Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success

POLICY and PROCEDURE

Brief Note to all stakeholders, from the UNSW Healthy Universities Initiative and the Scientia Education Academy:

1. It is intended that this paper be discussed at an October Academic Board UNSW Academic Quality Committee (UAQC) Meeting.
2. Prior to that, it is intended that as many stakeholders as feasible be consulted to allow input to the paper.
3. Major points about this proposed policy/procedure to note are:
   a. This Policy and Procedure are focused on the curriculum, and what Program and Course Authorities and other staff who contribute to curricula, can feasibly do to support student wellbeing, academic and career success. While input will be sought from relevant stakeholders, there will be no impact of this Policy and Procedure on the function of UNSW co-curricular/extra-curricular services, other than the principle that academics who teach should form partnerships with relevant student service/resource unit staff, with the aim of optimising student wellbeing, academic and career success.
   b. In an attempt to avoid multiple and contradictory meanings of the term “mental health”, we use an evidence-based model that specifies two dimensions: wellbeing; and psychological disorders (see the Guidelines document for further explanation).
   c. What is the associated ‘burden’ for academic teaching staff? If this Policy and Procedure are adopted, Program and Course Authorities (and associated Faculty/School committees) will need to consider how it can be implemented in the Faculty programs and courses. The accompanying Guidelines document is designed to give such support, and, given the availability of resources and assistance of the UNSW Healthy Universities community (e.g. https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/teaching/scientia-education-academy/unsw-healthy-universities-initiative), as well as the PVCE Student Academic and Career Success team (https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/student-experience/student-academic-and-career-success), the Health Promotion Unit and other units within the DVCE Portfolio, the implementation should not be a heavy burden. Indeed, such resources are usually modular, so that Program and Course Authorities can take a course-appropriate, stepped approach to curricular integration.

This document (based on existing Governance formats) provides a DRAFT of relevant Academic Board Policy and Procedure, and will allow meaningful input prior to consideration by Academic Board. A separate living/updateable Guidelines document will reside on the UNSW Healthy Universities website. The Guidelines will evolve with input from stakeholders, and will allow UNSW staff and students to get a sense of the proposed boundaries and potential of this academic program initiative.

Authors: UNSW HU Co-leaders Nalini Pather, Jacquelyn Cranney, Leesa Sidhu, and Gary Velan, with input/comment from (a) Scientia Education Academy Fellows, (b) Healthy Universities community and Student Wellbeing CoP; (c) Arc, SRC, MedSoc, Student Minds UNSW, and Medicine SWAG leaders; (d) Health & Wellbeing division; (e) key DVCE portfolio leaders (e.g., Megan Kek, David Sams); (f) Library; (g) UK Advance Higher Education consultant (Julie Hulme).
Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success

RECOMMENDATION
That the Academic Board receive, discuss and approve the Policy and Procedure (with reference to the Guidelines).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
The COVID-19 pandemic, requiring UNSW to pivot from blended to online delivery of courses, has highlighted the need to optimise the learning environment within the formal curriculum. This need was already present before the COVID disruption, but is now magnified. Many students are faced not only with life challenges such as decreased income and increased social isolation, but also with increased self-regulation challenges inherent in remote/online learning. The proposed Policy and Procedure underline the opportunity for UNSW to become a world leader in supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success. The associated Guidelines provide a framework to guide this initiative. Note that although it is paramount that we act now to adopt policy to support student wellbeing, any curricular redesign needs to be undertaken in a way that does not overload staff (given pandemic consequences). It is therefore recommended that Program and Course Authorities are given a one-year lead time to implement curricular change following adoption of the Policy and Procedure.

CONSULTATION
During the drafting of this paper, the following UNSW stakeholders were consulted:
- Scientia Education Academy Fellows; Arc, SRC, Student Minds UNSW, Medicine SWAG and MedSoc leaders; Health & Wellbeing division; key leaders from DVCE portfolio; Library; Healthy Universities community members and Student Wellbeing CoP members.
- Intended/in progress: DDEs/ADEs; Nura Gili; Library.

ATTACHMENTS
This document contains:
- A Brief Background on Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success
- Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success Policy
- Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success Procedure

A separate Guidelines document, including all literature references in the above documents, as well as a brief overview of the evidence-based framework guiding the Policy, is available at https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/teaching/scientia-education-academy/unsw-healthy-universities-initiative
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Acknowledgement of Country

We would like to acknowledge the Bidjigal, Gadigal and Ngunnawal people who, until white colonisation, thrived in their respective lands where UNSW campuses are concentrated (Kensington, Paddington and Canberra). First Nations Peoples have deep understandings of the importance of health and wellbeing and its connection to all aspects of life, as reflected in the Social Emotional Wellbeing Framework (Gee et al., 2014), which is congruent with a Healthy Universities approach. We pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past, present, and emerging, and commit to working collaboratively to achieve greater health and wellbeing outcomes at UNSW and beyond.

The purpose of university education has traditionally and implicitly been divided by (a) the idea that universities should focus on academic and intellectual pursuit, and (b) the idea that universities should provide education to support professional careers. The boundaries between these divided conceptualisations have been blurring with advances of everything digital, internet and big data, and this blurring is argued to be beneficial for graduates, universities and society (Barnett, 2017; Kek & Huijser, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused disruption of life in general and of the higher education sector in particular, has accelerated the opportunity to blur these two conceptualisations further. UNSW must demonstrate leadership in responding to this unprecedented situation.

One way in which UNSW can demonstrate such leadership is to better prepare all students to survive and thrive in an uncertain and rapidly changing future. We can do this by explicitly supporting, within the curriculum, intentional design for students’ wellbeing, academic and career success. That is, the purposeful inter-connecting of the two distinct but inter-related needs of universities and employers, in order to educate healthy global citizens who will flourish despite adversity, irrespective of what they study and where they work and live.

Prior to the pandemic, there were several national (e.g., Orygen, 2017) and international (e.g., Thorley, 2017; Veness, 2013) reports of increased levels of psychological distress amongst university students. Questions have been raised about the methodological rigor of some of these studies. Nevertheless, two points are relevant here: (a) there is no doubt that university students experience many stressors which, if not adequately managed, will lead to psychological distress (which has a negative impact on academic success); and (b) by taking a whole-of-university approach to student wellbeing, we can appreciate the role that academics can play in designing and delivering curricula that not only support students’ development of intended learning outcomes, but also promote wellbeing. Moreover, this approach should assist in the prevention of, and early intervention for, psychological disorders (Field et al., 2014; Huppert, 2009; Slavin et al., 2014). This Policy and Procedure is guided by the research-led “Complete State Model of Mental Health” (Keyes, 2005) which makes the empirical case for two dimensions: psychological disorders (none to severe) and wellbeing (low to high). These dimensions are correlated, but distinct (as others have demonstrated, e.g., Routledge et al., 2016). As a result of stakeholder input, the Guidelines document includes a suggested UNSW Framework for Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success.

Academic staff should: (a) be aware of how to design and deliver curricula (including building skills in academic self-management) that support wellbeing, as well as academic and career success; (b)
respect and work in partnership with professional colleagues who directly or indirectly support student learning and success (e.g., PVCE Portfolio, Student Life, Health Promotion Unit, Nura Gili, Library); and (c) value the ‘student voice’ in these endeavours.

The suggested approach to student wellbeing, academic and career success: (a) adopts a positive framing aligned with the UNSW 2025 Strategy Update and with national and international ‘Healthy Universities’ frameworks (e.g. Baik et al., 2017; Okanagan Charter, 2015; Carlson et al., 2020; UUK, 2020); and (b) conceptualises student self-management as underlying the UNSW graduate capabilities.

Moreover, although this paper is presented by the Scientia Education Academy and has been driven by the UNSW Healthy Universities Initiative, there has been consultation with stakeholders, including student leaders. It should also be noted that over the past several years, initiatives funded by UNSW and OLT have led to the construction of resources that can be readily contextualised for diverse academic programs. For example, resources such as evidence-based self-management tools have been developed to integrate with Learning Management Systems. Importantly, such resources are designed to be consistent with the theory and research on self-regulated learning. The Healthy Universities team, in collaboration with a diverse network of academics, has utilised these resources to deliver training sessions to early-adopter Program and Course Authorities to contextualise the use of the selected tools in their curricula (see https://teaching.unsw.edu.au/HealthyUni).

In this paper, we refer to the suggested university-wide approach that highlights the scope for curricular and co-curricular interventions to support student wellbeing, academic and career success (see the Guidelines document). Nevertheless, ADEs/DDEs as well as Program and Course Authorities will be responsible for developing a Faculty approach to student wellbeing, academic and career success (see the Guidelines for evidence-based frameworks and examples). The Program Authority is also required to work in partnership with the relevant UNSW student success support units (e.g., SACS, Health Promotion), and with key stakeholders - especially students. The latter requirement will be facilitated by each Faculty’s Student Wellbeing Action Group. These ideas are embedded within the first three principles/procedures, which we argue will enhance the learning environment. The fourth principle/procedure highlights the student’s responsibility to engage with the opportunities provided.

We suggest that through the implementation of a university-wide policy on curricular approaches to student wellbeing, UNSW can take leadership in the Higher Education sector by optimally preparing all of our students to survive and thrive in these unusual times. A UK Vice-Chancellor recently argued that: (a) we know the determinants of student wellbeing; (b) we know that there are evidence-based strategies to improve student wellbeing; and so (c) university leaders need to ensure the implementation of these strategies, now (Student Minds, 2020).
Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success POLICY DRAFT
14/08/2020

Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success POLICY DRAFT
14/08/2020

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Policy Statement

**Purpose**

To specify the principles that govern formal curricular approaches to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success, which provide a framework for the design and implementation of such approaches.

**Scope**

This policy applies to:

- curricular approaches to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success in all undergraduate, Honours and postgraduate coursework programs, the coursework components of higher degree research programs, and non-award courses offered by or on behalf of UNSW;
- all students, staff and others associated with, or contracted by, UNSW who are responsible for curriculum design and delivery of programs and courses.

Policy Provisions

**Purpose and scope of curricular approaches to supporting student wellbeing, and academic and career success**

Progressive universities take a proactive, evidence-based, whole-of-university approach to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success. The expectation is that students, graduates, employers, universities and society all benefit from such a positively-oriented approach.

The scope of this Policy is restricted to the design and delivery of formal curricula for UNSW degree programs and courses.

This policy is aligned with the UNSW 2025 Strategy Update, in particular, A3 – Student Experience (all Objectives; Measures 1 & 4) which makes reference to a “positive focus on wellbeing and mental health” (p.27). This policy is also aligned with the UNSW Wellbeing Plan, the Mental Health Business Case, and the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This policy is generally congruent with Orygen’s draft Australian University Mental Health Framework (Orygen, July 2020), the UN's Sustainability Goals 3, 4 and 8, and the Australian First Peoples’ Social Emotional Wellbeing Framework for health (Gee et al., 2014).

**Principles for formal curricular approaches to student academic success**

UNSW is committed to the provision of curricula that guide and enhance student learning and achievement.

The following principles apply to all programs and courses.

1. **Program and course curricula are designed and delivered in a way that:** (a) guides and enhances acquisition of the intended program and course learning outcomes; and (b) is congruent with evidence-based approaches to student self-management, academic and career success, and wellbeing.

   Part (a) of this principle reflects traditional approaches to the optimisation of student learning, whereas part (b) reflects more recent approaches based on research demonstrating multiple factors that influence student background, potential, and
performance. There are many overlaps in the intended outcomes of these two approaches, thus they must be considered together.

(a) The environment afforded by the learning and assessment activities within course and program curricula has a strong influence on how effectively students learn, and how successful they are in acquiring the intended learning outcomes.

(b) Evidence-based, positively-oriented frameworks exist for supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success. These frameworks highlight population health approaches to: (i) prevention of and early intervention for psychological disorders; and (ii) the promotion of academic success and associated wellbeing. Formal curricular approaches emphasise contextualised support for students to develop their self-management skills (e.g., time-management, emotional regulation), which translate to graduate career contexts and assist in future-proofing learning.

2. The design and delivery of curricula that support student self-management, academic success and wellbeing involves partnerships with co-curricular and extracurricular student support services.

Academics who design and deliver program and course curricula are typically not experts in specialised learning support, career development learning, information technology, information services, counselling and psychological services, cultural responsivity, or equitable learning processes. As such, program and course design and delivery need to be informed by contextually relevant partnerships with experts in those areas (e.g., Nura Gili, PVCE-SACS, Health Promotion), so that curricula can optimally support student self-management, academic and career success, and wellbeing.

3. The design and delivery of curricula that support student wellbeing, academic and career success involve partnerships with stakeholders including students, graduates, industry and relevant professional bodies.

Students, graduates, industry and relevant professional bodies have unique insights into: (a) aspects of the learning environment that support academic and career success; and (b) self-management skills that are particularly relevant to successful learning in degree programs and to life-long learning. As such, program and course design and delivery needs to be informed by professional and contextually relevant partnerships with these stakeholders, so that curricula can optimally support student (and graduate) self-management, academic and career success, and wellbeing.

4. Acquisition of intended learning outcomes results from supportive learning environments and effective student effort to meet the requirements of courses and programs.

The design and delivery of program and course curricula according to Principles 1-3 will result in a learning environment in which success is possible for all students who: (a) have the necessary academic enabling knowledge and skills, and (b) effectively expend effort to meet program and course requirements. That is, academic success should result from a combination of a challenging but supportive learning environment, and the effective efforts of students possessing the required enabling capacities. Such academic success leads to enhanced wellbeing, which in turn should lead to an increased willingness to engage with further academic challenges.
Accountabilities

Responsible Officer
Deputy Vice-Chancellor Education and Student Experience

Contact Officer
Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience)

Supporting Information

Legislative Compliance
This Policy supports the University’s compliance with the following legislation:
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (Cth)
Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015

Supporting Documents
Curricular approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success
Guidelines
Curricular approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success
Guide to Existing Resources for Course Design and Development

Related Documents
Student Code of Conduct
Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Assessment Policy
Equity Diversity and Inclusion Policy
Program Design and Delivery Policy
Program Design Procedure
Program Delivery Procedure
UNSW Wellbeing Strategy and Plan
UNSW Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (being drafted)

Superseded Documents
None.

File Number

Definitions and Acronyms

Academic success
At a minimum, students acquire intended learning outcomes (which includes relevant future-proofing capabilities) and so obtain passing grades in their courses and complete their degree program (see Renner et al., 2016, for a more interesting conceptualisation).

Career development learning
For university students, career development learning is essential to future academic success, and has been defined in this way:
“Learning about the content and process of career development or life/career management. The content of career development learning in essence represents learning about self and learning about the world of work. Process learning represents the development of the skills necessary to navigate a successful and satisfying life/career” (McMahon, Patton, & Tatham, 2003, p. 6, cited in Mclveen, et al., 2011).

Enabling skills and knowledge
The academic skills and knowledge that a student is assumed to possess prior to enrolling in a particular course or program (e.g., adequate English Language skills; essay-writing skills; basic calculus knowledge; minimal capacity to focus effectively on academic tasks).

Formal curriculum
The formal curriculum is designed to support student acquisition of explicit program and course learning outcomes. The formal curriculum consists of (a) formal teaching activities to support the acquisition of learning outcomes, and (b) assessment activities, one function of which is to determine whether students have acquired the learning outcomes. (See Baik et al., 2017, for a less pragmatic definition, and Jackson & Bridgstock, 2020, for definitions of “extracurricular” and “co-curricular”).

Learning outcomes
Learning outcomes describe the knowledge, skills and capabilities that students are expected to develop during a course or program of study. [Note – definition from Assessment Policy]
**Self-management capacity**

Self-management is the capacity to effectively pursue meaningful goals, and to be flexible in the face of setbacks (Cranney, Cejnar, & Nithy, 2016). Academic self-management involves knowledge and skills relevant to academic and career success, such as time-management and emotional regulation. As such, self-management can be conceptualised as a graduate capability, that is particularly relevant to successfully transitioning to the workplace.

**Wellbeing (psychological)**

Two definitions from the literature:

Wellbeing results from the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Wellbeing consists of both eudaimonic aspects (pursuing and achieving valued goals) and hedonic aspects (feeling good) (e.g., Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008). This definition is reflected in Keye’s (2005) operationalisation of wellbeing as positive emotions and positive functioning (see the Guidelines document).

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**Note:** For Literature References for the citations in this document, as well as the suggested *UNSW Framework for Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, and Academic and Career Success* which guides this policy, see the Guidelines document at [https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/teaching/scientia-education-academy/unsw-healthy-universities-initiative](https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/teaching/scientia-education-academy/unsw-healthy-universities-initiative)

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**Revision History**

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Curricular Approaches to Wellbeing
Version: 1.0 Effective 14 August 2020
Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success PROCEDURE
DRAFT 14/08/2020

Version | Approved by | Approval date | Effective date | Next review date
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1.1 | President and Vice-Chancellor | | | |

### Procedure Statement

#### Purpose
To specify the processes and responsibilities for the procedures involved in the implementation of the *Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Career Success POLICY*.

#### Scope
The procedure applies to:

- all undergraduate, Honours and postgraduate coursework programs, the coursework component of higher degree research programs and non-award courses offered by or on behalf of UNSW; and
- all students, staff and others associated with, or contracted by, UNSW who are responsible for design and delivery of these programs and courses.

**Are Local Documents on this subject permitted?**

☒ Yes, however Local Documents must be consistent with this University-wide Document

☐ No

### Procedure Processes and Actions

**Purpose and scope of curricular approaches to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success**

Progressive universities take a proactive, evidence-based, whole-of-university approach to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success. The expectation is that students, graduates, employers, universities and society all benefit from such a positively-oriented approach.

The scope of this Procedure is restricted to the design and delivery of formal curricula for UNSW degree programs and courses. For definitions of concepts such as ‘academic success’, please see the Policy.

This Procedure is aligned with the Policy, which is aligned with the UNSW 2025 Strategy Update, in particular, A3 – Student Experience (all Objectives; Measures 1 & 4) which makes reference to a "positive focus on wellbeing and mental health" (p.27). This procedure is also aligned with the UNSW Wellbeing Plan, the Mental Health Business Case, and the Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy. This procedure is generally congruent with Orygen's draft Australian University Mental Health Framework (Orygen, July 2020), the UN's Sustainability Goals 3, 4 and 8, and the Australian First Peoples' Social Emotional Wellbeing Framework for Health (Gee et al., 2014). Note that this Procedure does not explicitly address physical and digital environments and services beyond the curriculum.

1. Program and course curricula are designed and delivered in a way that: (a) guides and enhances acquisition of the intended course and program learning outcomes; and (b) is congruent with evidence-based approaches to student self-management, academic and career success, and wellbeing. (Policy Principle1)

1.1. UNSW responsibilities
UNSW will:

(a) Recommend a **UNSW Framework for Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, Academic and Student Success**, that will guide the work of Program and Course Authorities (see the Guidelines for a suggested Framework).

(b) Provide a suite of evidence-based resources that will support program and course authorities to implement Policy Principle 1. This includes staff training resources, as well as related curricular design and educational technology support. A register of university wellbeing assets such as web sites and events could be constructed in order to create a stronger connection between policy, procedure and practice.

(c) Ensure academic program alignment with the Policy, as part of regular Academic Program Reviews.

(d) Include an introduction to this Policy and Procedure, and examples of implementation, as part of the Foundations of University Learning and Teaching program.

(e) Facilitate communication and integration of relevant policies, procedures, guides and systems (e.g., regarding how student grievances are processed).

(f) Measure the impact of the Policy and Procedure, particularly on student wellbeing.

*It is recommended that a University-wide Student Wellbeing Advisory Group (U-SWAG) be formed to support the fulfillment of these responsibilities.*

### 1.2. Program Authority Responsibilities

Design and delivery of curricula are the responsibility of the academic program team, which may be situated within or between Faculties, or within one School. Hence the term “Program Authority” is used, recognising that Faculty-wide approaches, led by an Associate or Deputy Dean Education, will influence these processes.

The Program Authority will:

(a) Be aware of all aspects of the Policy and Procedure and strive to meet the requirements.

(b) Adopt and implement an evidence-based **programmatic approach** (see the Guidelines document) to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success.

(c) Include in that **programmatic approach** a systematic and fair method of providing opportunities for students to obtain enabling skills from the commencement of the program.

(e) Evaluate the **programmatic approach** regularly within the Academic Program Review cycle, and take actions to ensure continuous improvement.

(f) Provide professional development training and support mechanisms for all program staff to assist them to implement the **programmatic approach**.

### 2. The design and delivery of curricula that support student self-management, academic and career success and wellbeing involves partnerships with co-curricular and extra-curricular student support services. (Policy Principle 2)

#### 2.1. UNSW responsibilities

UNSW will:

(a) Ensure adequate co-curricular and extra-curricular student support resourcing to meet the requirements of this Policy and Procedure.

(b) Support partnerships between Program Authorities and student support services.

*It is recommended that a University-wide Student Wellbeing Advisory Group (U-SWAG) be formed to support the fulfillment of these responsibilities.*
2.2. Program Authority Responsibilities

The Program Authority will:

(a) Ensure that there are adequate opportunities to form partnerships with student support services in the design, delivery and evaluation of curricula that support student self-management, academic and career success, and wellbeing.

3. The design and delivery of curricula that support student wellbeing, academic and career success involves partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including students, graduates, industry and relevant professional bodies. (Policy Principle 3)

3.1 Faculty Responsibilities

Each Faculty will:

(a) Establish a Student Wellbeing Action Group (SWAG), to which students, staff, alumni, employers and professional bodies can contribute, and which may have subgroups related to particular programs.

(i) The Faculty SWAG will contribute as appropriate to implementation of recommendations by the University Student Wellbeing Advisory Group (U-SWAG)

(ii) The Faculty SWAG will contribute as appropriate to regular reviews of the design, delivery and evaluation of the chosen programmatic approach to supporting student wellbeing, academic and career success.

4. Acquisition of intended learning outcomes results from supportive learning environments and effective student effort to meet the requirements of programs and courses. (Policy Principle 4)

Procedures 1-3 set out the responsibilities for creating a learning environment that supports student wellbeing. This procedure sets out the responsibilities of the student.

4.1 Student Responsibilities

Students in every course will:

(a) Take advantage of opportunities to acquire the enabling skills necessary to engage in the pursuit of the intended learning outcomes (if they don’t already possess such skills).

(b) Apply effective effort to meet the requirements of the course.

(c) Seek to improve general and course-specific self-management knowledge and skills.

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Program Design and Delivery Policy  
Program Design Procedure  
Program Delivery Procedure  
UNSW Wellbeing Strategy and Plan  
UNSW Student Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy (being drafted) |
| Superseded Documents | None |
| File Number | |

**Note:** For Literature References for the citations in this document, as well as the suggested UNSW Framework for Curricular Approaches to Student Wellbeing, and Academic and Career Success which guides this Policy and Procedure, see the Guidelines document at https://www.education.unsw.edu.au/teaching/scientia-education-academy/unsw-healthy-universities-initiative

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