

## Board of Management

### Students, Staff and Equalities Committee

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>Monday 1 February 2021</b>
<b>Paper No.</b>	<b>SSEC2-F</b>
<b>Agenda Item</b>	<b>5.4</b>
<b>Subject of Paper</b>	<b>Student Mental Health and Well Being Interim Report 2020/21</b>
<b>FOISA Status</b>	<b>Disclosable</b>
<b>Primary Contact</b>	<b>Gillian Plunkett   Student Experience Director</b>
<b>Date of production</b>	<b>19 January 2021</b>
<b>Action</b>	<b>For Discussion/Decision</b>

#### 1. Recommendations

Students, Staff and Equalities Committee (SSEC) is asked to note the Student Mental Health and Well Being Interim Report for Academic Year (AY) 2020/21.

## **2. Purpose of Report**

Student mental health and well-being continues to be a key national and global priority, and the purpose of this report is to update SSEC on current activity in relation to support for students.

## **3. Context**

- 3.1. A key strategic priority for the College is **Strategic Priority 2 - To enable individuals to excel and realise their full potential**, and to achieve this we must continuously review and respond to the diverse and evolving needs of our students, enabling individuals to flourish by developing a healthy, supportive, and collaborative working environment for both students and staff.
- 3.2. In November 2019 the SFC announced additional monies for colleges and universities to provide trained counsellors and other mental health support. This support was further augmented in November 2020 by an announcement of additional monies to support student mental health beyond counselling, and in light of additional emotional and other pressures related to Covid-19. This is very welcome.
- 3.3. An update on our current student mental health and well-being activity is provided at Annexe A.
- 3.4. What the Report does not comment upon is the building anxiety levels of students in relation to successful completion of their current programme although there is increasing evidence to support this appearing through the class rep system, student communications and complaints raised with CitySA. This is compounded by restrictions surrounding campus access to complete important critical 'legislative' skills for certification but also for social interaction.

## **4. Impact and Implications**

- 4.1 Failure to meet student needs in relation to mental health could result in reputational damage for the college.

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### 1. Background

Student mental health and well-being continues to be a significant issue for educational institutions globally and Covid-19 has brought into sharp focus the need to step up monitoring and evaluation of service delivery and usage, working with students' associations to ensure that students' needs are being addressed.

The NUS [Improving Mental Health and Well Being Support for Scotland's Students](#), October 2020 undertook a survey of 3,000 students across Scottish Colleges and Universities and offers some insight into the impact of current services and support, in addition to guidance on areas for future service development. The Report recognises that while many of the findings from the survey are not new, it addresses gaps in knowledge from a student perspective, a specific Scottish context and offers a student voice relating to access to and experience of support for mental health and wellbeing.

The survey found that the main factors influencing student mental health and well-being are:-

- Lack of money and financial pressure
- Adjusting to new ways of working, course workload and pressure to achieve.
- Positive social interactions and relationships, particularly those with family and friends.
- Maintaining good health through physical activity, not only for health benefits but also in relation to developing a sense of belonging as part of a community.
- Lack of confidence can impact negatively on mental health and wellbeing and, as a result, on ability to learn successfully.

In relation to the quality and impact of support, students were very positive about the quality of support received and its impact on mental health and wellbeing. There were no differences between FE and HE students, or between protected characteristic groups, with the exception of BAME students who indicated their experiences were poorer than that of their white peers.

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The NUS survey findings also corroborate the findings of previous research relating to trigger points in the student journey being particularly impactful to student mental health and wellbeing, together with students' individual circumstances and identities which confirms existing knowledge and practice within the college and university sectors.

This following sections provide interim information on the delivery of mental health and wellbeing services at City of Glasgow College in Academic Year (AY) 2020/21 to the end of Block 1 (11<sup>th</sup> Dec).

### **2. Counselling Service**

From lockdown in March 2020, on campus counselling transitioned to telephone counselling and there was a drop in the number of referrals for counselling, together with engagement. Some students reported that telephone counselling was not for them, others reported no longer requiring the service. There was a feeling among staff that the main issues impacting on students while on campus (i.e. relationships with other students, social anxiety, exam and assessment stress) had been supplanted by concerns about Covid-19.

The Academic Year (AY) 2020/21 resumed on 31 August 2020 with blended learning and teaching commencing from 14 September which was 3 weeks later than the previous year. The blended approach allowed a mixture of online and on campus access for students with the Faculty of Education and Humanities wholly online. This, together with the necessity for strict protocols on health and safety, meant that counselling services were also offered mainly online with some bookable face-to-face sessions available for those who required them.

#### **2.1 Counselling Referrals and Assessments**

Chart 1 provides information on counselling referrals for 2019/20, and for 2020/21 to the end of December 2020, and shows 295 referrals to the service and 221 respectively. The data for both years is not exactly comparable given the later start date in Academic Year 2020/21, combined with a mainly on line experience,

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however, robust communication and promotion of services has seen the number of referrals increasing to comparable levels with the previous year by November 2020. It is anticipated that the remainder of the year is likely to be similar to 2019/20.

**Chart 1 – Counselling Referrals 2019/20 and 2020/21**

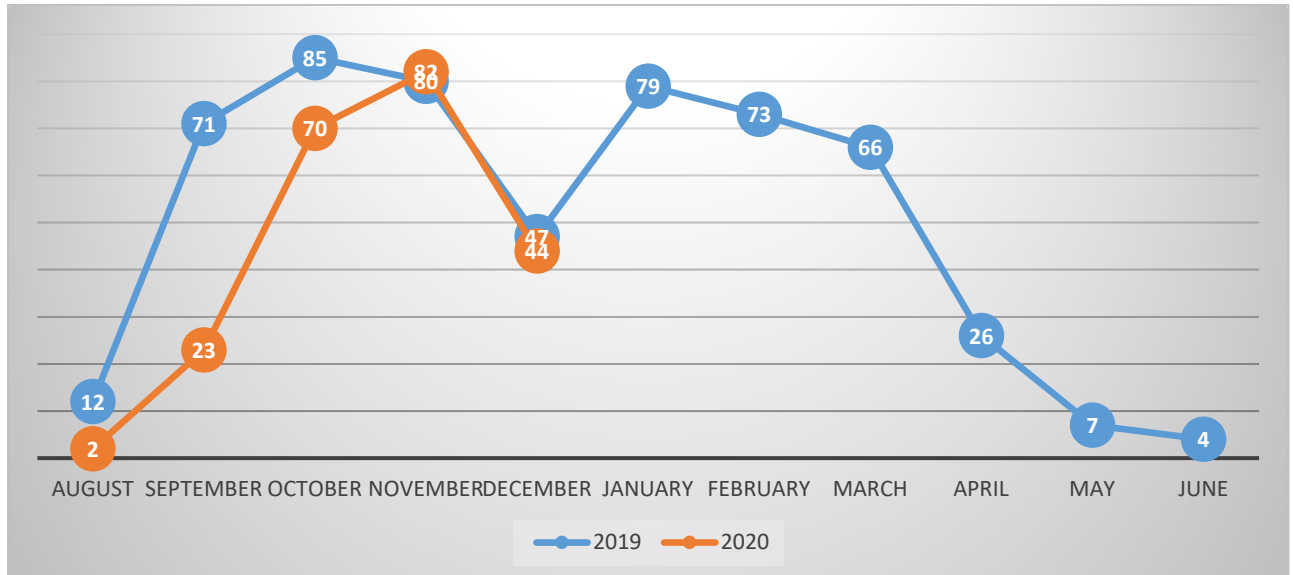


Chart 2 shows the well being assessment outcomes for Block 1 with comparable figures from 2019. A well being assessment involves a 30-45 minute telephone session with a Student Counsellor and is used to find out more about the student, their presenting issues, assess risk of harm and to decide on an appropriate outcome e.g. short-term counselling or referral to specialist agency.

In AY 2020/21 a new therapeutic anxiety group has been introduced in addition to short-term counselling (STC). This has been very well received and further details are provided under new developments in section 3. A positive change for AY 2020/21 so far is a significant decrease in non-attendance (DNA) at wellbeing assessments as well as a decrease in the number of students who were contacted with no response which has resulted from an increase in student self-referrals.

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**Chart 2 – Counselling Service Assessment Outcome 2020/21 Block 1**

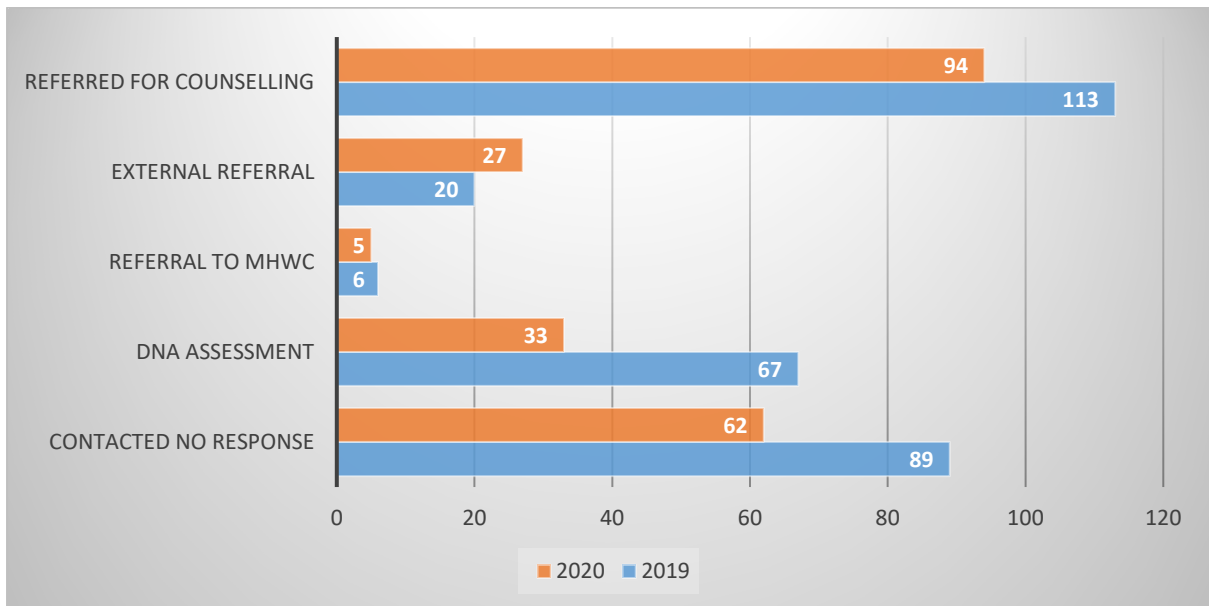
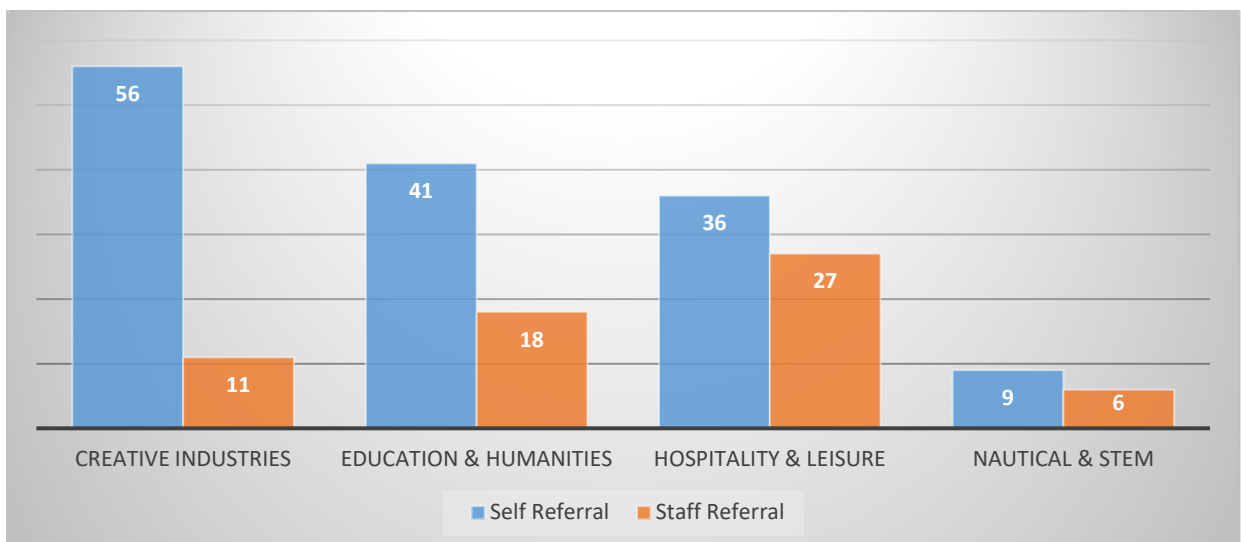


Chart 3 shows student referrals by referral type and Faculty in AY 2020/21 Block 1 and shows that students are more likely to engage with the counselling service when they self refer. This trend was identified in 2019/20 and work undertaken to promote self referral among students and staff as the preferred referral route. Work continues to be undertaken to encourage staff to guide students to self-refer although staff referral remains an option.

**Chart 3 – Referral by Type 2020/21 Block 1**



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### **2.2 Counselling Impact and Outcomes**

Our Counsellors use CORE-10 to evaluate psychological distress and progress for students who access the service. In Block 1 the average score for students at the beginning of counselling was 19. This equates to moderately severe psychological distress. The average end score was 9, mild psychological distress, an average reduction of 56%. These mid year results compare favourably to the full year results for 2019/20 where the average score for students at the beginning of counselling was 20 and end score of 12.

Counselling is one of a number of services offered to support students to maintain their courses. By the end of December all students bar one who were receiving were counselling remained on course.

### **2.3 Access and Participation Datasets**

Concerns about the level of mental health conditions among students are long standing. However, what is of emerging importance is how other factors, such as age, sex and sexuality, disability and levels of poverty and disadvantage, impact on mental health and how we might consider an intersectional approach in the development of services to support different groups of students.

Our data offers similar findings to that of the NUS Report with evidence of higher than average participation rates from students who are disabled, care experienced and in the age range 18-29 years. Our data also shows that students whose sexuality is other than straight are also over represented in seeking counselling.

#### **2.3.1 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD)**

The SIMD identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivations across Scotland via postcodes. Postcodes are divided into 10 deciles with decile 1 representing the 10% (SIMD10) most deprived postcode areas in Scotland. Table 1 below shows that 23% of the students referred for counselling reside in a SIMD10

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area which is slightly less than the college overall SIMD10 figure which is 24%. However, this slight variance is not concerning when we consider that the overall college figure will include transition and learning support students, and commercial and employed students who will have access to mental health support from other sources external to the college.

**Table 1: Students Referred for Counselling by SIMD**

Decile	Students	%
1	43	23%
2	28	15%
3	19	10%
4	11	6%
5	10	5%
6	10	5%
7	9	5%
8	15	8%
9	12	7%
10	9	5%
Outside Scotland	18	11%
Totals	184	100%

### 2.3.2 Care Experienced Students and Carers

17 students or 9% of the sub group referred for counselling are care experienced students, which is higher than the college enrolment figure of 3.3%. This group are more likely to have mental health issues than their peers.

31 students or 14% of referrals for counselling are student carers. This figure is much higher than the college average of 6%. As with care experienced students, this group is more likely than their peers to experience poor mental health or low mood.

### 2.3.3 Protected Characteristics

Table 2 below provides information on the students referred for counselling by protected characteristic



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- At 70% female students are significantly over represented in the counselling statistics compared with overall college enrolments (51%). This is not surprising as a Scottish Government Review on mental health in teenage girls reported poorer mental wellbeing compared to boys of a certain age across a range of indicators. The review highlights several interrelated drivers that may contribute to these trends: social media use, disrupted sleep, body image concerns and school related pressures. Scottish Government (2019), [Exploring the reported worsening of mental wellbeing among adolescent girls in Scotland](#), Health and Social Care Research, 143/2019.
- At 37% the 16-19 year old age group is under represented compared to overall enrolments (60%) and other age groups particularly 20-24 year olds are over represented.
- In terms of sexuality straight students are underrepresented and all other sexualities are over represented with bisexual students significantly so at 20% compared to 7% of all enrolments.
- Those declaring no religion is slightly higher than the college average but religion in the main is similar to the overall college enrolments.
- Disability is over represented at 28% of students referred for counselling having disclosed one or more disabilities at enrolment compared to 11% college wide. The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework highlights how disability intersects with other characteristics to create significant barriers and inequalities for those with disabilities [Scotland's Wellbeing - Measuring the National Outcomes for Disabled People](#), July 2019.
- There is no significant variation in the ethnicity of those students presenting for counselling and overall college enrolments.

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**Table 2 – Protected Characteristics.**

Sex	Students	Age	Students	Sexual Orientation	Students	Religion	Students	Disability	Students	Ethnicity	Students
Female	143	16-19	76	Straight	133	None	142	Mental health	33	Scottish	153
Male	60	20-24	79	Gay Man	9	Christian	38	Specific learning disability	20	English	18
Non Binary	1	24-29	17	Gay Woman	8	Muslim	6	Social /Comm. Issues	7	British	8
		30+	32	Bi Sexual	41	Buddhist	1	Long standing illness	7	Other White Background	5
				Other	3	Sikh	1	Physical impairment	3	Mixed Background	4
				Prefer Not to Say	10	Another Religion	9	Deaf	3	Polish	3
						Prefer not to say	7	Blind or visual impairment	2	Pakistani Scottish/British	3
								Other impairment	7	African Scottish/British	3
										Irish	1
										Northern Irish	1
										Indian Scottish/British	1
										Chinese Scottish/British	1
										Other Asian Background	1
										Any Other Background	1
										Prefer not to say	1

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### **3. New Developments in AY 2020/21**

#### **3.1 Group Work**

Following the SFC announcement of additional monies to support frontline student mental health in 2019, the college recruited an additional Student Counsellor in March 2020. This brings the team to 3 FTE Student Counsellors plus 1 FTE Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator.

The Student Counsellor appointed in March 2020 has focused on developing preventative support through a psycho-education Stress Management Workshop delivered to class groups and a four-week therapeutic anxiety group.

#### **3.1.2 Stress Management workshop**

The aim of this workshop is for students to understand stress and its impact; begin to reflect on stressful triggers; and explore coping strategies and methods to reduce stress. Workshops were promoted to lecturing staff for delivery in AY 2020/21 and in Block 1, 29 workshops have been delivered to 630 students with the majority being delivered to the Faculty of Hospitality and Leisure. 98% of students who completed evaluations (229 respondents) agreed that following the workshop they had a better understanding of stress.

#### **Student feedback:**

“It (the workshop) included really useful resources to use if I feel stressed, and I was very surprised that the breathing activity worked.”

“Having suffered from depression and anxiety for years this was very helpful in reminding me of ways to deal with this and that the support is there if I need it”

#### **Lecturer feedback:**

“I just wanted to really recommend the Stress Management workshops... we just held one for my guidance group (level 5) and it was such a positive

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experience. Lots of sharing between students and they were really supportive of each other. I felt that it really helped to bond the class.”

Workshops will continue in Block 2 and will be offered in the first instance to the other three Faculties. We aim to use monies from the SFC Counselling Funding to procure additional facilitators to deliver to a wider number of classes.

### **3.1.2 Therapeutic Anxiety group**

In Block 1 we piloted a new group therapy via Zoom to support students with anxiety as this is the most common presenting issue for the Counselling Service. The therapy uses a psychoeducation and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approach to enable students to understand what may be causing their anxiety and encourages self-efficacy and management by considering different ways to cope with this. Of the 16 students referred to the group therapy initially, 8 confirmed they would attend with 5 participating in the pilot. The students who did not participate were offered short-term counselling. We intend to follow-up with students who did not join the group to find out why they chose not to participate.

Students reported an improvement in their psychological wellbeing and that they found the group extremely helpful; they had a better understanding of anxiety; the length of the programme was sufficient; and that they would use the approaches after the group. One student commented “(the facilitator) was a great help and understood us, she specifically aimed it at younger people so we would benefit”. There are currently 18 students on the waiting list for the next anxiety programme starting in January 2021.

In Block 2 we will procure additional counselling sessions through an external Counselling organisation to ensure a short waiting time from assessment to therapy; and to enhance the offer available for students assessed as requiring longer-term support.

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### 4. TogetherAll

TogetherAll was launched in March 2020. This is an online peer support platform supporting mental health for students and staff 24/7. In March there were 489 registrations. This followed a sustained marketing campaign and promotion of the service at the beginning of lockdown. Table 3 shows that registrations in Block 1 have fluctuated each month, peaking at 55 registrations November. Although the numbers are low, we continue to market TogetherAll through our social media channels and have added specific information about the platform to our induction presentation. TogetherAll have indicated that this action had a positive impact at other institutions.

**Table 3 – TogetherAll Activity Report**

Activity		Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
<b>New Registrations</b>	Total New Registrations	19	41	29	55	28
	Number of Users	31	53	42	62	37
<b>Usage Activity</b>	Total logins	77	235	187	189	115
	Total Self-Assessments	14	42	39	10	18

### 5. Specific Mental Health Support

#### 5.1 Mental Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator

The Mental Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator (MHWC) is a qualified Social Worker whose role is to coordinate mental health and wellbeing support in addition to delivery of support to students with complex issues often arising from the intersectionality issues mentioned at 2.3 above, and those that have a declared mental health condition. Currently the MHWC has a caseload of 49 students (26 returning students and 23 new students). Referrals may come from:

- Learning Support following a mental health questionnaire assessment. This is the main source of referrals.

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- Crisis intervention.
- Student Advisors.
- Student Counsellors.

40% of referrals are for 'Mental Health'. This term includes those students that have diagnoses of personality disorders, psychosis or where their presenting need is unclear and therefore the focus of the work with the MHWC will be to establish this and support students to get the appropriate support externally, usually from the NHS, including psychiatric review.

The MHWC works closely with colleagues in the NHS to provide appropriate support for students and will liaise with GPs and Community Mental Health Teams for individual students. Working in partnership with the NHS, we can ensure that students are supported through Primary Healthcare to enable the college to continue in its role as educator.

### **5.2 Winter Communications Plan**

To support students during the Christmas break, we developed a communications plan to inform students of support available to them when the College closed from 18 December. Communications included updating the college website, all student emails; contact with students on the Counselling Service waiting list; scheduled social media posts and text messaging. Messages included information on welfare support, food banks housing and mental health support available from external agencies. In addition, TogetherAll provided a suite of social media posts which were scheduled for release over the holiday period and a small number of staff offered support to 22<sup>nd</sup> December which resulted in 15 students being supported with emergency hardship.

## **6. Wellbeing Activities**

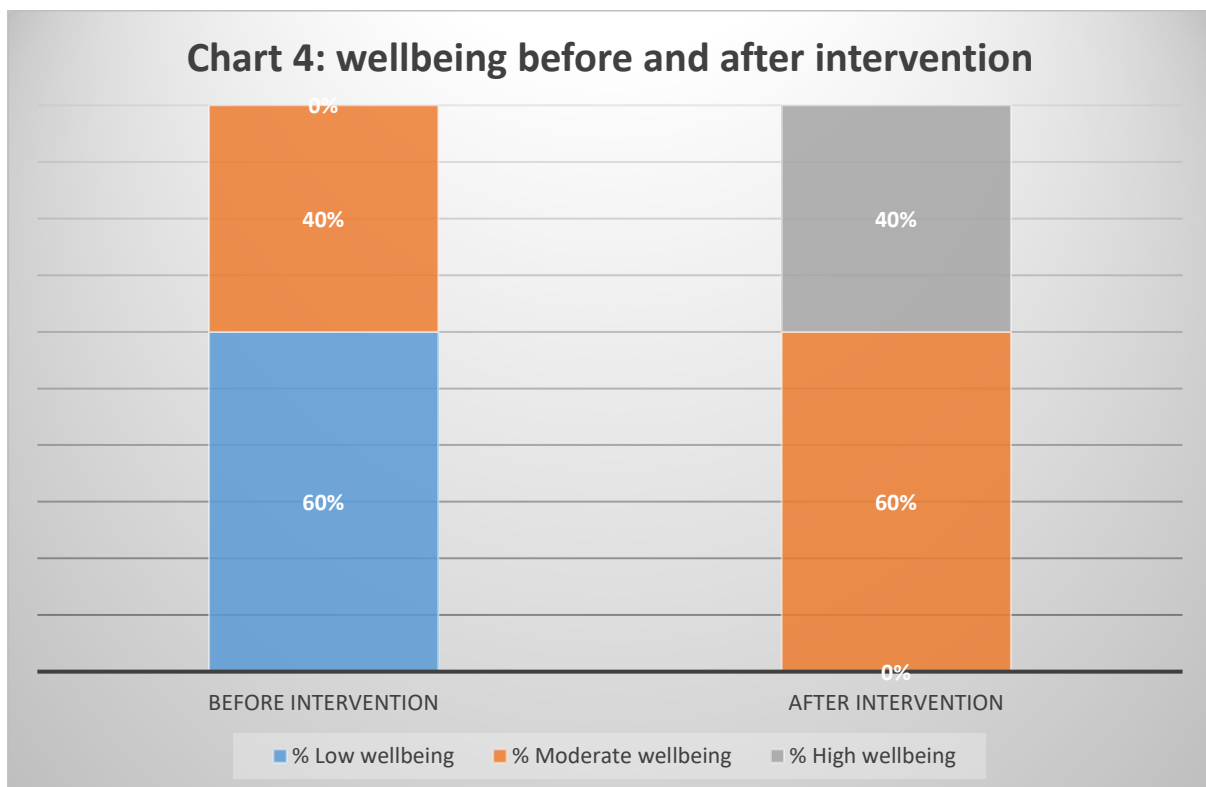
### **5.1 Mindfulness**

25 students booked a place for the 8 week Mindfulness Living Based course. 12 students started and 5 completed the full length of the programme. To measure the

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impact of the course on students The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales (WEMWBS) is used which evaluates mental wellbeing before and after completion of the course. Chart 4 shows that all students experienced an improvement in their wellbeing following completion of the course. We plan to offer another course in Block 2 offering more spaces to increase student participation. The numbers participating are similar to those when on-campus. We intend to contact students who booked but did not join the course to find out more about why they chose not to participate and are working with the facilitator to offer the course over four weeks rather than eight in the next block to see if this improves participation levels.



### 5.2 Yoga

28 students have been attending online yoga. Engagement in Block 1 has been low given the popularity of the face-to-face sessions on campus in 2019/20. Qualitative feedback from the students suggests that the availability, timing and enjoyment of classes have been positive but lack of awareness of online activities may need further attention.

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### 5.3 CitySA Activities

The Students' Association also offer a range of alternative wellbeing activities for students to get involved in. They have developed a new Mental Health area on their [website](#) and offer a variety of wellbeing activities including sports and online yoga. Students are actively encouraged to participate in wellbeing activities through a weekly 'What's on' guide including fitness challenges, clubs and societies and wellbeing tutorials. In spring 2020, CitySA worked with departments across the college on a Social Media Blackout campaign. Once a month all of the support service social media channels were 'blacked out' for two hours to highlight the need to manage screen time appropriately and how too much time online can impact on mental health.