.

Doing a reality check about the actual impact of things going wrong can help
stop any catastrophizing a student might be doing – asking ‘so what if….?’ or
‘and then what?’ questions is useful. Thinking through the worst-case
scenarios they are presenting themselves with is a good way to break down
some of the anxiety – there is almost always a way through, another option, a
way of coping.

Your response to ‘worst-case scenarios’ is really important. When you hear ‘I
will fail everything and then my life will be over before it’s even started’ or
something like it, you need to stay calm, steady and open. This response will
help the student you’re supporting hear themselves and begin to re-evaluate
the meaning they are giving to the exam.

Reminding students to look after themselves physically whilst they are
challenging themselves mentally is really important. Help them to balance work
with rest by encouraging them to schedule in sufficient sleep, meals, exercise
and fresh air. Some relaxation that involves setting aside time to unwind, some
breathing exercises (deep breaths in for the count of 3 and out for 4 is the
simplest!) and anything else that relaxes them - even taking a shower can act
as an emotional and mental re-set.

*Simone Gold is a Counsellor in the Counselling and Mental Health Service.*
*She is a Psychodynamic Therapist.*
My name is Zee, and I have been working as a supervisor for a team of Student Support Callers since November. Our team was assembled in response to struggles that Middlesex University identified many students have been dealing with following the first wave of the Covid-19.

As we all know, the last twelve months have been especially challenging for students and young people. Many students haven’t been able to socialise or see their families for months on end. On top of that, some students and their families have been managing job uncertainty which has put additional strain on many households across the UK and internationally. Since everyone was suddenly forced to work remotely from home, many students have experienced additional problems – lack of access to appropriate equipment, Wi-Fi, learning resources, or quiet study space at home. That meant that many students felt discouraged and anxious about their ability to perform well in their assessments.

For the last several months, we have been calling and emailing students, offering them support and guidance on how to access services and who to contact. We have reached out to thousands of students, and we continued to offer them support, even over the Christmas period, recognising how important it was to have someone to speak to during that time.

Since all Student Support Callers are also students, we are able to understand and relate to our peers’ struggles. This empathetic approach was always our top priority, and guiding students in the right direction to ease stress has always been the main concern for us. Student Support Callers have been helping students across all degrees and departments, highlighting the services available to them so that no matter where they were in the world and what they
do, they feel like they are part of something bigger and they are not alone! After all, we are all part of #TeamMDX!

It has been a pleasure speaking with so many students and helping them along their journey at MDX university. As a result of our work, the university has been able to action several things that the students have identified as problem areas. I believe that the support we offer should be available across all educational institutions because it is crucial to have a healthy stress-free educational experience no matter the circumstances.

The calls have been a huge success. The students we have spoken to were truly appreciating the calls and sent in some lovely emails to the team in response. As a result of that, the launch of our new ‘Request a Call’ campaign has been initiated, allowing our students to get in touch with us. So if your student needs some advice, has a query, or just need someone to talk to, we are only a few clicks away!

“Thank you so so so much! I've been stressing for so long with my assignments and adapting to university/ lectures online. I have made a list of all of my assignments of which I have missed. I will email my module leaders to speak to them one on one. Once again, thank you so much. I've been stuck for so long.”

“Thank you once again for your kind gesture it really means a lot to me and your feedback is quite encouraging for me.”

“Many thanks for speaking with me yesterday and this follow up email. Really appreciate the time and support you and Middlesex are offering. Lots of useful, supportive information. Stay safe”

A massive thank you to my amazing Student Callers team!

Zee Osman supervises the Student Callers team and is Director of Membership Development at Student Light - a student-led community focused on improving wellbeing and success at Middlesex University.

Make it Happen is a project that was created in the academic year 2018-19 with the aim of supporting students’ wellbeing during the University assessment period.

Make it Happen offered a range of de-stressing activities and provided various resources. The project was created in collaboration between MDXSU and various University Support Services and departments.
Some of resources included the Make it Happen Guide which provided students with helpful revision tips, how to get organized, how to set an appropriate study space and techniques for self-care. At the start of the project, students were also able to access a number of wellbeing boxes given to them for free. The project has now run for two consecutive years and at the time of writing, work is being undertaken for it to take place again in the 2020-21 academic year.

In its first year, the project took place in a designated space on campus where students could come to diffuse assessment stress and where various activities took place. The focus of the project was to run activities fitting into the following areas:

- **Physical wellbeing**: These included activities such as Thai Chi, boxing (pads), upper back/shoulder and neck massage
- **Intellectual wellbeing**: These included activities that supported students’ preparation for assessment and included sessions such as ‘back to basics’, ‘practice your presentation’ & ‘de-stress for success’
- **Social wellbeing**: These included sessions where students could socialise and support one another through various games and competitions. We also offered facemasks, henna, breakfast with free teas, coffees and some refreshments.

The project engaged 1480 students in total in its first year. Due to coronavirus restrictions, in the 2019-20 academic year, the on-campus project was adapted to take place entirely online so that students could take part in it no matter where in the world they were. Students were able to download the guide with adapted information around how to study from home, how to set up their equipment and what to watch out for in online assessment. Students could also take part in physical activities online, competitions and various DIY workshops helping them to make their own facemasks, face coverings, recipes, or T-shirts. In its second year, Make it Happen engaged over 600 students.

“Staff were amazing!”

“My first time getting a massage and it extended my expectations. And it was lovely, especially after doing an exhausting EU law exam.”

“Always made to feel welcome and found it a reliable and supportive place to drop in.”

“Very good opportunity to take a break from studies and library, to let your mind calm down.”

Michael Jones is a Senior Student Advisor in MDXSU and is planning this year’s Make It Happen.
Learning Enhancement Team

The Learning Enhancement Team (LET) are specialist Lecturers in Academic Writing & Language (AWL) and in Maths, Statistics & Numeracy (MSN). We understand that a student’s time at university will be full of challenges, particularly related to writing, language and numbers. Our aim is to help them develop knowledge and skills in these areas so they can meet these challenges and get the most out of their studies.

We work with all Middlesex students in a number of ways. During the last year, all of our services have been offered online and need to be booked ahead of time via Unihub for AWL and MSN.

In AWL and MSN, we offer one-to-one, private 30-minute tutorial sessions throughout the year. Students can have one tutorial per week. There are a variety of reasons why a student might book a tutorial – they find the coursework brief to be unclear; they’re not sure how to get started; or they want to receive some feedback on what they’ve produced. Group tutorials are also available and need to be arranged by emailing the LET let@mdx.ac.uk.

We also offer workshops. In MSN, students can request a workshop on a particular topic by emailing numeracy@mdx.ac.uk. The AWL workshops are small classes, which are offered five days a week with a different topic offered each day. The workshops are one-hour long. AWL Chat is another option for students. During this private 10-minute session, a student can ask a specific question or get some quick feedback. These sessions can only be booked on the day of the appointment up to 15 minutes before it takes place. They are offered five days a week.

In addition, AWL and MSN also have various online materials for self-study, which can be accessed via our Unihubpages.
We also teach in timetabled classes. We do this by working closely with subject lecturers on degree programmes, to help with the writing and language or maths, statistics and numeracy needed for that module or programme.

**Academic Writing and Language (AWL)**

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**Faculty of Arts and Creative Industries**
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**School of Health and Education**
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**Maths, Stats and Numeracy (MSN)**

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**Maths, Stats and Numeracy**
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**Drug calculations**
Martin Ward  
[m.ward@mdx.ac.uk](mailto:m.ward@mdx.ac.uk)

"What I enjoy about my role in the LET is that one day is never the same as the next. I really enjoy the variety of my work and I appreciate the opportunity to work with different students every day."  
Eleonora - LET team

"Working in the LET has allowed me to get to know so many different students from multiple disciplines. It's a genuine honour to be allowed to read their work, learn about their studies, and (hopefully!) help them to go on to do amazing things!"  
Faith - LET team

“One of the things I enjoy about my role is learning about so many different subjects, from administering the correct amount of a drug to analysing performance in football.”  
Lois - LET team
MDXworks – Careers and Employability Service at MDX

MDXworks provides a range of opportunities and services to support our students’ career development.

All #TeamMDX members are welcome to utilise our service to ensure that they are prepared for their future; whether their ambition is to find a graduate job, create their own business or continue studying.

We are a dedicated team of 17 diverse individuals, covering a variety of interests, professional backgrounds, and future aspirations. There is one thing however that defines us all and that is our pledge to enhancing our students’ professional journey by helping them articulate their unique story and shape their career around it. We do this via a menu of co-curricular and work-related activities that develop and nurture the new skills for your future. Visit this page for more details and keep an eye on our social media channels for updates on the programmes.

Employability Portal
The first step our students or alumni need to take to engage with us is to create their profile on www.mdxworks.com, their dedicated employability portal. As soon as they are signed-up on the platform, they can access a wide range of job opportunities, national and international events, tailored resources and a variety of 1:1 appointments with their dedicated Faculty Employability Adviser.
We are always looking for ways to support our students with all aspects of their future and workplace skills.

We recently hosted a successful ‘MDX= Wellbeing Mental Health & Employability’ day where we hosted a number of diverse talks on the topic of mental health and employment on our interactive Gather Town software.

We continue to host a number of online pop up sessions, and more details can be found on our social media channels.

**Online Pop-up Sessions**
16 March – Tackling Online Assessments
25 March – Applying for further study
31 March – Freelancing on the side