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Student Resilience

Exploring the positive case for resilience

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Introduction

Resilience is a word that is increasingly being used alongside student welfare, but what is meant by resilience?

This paper takes a closer look at the subject of student resilience and I hope will encourage greater debate, exploration and fresh perspectives. As the paper outlines, while the study of student resilience is still very much in its infancy in the UK, there is recognition that student mental wellbeing is a growing challenge, and one which needs greater consideration.

While overall student satisfaction at UK universities is rightly high, it has become clear that not all students find the transition to university life a straightforward one. Unite Students provides a home to around 50,000 students across the UK and our own research findings from the past few years demonstrate that some students can and do face difficulties. This is what prompted us to dedicate a significant portion of our annual Unite Students Insight Report in 2016 to finding out more about students' own views on resilience by trying to identify some of the challenges surrounding student mental health, isolation and stress. These research insights support the detailed operational data from which we and our partner universities have seen an increase in welfare-related incidents over the last two years, and which encourage us to continually review and improve our operational processes and support services.

It is for this reason that we felt there was a need for resilience to be considered in greater depth and serious consideration to be given to how underlying personal and structural issues can be better identified and outcomes improved.

I am appreciative of the work in preparing this report by authors Dr Emily McIntosh and Jenny Shaw and hope that their findings and recommendations garner wide support within the HE community.

Richard Smith

Chief Executive Officer, Unite Students

Executive summary

RESILIENCE is a term that has crept into higher education discourse over recent years, mirroring adoption in other professional settings such as compulsory education, youth and social work.

On the one hand, the term resilience seems to offer new hope within a sector that has changed beyond recognition over the last twenty years - a sector that needs to retain its standards and values, while offering mass, even universal, higher education to a cohort who appear to be increasingly emotionally troubled.

On the other hand, it can sound like an abdication of responsibility and an excuse not to adapt to the changing needs of young people and the greater diversity that comes through the doors of the academy. It can even seem like victim blaming.



Positive case for resilience

In this paper we make a positive case for resilience and based on the scholarship and findings from our research, have highlighted a number of key conclusions:

- **There is a growing issue of student mental ill-health:**
This research reinforces the view that there is a growing issue with student mental health, isolation and stress.
- **Resilience is tangible:**
Resilience can be defined and is influenced by both internal and external factors, with students' social environment having a significant role to play.
- **Life satisfaction:**
Higher resilience is associated with higher life satisfaction.
- **Resilience can be developed:**
Individual resilience isn't fixed; it can be developed - through innovative pedagogies and students' social and living environment.
- **Greater understanding is required:**
The evidence is that a better understanding of resilience could have a significant impact on improving outcomes for both students and universities.
- **Cultural exclusion:**
Students from socio-economic groups D and E have similar 'internal resilience', but score lower on social factors, suggesting that the culture of university can be less welcoming to students from a working class background.
- **Peer support:**
Peer support, including flatmates or housemates, can play an important role in resilience.

We contend that resilience represents much of the traditional values and mission of higher education: to nurture strong, independent learners and to support the development of rounded individuals that can contribute positively to society. However, we argue that there is ambiguity associated with the word resilience. This has been, in part, due to a lack of qualitative and quantitative data assessing its impact and how it can be used and applied to the overall student experience, particularly in relation to student support, retention and success.

We begin to redress that balance by:

- I. Reviewing the existing literature on student resilience;
- II. Presenting new insights based on a quantitative dataset collected for the *Unite Students Insight Report* in 2016; and
- III. Shedding light on the ambiguity of the term resilience by offering a more concrete definition of its significance and application in the area of student experience.

We do this by offering a set of defined characteristics which are associated with resilience, including the role of external environmental factors and conditions.

This report further includes an initial set of recommendations for embedding the development of student resilience into existing HE policy and practice.



There are many natural opportunities to nurture resilience throughout the student experience: through the way in which teaching, learning and assessment are approached; through the design of social spaces and services both on and off campus, particularly student accommodation; to the way in which broader skills are developed. Conversely, there are many ways in which the development of resilience in students can be inadvertently hampered in ways that may not be immediately apparent, but can contribute to the issues and challenges seen within the sector.

Recommendations

Two key recommendations present themselves from this research and scholarship:

1. **Clearly define resilience:**
 - i. Resilience to be investigated seriously as a matter of urgency within the HE sector in light of increasing concern about student mental wellbeing.
 - ii. The HE sector to establish a common definition of student resilience and resilience characteristics, and engage with government, policymakers, other education providers, schools and employers to develop a coordinated approach to developing students' resilience.

2. Implement practical steps:

- i. A more proactive approach to resilience is required, with resilience approaches embedded, from national strategy down to the smallest day-to-day interactions with students.
- ii. The sector should seek to build a nationally recognised 'Resilience Toolkit' to support HE institutions in being proactive in creating the conditions for the development of student resilience.
- iii. Resilience approaches developed for the HE sector should be coherent with developing practice in secondary and even primary school education to improve resilience into adulthood.
- iv. Consider all touchpoints - including teaching, support services and materials, parents, peer interactions, and the built learning and living environment – as all can have an impact on resilience.

Taking a more proactive approach on resilience, we believe, offers a reframing of some seemingly intractable problems that appear to resist solution. In particular, it brings a new and more positive perspective to the growing issue of student mental ill-health and, while we do not dispute the need for additional counselling resource, a more proactive, preventative approach must surely be better for students than waiting for the crisis point to be reached.

Conclusions

While the study of student resilience is still very much in its infancy in the UK, we conclude this paper by outlining a number of areas that would benefit from further development, calling for a continuing conversation at every level including – perhaps especially – with students themselves.

Resilience looks at mental wellbeing across the whole student population and potentially offers the key to useful strategies and interventions. It is rooted in positive thinking, avoids labelling and is empowering for students.

Based on conclusions from our scholarship and findings from our research, by adopting these recommendations (and others contained in Chapter 5), student outcomes will not only be improved, but HE institutions will also further their endeavour to nurture independent learners and positive contributors to society.

Chapter One:

What is resilience and why
does it matter?

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What is resilience and why does it matter?

RESILIENCE is often defined, in broad terms, as the ability to recover – to bounce back – from misfortune and to adjust easily to change. The etymology of the term has its roots in the Latin verb “resilire” meaning to “jump back”. In physics, resilience is linked to elasticity and the ability of an object to return to its original shape after it experiences significant levels of stress. As it applies to people, the development of resilience is linked to the combination of a number of factors and key traits which, when put together, contribute positively to a person’s overall emotional and physical wellbeing.

In May 2016 the publication of Angela Duckworth’s New York Times bestseller entitled *Grit: The Power of Passion & Perseverance* introduced the word “grit” into educational policymaking and popular discourse. Duckworth, researching in this area for some time, defines grit as “the combination of perseverance and passion for especially long-term and meaningful goals”. Grit, according to Duckworth, can matter more than talent or IQ. Crucially, it is also a better predictor of academic performance and of graduate marks. The words grit and resilience are now often used interchangeably and both are starting to appear regularly in popular discourse, particularly in relation to student retention, success and graduate outcomes.

As a result, resilience, along with its associated characteristics, is now starting to inform several key interventions in higher education (HE) and the student experience, from peer learning to graduate attributes and curriculum design. It is argued here that, in a HE context, resilience is most useful when it is understood as a broader umbrella term to analyse both individual characteristics, or traits, and the external conditions which need to be present in order to cultivate student success. Factors such as persistence, perseverance and the ability to set goals (those characteristics making up Duckworth’s definition of grit) are all important traits but other factors also have to be present if resilience is to be developed and maintained.

The Resilient Student, as defined by our analysis, is therefore one who embodies a set of identified characteristics, referred to here as “internal factors”, and makes use of them in order to bounce back from setbacks and difficult situations. Importantly, in order to maintain resilience, certain environmental or external protective conditions also need to be present. Both of these have culminated in the development of a Resilience Index which has a strong positive relationship with life satisfaction. At a time when between 12 per cent (Unite Students, 2016) and 20 per cent (NUS, 2013) of students report having a mental health problem and a staggering 92 per cent identify as having experienced mental distress, the importance of cultivating resilience amongst learners of all ages must be both recognised and acted upon.

Recent discussion of resilience has been in the mainstream educational media as much as in academic journals. In August 2016, a piece published by Gabbi Binnie in the Guardian’s Higher Education Network declared that resilience has become the “latest buzzword” in HE, and urged colleagues to exercise caution when using the term because its overuse contributes to more problems than it solves.

The piece considered the ambiguity of the term resilience and the way in which students responded to its use in discussion, attributing it to the development of strength and character. It also highlighted a lack of guidance for the sector on what resilience actually is and, more importantly, exactly why it is significant and what can be done to develop it. The article referred to situations in which, for example, students had repeatedly asked for feedback on assignments and were told that they ought to develop more resilience and not ask for feedback so frequently. Students in this situation believed that they lacked the strength of character required to be resilient. More importantly, their view of resilience, as reported by Binnie, suggested that they saw it as a fixed trait, something inherent which could not be improved. Some of these observations relate to the development of internal characteristics central to resilience, others to the environment in which these characteristics are nurtured.

Professor Jacqueline Stevenson, of Sheffield Hallam University, has recently drawn the sector's attention to the importance of the interplay between internal characteristics and external protective factors. Stevenson's research has investigated the worrying upward trend of focussing on deficit discourses to describe resilience. These discourses, according to Stevenson, put too much emphasis on students themselves and their internal characteristics. This is something that can also arguably be attributed to the recent rise in the use of the term "generation snowflake" to refer to young people, especially millennials, in popular culture. Stevenson calls for a reconceptualisation of resilience, which investigates the importance of university support systems and how they can be developed to ensure that we bring those services to students, as well as create an environment that is "diverse, inclusive & welcoming". Stevenson also argues that we must acknowledge that HE can be seen as a challenging place for some.

Factors involved in resilience

In attempting to understand resilience and its impact, we have created a definition that is suggested by the wider literature and supported by data. It considers both internal factors – those innate to an individual, though capable of being developed – and external factors. Within this definition, the Resilient Student will demonstrate the following:

Internal factors

- Self-management, including goal setting and persistence.
- Emotional control: ability not to dwell on negative experiences or over-react to situations.

External factors

- Social integration within the university setting.
- Support networks: an ability to turn to formal or informal support networks.

-
- Social relationships: Happiness with existing relationships and depth of these relationships.

Further detail on this definition is given in Chapter 2.

In many respects, it is difficult to assess internal and external factors separately given that they are so closely related to the cultivation of overall resilience. The following discussion therefore aims to comment not only on the relationship between internal factors themselves but also on the complex inter-relationship between internal characteristics and environment for what this can reveal about the importance of resilience in helping students to realise their potential. It is not exhaustive of all the factors listed above simply because some are still under-researched.

When examining the characteristics defining The Resilient Student, it is important to acknowledge the internal factors involved in helping students bounce back from setbacks. Two of these significant factors are willpower and self-control. In addition to a reported rise in student mental health issues, today's learners are hard-wired to appreciate the product (in other words the result) of their learning rather than the process of the learning itself. This is more commonly known as "instant gratification" and is in many respects at odds with the development of resilience and its associated characteristics. The concept of instant gratification is particularly relevant to the example discussed above about receiving feedback on work in progress and is perpetuated by the availability of technology and devices to support instant dialogue and 24/7 connectivity. Students receive feedback in real-time from their followers on social media and have unfettered access to email through which they are able to engage and respond to those around them almost instantaneously.

Walter Mischel's pioneering work in this area, The Marshmallow Test, identified the importance of willpower and self-control in living a successful and fulfilling life. Mischel's work was critical in proving that the practice of delayed gratification is essential to achieving higher marks, better social and cognitive functioning, and a greater sense of self-worth. Willpower and self-control are therefore essential characteristics in the development of resilience – the ability to wait longer or delay gratification in order to achieve a better or more positive outcome at a later date.

The development of self-control cannot be studied in isolation from the overall learning environment. The effects of instant gratification in the classroom have been studied by Marquis and a fundamental disconnect identified between the environment experienced by learners outside of the classroom, and the environment within it.

Marquis pinpoints the pitfalls of large class sizes and how this detracts from individualised, one-to-one learning where students are able to develop at a pace which suits them and respond to instant feedback. More importantly, subject content

is also a key factor, where content-specific learning triumphs over supporting an individual to develop concrete skills such as problem-solving which they can apply to a multitude of contexts and circumstances. Here Marquis points to the role of technology and “gateway tools” in enabling students to access other disciplines and develop their thinking, highlighting the potential of using new technological features like open digital badging. Although such techniques arguably mirror the external instant gratification environment, it is argued here that they open up the potential for students to develop greater willpower by engaging in “meaningful conversation and directed individualised learning”, both of which are fundamental to the creation of resilience. These environmental factors are also closely aligned with the development of The Citizen Scholar, which is discussed below.

Engaged students

The concepts of delayed gratification, willpower and self-control are also related to two other internal factors in the development of resilience: motivation and commitment. A student’s level of motivation and commitment is not only central to resilience but also to their level of engagement, both inside and outside of the classroom. Again, environmental factors have a key role to play here.

In 2002 Philip Schlechty developed a framework called Working on the Work (WOW) in which he explored putting the principles of student motivation and commitment into practice. Schlechty makes a distinction between an engaged student and one who is strategically compliant. Those who are engaged tend to see personal meaning in learning and therefore are able to retain what they learn and, crucially, transfer this learning into different contexts. In terms of developing resilience, they may find this learning quite challenging but because of their high level of personal interest will persist in their studies even in the face of difficulty. It is argued here that an engaged student is a resilient one, not only demonstrating the qualities of grit (passion, perseverance and long-term goals) but also appearing comfortable with delayed gratification.

For Schlechty, an engaged student demonstrates both high motivation and high commitment. In contrast, a student who is strategically compliant will rarely retain what they learn and instead focus on what it takes to gain the desired personal outcome rather than on the nature of the task itself: they are rarely able to apply what they have learned to new and differing contexts. In this sense, for Schlechty, the satisfactions are extrinsic rather than intrinsic and, if the task does not promise to meet the extrinsic goal, the student will abandon effort. Most importantly, the strategically compliant student substitutes their own goals for the goals of the work and these goals are instrumental – grades, rank, acceptance and parental approval all feature heavily in their overall plans.

Schlechty argues that a strategically compliant student has a high level of motivation but a low level of commitment. It is argued here that a strategically compliant student is one who seeks more instant gratification, and is goal-orientated rather than process-orientated. When faced with setbacks these students are not able to demonstrate resilience: they abandon their efforts because they are taught to value the prize rather than appreciate the learning involved in embracing uncertainty. What is clear here is that whilst long-term goals are important to Duckworth's definition of grit, it is the type and nature of the goal that matters in developing overall resilience and also whether that goal is extrinsic or intrinsic. Although goal setting is clearly important in the development of resilience, it cannot be the sole factor at play in developing a student's sense of motivation and commitment to their task. These factors are not only important to a student's learning development within the classroom but outside it and also, crucially, after graduation.

Growth mindset and learned optimism

Two further internal factors in the development of The Resilient Student relate to overall outlook on life: a growth mindset and learned optimism. In 1999, Carol Dweck published *Self Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* in which she made a distinction between two types of students, depending on their outlook and personal view of their ability. According to Dweck's theory of motivation, students who have a "fixed mindset" believe that their ability is innate, fixed at birth, and that there is little that they can do to change or improve their prospects. On the other hand, students who have a "growth mindset" believe that ability and success are due to learning and that learning takes time, patience and perseverance.

The students identified in the Guardian piece by Gabbi Binnie adopted a fixed mindset, whereby they saw resilience as a fixed trait which they either had or did not have and could do nothing to cultivate. If the situation had been handled differently these students could be supported to understand what resilience is and to develop a degree of comfort in waiting for their results. If the term resilience goes unexplained or is insufficiently understood, as it was here, the students are unable to develop a more resilient or growth mindset and are thus more likely to have less tolerance for uncertainty.

A growth mindset is crucial to the development and maintenance of student resilience and can help a student make the most of the conditions and environment in which they are situated. Closely related to the concepts of grit and delayed gratification, growth mindedness enables a student to set goals and develop a sense of comfort in waiting for longer-term results to be achieved. It is also argued here that being growth minded is central to a student's ability to embrace failure and learn from it, something which has been defined as "mistakability" and is discussed later on in this chapter. An engaged student who is highly motivated and committed is also, arguably, growth minded: able to persevere in the face of adversity and has a personal interest in the work at hand, believing in their potential to grow and develop.

In addition to mindset, learned optimism is another critical internal factor in the development of resilience. Martin Seligman's 2006 book on learned optimism demonstrated that by challenging negative self-talk, optimism can be cultivated, helping to overcome adversity. As demonstrated with growth mindedness, optimism is not a fixed trait but one which can be learned and thus has endless developmental potential. Seligman identified three differences which separated those who had learned to be optimistic from those who were pessimistic: (1) permanence, (2) pervasiveness and (3) personalisation. We argue here that students who are more resilient are more likely to be optimistic, as defined by Seligman, and that they may have learned and been supported to adopt this approach over time. That is, they believe that setbacks are only temporary and not permanent; they do not let certain failures dominate their whole outlook on life and take a more objective, external view of circumstance.

The Citizen Scholar

In 2016 Arvanitakis & Hornsby published an edited volume on The Citizen Scholar and the future of higher education, in which they articulate the need for innovative pedagogies not only to bring about a shift in focus but to develop students who are better equipped to work through real-world, global issues. Arvanitakis and Hornsby advocate future-proofing higher education by creating a new set of what they term Graduate Proficiencies and developing The Citizen Scholar where the role of universities is to "promote both scholarship and active and engaged citizens" (p11). The Citizen Scholar possesses a number of key attributes, categorised into four clusters: (1) creativity, (2) resilience, (3) design thinking and (4) cross-team working. Arvanitakis and Hornsby define resilience as consisting of two key things: the first is "mistakability" – the ability to make mistakes and learn from these, the second is adaptability, the flexibility to adapt and learn accordingly.

We argue here that mistakability and adaptability are both critical to the development of resilience and should be considered and understood alongside other internal factors identified and discussed above. This creates a sufficiently broad understanding of resilience and the environmental factors that contribute to its development, also providing greater insight into the complex interplay between these factors. There is often more learning in making mistakes and, as discussed above, engaged students who demonstrate higher degrees of motivation and commitment, especially in the face of failure, are able to transfer their learning into different contexts.

To transfer learning from one context to another requires a significant amount of flexibility and adaptability. Applying knowledge to different contexts also requires a high degree of process and systems thinking, another internal factor linked to the development of resilience. Arvanitakis and Hornsby argue that new pedagogies should focus on helping students to appreciate processes and systems rather than delivering discipline-based content, leading to improved problem-solving capabilities.

Process and systems thinking is also closely linked to other internal resilience factors, delayed gratification and self-control, where a student focuses on the process of learning rather than on the product itself and thus engages in autonomous development. Given some of the emerging findings in the sector on the effectiveness of mindfulness, it is possible that an environment in which students can practice mindfulness will help them to appreciate the process and systems thinking involved in enhanced learning.

Whilst the above internal factors are central to the development of The Resilient Student, they cannot easily be separated from the environment in which the student is working. In order to nurture mistakability, adaptability and process and systems thinking, for example, certain environmental conditions need to be present and this includes pedagogical innovations that have been identified by Arvanitakis and Hornsby and others. The ability to make and learn from mistakes needs to be articulated and normalised, the importance of applying thinking to different contexts and disciplines needs to be encouraged and more emphasis should be placed on process and systems-orientated activity within the curriculum, and also within assessment. Finally, the learning environment cannot be separated from the real-world context in which the student will eventually come to work, meaning that these issues are also of relevance to graduate employers.

Arvanitakis and Hornsby make several recommendations to create the conditions to nurture The Citizen Scholar. It is argued here that two of these conditions are central to the creation of The Resilient Student: (1) that uncertainty is acceptable and (2) silos must be broken and interdisciplinary learning promoted. Importantly, these environmental conditions encourage substantial increases in growth mindset and resilience: students who feel more comfortable with uncertainty are more likely to take risks and to learn from them. Moreover, in creating the conditions that nurture the development of resilience, universities are better able to strike “the right balance between support and challenge” rather than resorting to “handholding” or responding to smaller insignificant student queries.

The role of tutors

These findings are consistent with Sharples et al's 2016 *Innovating Pedagogies* report, which emphasised the importance of “productive failure” where students are supported to “try to solve complex problems before being taught the relevant principles and correct methods”. Productive failure requires a strong tutor presence but “the process of exploring different paths can lead to deeper understanding”. The personal tutor or academic advisor is integral to creating the conditions for the development of resilience and, alongside peer support, is central to helping students navigate the transitions that they face during university.

Tutors contribute hugely to the development of a vibrant and supportive learning community in which students can embrace failure and learn lessons from it. A learning community which supports more personalised and individual learning, particularly one where a student can explore their University Student Identity and University Student Role, as defined by Whannell and Whannell, can ensure that students succeed in the face of severe objective challenge. Identity, particularly how the learner views themselves and subjectively views others around them, is an essential part of a learning community and is one of the five levers which define design, delivery and discourse in the educational experience.

A sense of belonging is also critical to the creation of a supportive learning community, and has a strong impact on retention as identified by Liz Thomas in the "What Works" Report in 2012 and Kate Thomas' work on part-time learning and widening participation. The analysis presented below explores this environmental aspect of resilience in more depth, looking beyond the classroom to a wider sense of belonging as a student and particularly highlighting student accommodation as a place to nurture belonging for those students who are resident. It looks at this in the context of the wider network of social relationships that a student has access to, such as family and friends from home, the quality of these relationships and their effectiveness as a support mechanism. At this point we begin to enter uncharted territory as far as the UK HE system is concerned.

All these factors are critical to the development of a safe environment where internal factors are nurtured and The Resilient Student can learn to thrive. It is argued here that these conditions particularly encourage a student to practice developing these internal factors and skills, where they can not only learn to delay gratification but also embrace mistakability and work alongside tutors and peers to develop the flexibility and agility to transfer their learning between contexts.

Case Study: Returning to study

The following case study illustrates the importance of day to day interactions with students and how these interactions can help to develop resilience, and particularly the interplay between internal and environmental factors.

Emma returned to study as a mature student. She was tentative about meeting new people and experienced social anxiety, yet was excited about the course and initially wanted to engage in some of the activities offered by the university. However, at the start of her course she took the decision to focus on study rather than making friends.

Although she talked to other students during classroom activities, she avoided social areas during breaks and lunches, instead devoting this time to reading or working on assignments.

Emma became increasingly anxious, stressed and battled with wanting to leave. She was often paralysed by fear of failure and negative self-talk, resulting in an excessive number of hours being spent on one piece of work, even though she was achieving excellent marks already. She continued to isolate at university and at the time had a very poor support network at home.

This pattern continued into her second year, during which time the pressure became too much and she strongly considered leaving. A meeting with her lecturer about an assignment proved pivotal. It gave her the opportunity to talk about her social isolation and the excessively high standards she was setting herself.

As a result of this conversation, Emma began to open herself up to her peers by sitting in the social areas and engaging in conversation. Though still battling with anxiety, this strategy proved to be a turning point and she developed a strong and supportive network of friends who helped her cope with the pressures of the course.

In her final year, Emma also tackled her perfectionism, attaining emotional control over her negative thoughts and realising that completing the course was more important than attaining perfection. This allowed her to grow intellectually, and later professionally, by taking more risks and not being hampered by fear of failure. On completing her course, Emma was awarded a first class degree.

It is important to note that, in situations where these internal resilience factors or characteristics are largely absent, they can be learned. This analysis presented below has revealed how certain vulnerable student groups are less likely to have developed these internal key traits. In this case the understanding around a growth mindset – among both students and university staff – is crucial in enabling these traits to be developed and the analysis suggests that this will have a material impact on student outcomes. The data also shows where, for some groups of students, it is the external factors that provide a challenge. Again, these can be supported and developed purposefully in order to improve outcomes.

Chapter Two:

Creating a resilience index

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Creating a resilience index

THE ANALYSIS presented in Chapters 2-4 is based on the dataset from the Unite Student Insight Report 2016, a survey of over 6,500 students in the UK. Further details about the survey can be found in the Appendix, and the dataset is publicly available at <http://www.unitestudents.com/insightreport>.

Seven of the survey questions were used to create the index, grouped into five thematic domains outlined below. These domains were suggested by the wider literature as being of relevance to resilience and in most cases had an empirical basis, mainly in the US body of resilience research.

Internal factors

- Self-management: this is similar to Duckworth's definition of grit outlined above and includes goal setting and persistence.
- Emotional control: ability not to dwell on negative experiences or over-react to situations. This has much in common with Seligman's concept of learned optimism.

External 'protective' factors

- Social integration: Perceived integration with specific groups of other students, such as flatmates or housemates, or other students on the same course. This links to Liz Thomas' work on sense of belonging, cited above.
- Support networks: Perceived ability to turn to a formal or informal support network.
- Social relationships: Happiness with existing relationships (including family and friends from home), inclusion in friendship groups compared to others, and the depth of friendships with other students.

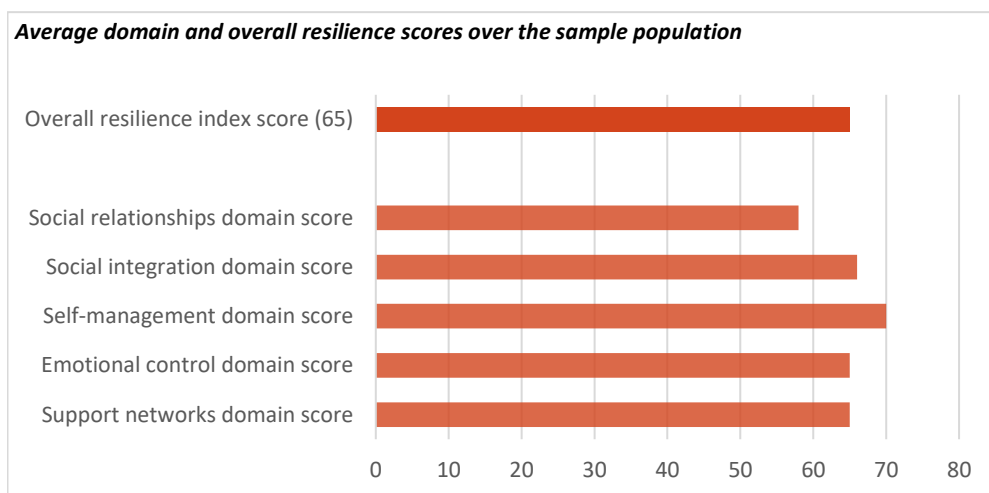
Each of these domains is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

A full list of the questions that comprise the index and the way in which they were scored can be found in Appendix 1.

It should be noted that the Unite Student Insight Survey's primary purpose was to understand the wider non-academic student experience and its impact on students. As such, there are a number of areas of inquiry outlined in Chapter 1, which could not be addressed through this dataset. However, as the development of student resilience outside of the classroom is almost entirely absent from the UK literature, we suggest that this represents new and much needed data for the sector and a fresh perspective on resilience. Furthermore, it demonstrates many of the general assertions made about resilience, its importance and impacts and the complex interweaving of internal and external factors that enhance its development.

To support the analysis, a Resilience Index was constructed representing each of the five domains outlined above. Each response to each question was given a score based upon whether the response was positive, for example 'well integrated' or negative, for example 'very unhappy'. This yielded a percentage score for each student within each of the domains and, by aggregation, an overall resilience score for each student. For both the individual domains and the overall score, a score of 100 represents the highest resilience, and 0 the lowest.

While a resilience score has been generated for each individual student in the survey – and could be generated for any individual using the questions set out in the appendix – we are not advocating its use at the individual level without extensive further testing. Rather, its value lies as an analytical tool that can be correlated with other factors such as life satisfaction (see below). Scores can also be compared between different groups of students to identify those who may be at risk and, by breaking this down by domain, what the differentiating factors might be for these groups.

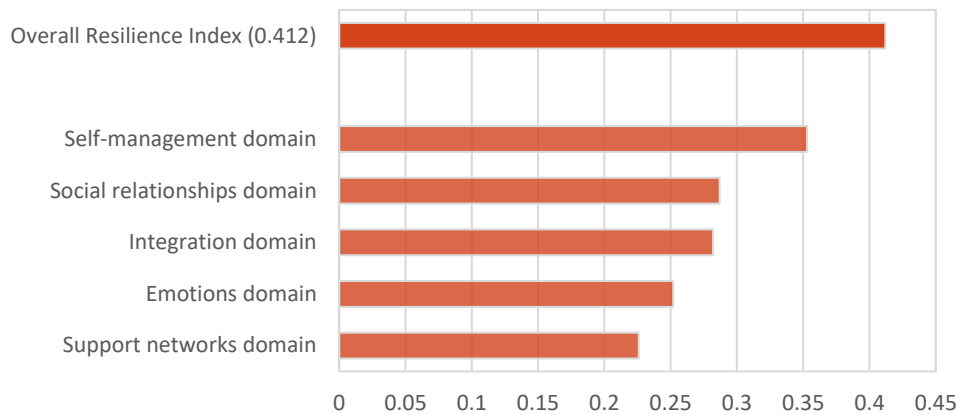


At the level of the whole dataset, therefore, the overall index score and the scores in each of the domains give an average or benchmark figure against which specific groups of students can be compared, and which can be correlated with other factors including outcome indicators.

Resilience and life satisfaction

The Resilience Index as defined by this study has a strong positive relationship with overall life satisfaction using a bivariate correlation (Pearson) analysis. Within this, self-management alone is moderately correlated. In other words, students who already consider that they possess self-management skills such as goal setting, persistence and ability to bounce back after a setback tend to be happier; social and emotional factors contribute further to this.

How satisfied are you with your life at the moment?



Of the 46 individual variables that make up the five factors, the following had the strongest relationship with life satisfaction, each having a moderately strong correlation:

1. Happiness with relationships with other students on the same course (0.339)
2. Feeling able to 'plan my way out of negative situations' (0.326)
3. Happiness with relationships with family (0.323)
4. Happiness with relationships with friends at university excluding housemates or those on the same course (0.323)

Items one and four above are linked to a sense of belonging at the institution which, as has already been noted, is also closely linked with retention. These findings suggest that it also has a strong impact on wellbeing and may be an important 'protective factor' for mental health.

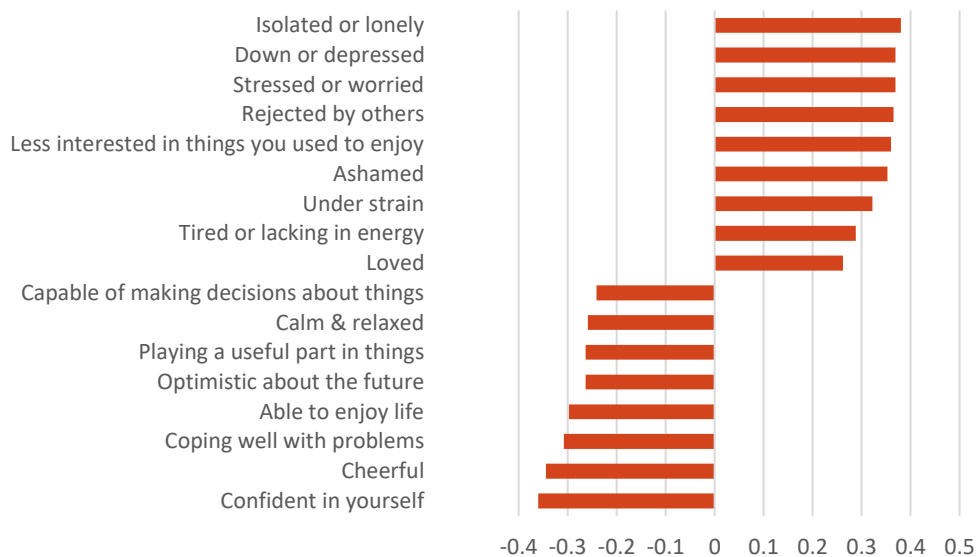
Item two, feeling able to 'plan my way out of negative situations', has potential links to the concepts of 'mistakability' and 'adaptability' that Arvanitakis and Hornsby see as central to the understanding of resilience. It suggests that allowing young people to fail and recover within a supportive context may be important not only for mental health, but also as an important skill for learning and future employment.

Finally, the role of family is highlighted as an important factor in wellbeing for students. Chapter 4 explores in more detail some of the stark negative consequences for students who do not feel supported by family. This has implications for institutional policy around care leavers and estranged students, and may also help to break down the broad concepts of 'social capital' into something more actionable.

Resilience and mental wellbeing

The overall resilience index had a moderate relationship with a range of both positive and negative indicators of mental wellbeing. Some of these should be unsurprising, for example the strong negative relationship with isolation and loneliness is to be expected when the index contains many questions about the quality of relationships. However, the number and range of correlated emotions suggests that the Resilience Index identifies some underlying aspects of mental wellbeing that are manifest in these symptoms. Tackling these underlying factors is likely to be more effective and sustainable than simply addressing the symptoms.

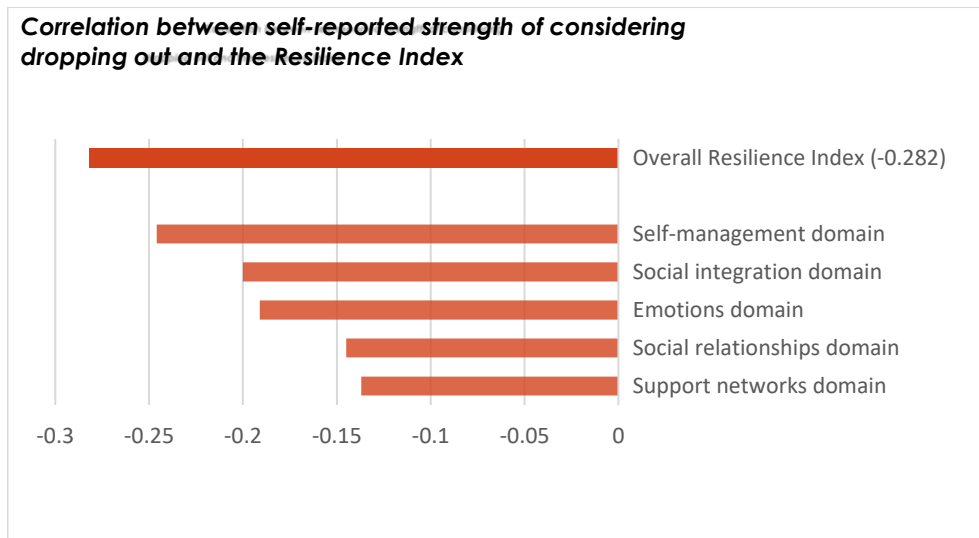
Correlations analysis: relationship between Resilience Index and feelings students have



Given the argument presented in Chapter 1, which proposed that resilience can be purposefully developed, this may suggest some new ways of approaching student wellbeing.

Resilience and retention

Resilience also has a measurable negative relationship with ideation around leaving university early, though this is a weaker correlation than for life satisfaction. Two of the individual factors – self-management and social integration – are significantly correlated.



The relationship between resilience and actual retention could not be measured through this dataset, however case study evidence and the retention work by Liz Thomas et al suggest it may play a role. This would be a fruitful area for further research.

Case study:

Developing resilience in student accommodation

The case study below illustrates the significance of resilience in supporting retention. It shows how a supportive living environment can help develop goal setting and help students develop social relationships and a support network to enhance their resilience.

Matt, a student at a London university, was flagged by his accommodation provider as a cause for concern shortly after he started living with Unite Students, as he was struggling with integration and mental ill-health. He was experiencing isolation, depression, severe anxiety and had expressed suicidal thoughts. He didn't know how to integrate with flatmates, more often than not remained in his bedroom and was strongly considering leaving university and going home.

After an initial meeting with a Unite Students team member, Matt agreed to see a GP. However, he felt the doctor had not understood him and had given him medication, which he did not want to take at that time.

Matt was signposted to university support services who offered him counselling. He also met with a Unite Students team member and was able to discuss how he felt, and decide on achievable targets to help him cope better. Using conversations around rationalising the 'worst case scenario' Matt agreed to engage in things that he had previously been wary of, such as finding a work placement and integrating with his flatmates.

Matt planned small tasks that would help him integrate better in his flat, such as wedging his bedroom door open and spending time studying in the kitchen rather than his bedroom. His anxiety had previously prevented him from feeling able to do this, but each time there was a small success he became more confident. He also tried working in the communal study area to try to engage with people outside of his flat.

Over time, he went from finding London incredibly difficult, to loving it, from having no friends and not feeling confident to be himself, to being able to form meaningful relationships and take part in the social aspect of university.

Towards the end of his degree, Matt undertook an internship in Vietnam, something that would have previously been unthinkable to him. Instead of leaving university he successfully completed his degree, achieving a 2:1, and has gone on to start a Masters degree.

Chapter Three:

Key findings across each domain

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Key findings across each domain

THIS CHAPTER draws out analysis on each of the Resilience Index domains, with a focus on understanding some of the dynamics at play and on highlighting areas for potential action.

Self-management domain

The self-management domain was created from two of the questionnaire items. The first asked respondents to self-rate against a number of statements relating to their own self-management. The second asked students to report on their response to a specific setback against three statements.

The results suggest that on the whole students are likely to report that they demonstrate "Grit" as defined by Duckworth, in the sense that they are likely to set goals and believe themselves to be persistent in pursuing them. This is consistent with the ability they have shown in qualifying for university. However, there is a potential counterbalance to this in that a relatively high percentage report panicking under pressure (about a third agree, and only about a half actively disagree). Similarly, just under two thirds agree that they take on short term discomfort for long term gain (see Mischel's work on delayed gratification discussed in Chapter 1) and around the same proportion agree that disappointment doesn't stop them from trying again. This is likely to reflect the age profile and stage of development of the average student, an assumption that is supported by the finding that students aged between 18-22 years old were more likely to report panic under pressure, compared to those aged 25 and over, and were less likely to agree that disappointment doesn't stop them from trying again.

Students were then asked to think about a specific setback they had experienced while at university, and asked to self-rate on their response. The sample excluded the 10 per cent of respondents who reported that they had not experienced a setback.

The most surprising result here was that over half of respondents reported they had avoided doing something from fear of failure. Elsewhere in the survey, students reported fairly high levels of stress, notably almost three quarters reporting they were stressed about performing well in tests and coursework and two-thirds saying they were stressed about keeping up with study. It may be that fear of failure is a more pervasive feature of student life than has previously been recognised, arguably exacerbated by the significant financial risks attached to academic failure.

Emotional control domain

Data for this domain was also derived from the question about response to a specific setback. This group of four statements was themed around the ability to control emotions in order to avoid additional negative consequences that may compound the original setback.

The impacts of a setback were more likely to make themselves felt within the student's internal world than their external world. After experiencing a setback over two thirds of students reported dwelling on a negative experience for longer than they should have, and impacts on confidence were reported by more than half of respondents. Externalised consequences to the reaction, such as damaging relationships, were rarer though more likely to be seen in some groups of students than others: this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Social integration domain

Survey respondents were asked to self-rate their level of integration with other students in a number of different categories. The majority of students reported feeling integrated across all of these categories.

Feelings of integration differed significantly between different demographic groups, with the following groups much less likely to feel integrated:

- Students with a disability and, within this, especially students with a mental health condition;
- Students from socio-economic groups D and E;
- Female students; and
- Students who were care leavers or estranged from their parents.

More detail about the different experience of these groups, and its link to different outcomes, can be found in Chapter 4.

However, this is not just about disadvantaged groups. Lower integration is important wherever and whenever experienced because it is associated with a number of factors that tend to indicate lower satisfaction with, and possibly disengagement from, student life. These include:

- Feeling dissatisfied with their accommodation;
- Feeling dissatisfied with the communal areas in their accommodation;
- Being worried about the cost of accommodation;
- Believing that their university is preparing them poorly for employment; and
- Being dissatisfied with life.

Social relationships domain

The score for this domain was drawn from three different items in the questionnaire:

1. Extent of positive/negative feelings about current relationships with friends, fellow students and family;
2. Self-rated comparison with other students of aspects of current social life; and
3. Agreement or disagreement with statements about the quality of relationships with other students.

The majority of respondents reported that they were happy with their friend and family relationships. However, respondents were more likely to rate themselves negatively rather than positively when comparing themselves to other students.

There is a clear discrepancy between students' positive self-rating of the relationships in their lives and the more negative self-view when comparing themselves to others. This may be linked to social media and the propensity of people to compare themselves unfavourably against the edited highlights of other people's lives.

Across both these questions, the following groups scored more negatively than average:

- Students with a disability;
- Care leavers and students who are estranged from their parents;
- Students from D and E socio-economic groups;
- Female students; and
- Mature students.

When asked questions about the quality and depth of their university-based social relationships, the results are surprisingly low. Just over half of students agreed that they have a friend at university that they trust with deeply personal secrets, but the figure is lower when the question is made more specific. However, that may be because the specified concerns (financial, health) have not arisen for all students.

Only a third of students report that they have better friends at university than at home, and just a quarter that their best friend goes to their university. This may not be surprising among first years but seems low across the whole student population and may indicate an incomplete integration into student life compared with previous generations. Improvements in communications technology have made it easier to remain in touch with friends from home, but may have a correspondingly negative influence on socialisation at university.

Support networks domain

Respondents were asked the extent to which they felt able to turn to formal and informal support networks in the context of thinking about a specific setback. The vast majority of students reported that they could turn to family and friends. A smaller majority reported that they could turn to formal professional support such as counsellors, tutors and university support staff. Just under half of the respondents felt able to turn to peer-support (wardens, residential assistants or mentors) and just a third to accommodation staff, possibly because they believe this was not within the scope of their role.

Housemates or flatmates occupied an anomalous position, with around two thirds of the respondents who live with other students feeling able to turn to them. They rank below family and friends, but above all official sources of support and well above designated peer support. They may be an under-recognised element of a student's support network.

Case Study:

Supporting resilience among refugee healthcare professionals

The case study below illustrates the important role that support networks can play in resilience. It particularly shows how important this can be for students who are facing additional challenging circumstances and are separated from their previous support networks.

Refugee healthcare professionals are an extremely specific subset of refugees who undertake a re-qualification route through higher education or professional bodies in order to attain professional registration in regulated professions. Evaluations by Cross in 2012 and 2016 highlighted the role that a supportive network could play in underpinning the resilience of these learners.

"There was no battle and nothing was in my control I had done what I could have done whatever I could have done and then it was up to other people to decide for my future. That was very difficult, I found it the most difficult bit actually. I found it extremely difficult. I mean I could manage working full time, part-time studying, studying under boss, like struggling, all these things weren't as difficult as waiting for registration."

For refugee healthcare professionals there is a systematic process that they must undergo which often tests their resilience. They must demonstrate language competency, medical theory, and clinical application through a series of examinations and then must complete a registration process with the appropriate clinical body, yet often the impact of their journey is overlooked.

"I came to England but, for many reasons and some personal reasons I was unable to look at my professional life at all. I had to survive and I had to live day by day."

For many of the doctors the asylum seeking process impacted on their resilience the most, as they were often left destitute, with approximately £30 a week to live on with simple questions like 'what did you do at the weekend?' impacting greatly on the inequality of their situations. One doctor remarked that 'you start to feel less worthy, less equal'.

Reache North West had a well-developed transition programme that prepared the learners for employment, however there were external factors which had an impact on their physical and mental wellbeing which in turn had an impact on resilience. Cross's 2012 review used semi-structured interviews with refugee doctors who had gone through the whole programme and had returned to their careers.

Their reflections on the process gave insights into how their resilience had been affected by external factors, such as the need to flee their country or very often challenges of a social nature.

In one case a doctor reflected on how living on a tight budget as a refugee made you aware of your clothing and how being asked to go for coffee could mess up their plan.

All of the doctors spoke highly of the programme and found that when their resilience was waning they would contact Reache for 'pep-talks' that could keep them on track.

"I waited so long to have my status and it was quite a process to get my registration and then there was a point where I was applying for jobs and not getting any positive response or any response at all and my confidence had suffered and then I'll go back to Reache for pep-talks."

Reache provided a support network that addressed the specific needs of this group of learner, supporting their resilience throughout a challenging process of living as an asylum seeker and re-registering professional.

Chapter Four:

Demographic differences and disadvantaged groups

Chapter Four:

Demographic differences and disadvantaged groups

THIS CHAPTER explores differences in overall resilience and resilience domain scores between different demographic groups. It picks out three groups – those from socio-economic groups D and E, students with a mental health condition and students who are estranged from their parents – as being particularly low scoring on resilience and explores the impact of this.

There is only minor difference in overall resilience score between:

- BAME and White British students;
- Students in Years 1, 2 and 3+ of their degree; and
- Students attending universities with different missions.

At the domain level, however, some differences can be seen.

Students attending post-1992 institutions were slightly less integrated than those at other types of institution. Similarly, they scored the lowest on social relationships and very slightly lower on support networks. However, when it came to self-management and emotional control they were slightly above average. This difference in integration may be linked to higher levels of living at home, and suggests that the overall resilience of students in post-1992 institutions may be boosted by paying attention to integration and other social factors.

Year 3+ students scored somewhat higher on self-management, social relationships and integration, which supports the theory set out in Chapter 1 that resilience can be learned. However, they scored lower on emotional control, which may reflect the higher levels of stress they encounter as they near graduation. This is borne out elsewhere in the dataset, in which Year 3+ students reported higher levels of stress from academic factors (keeping up with study, performing well on tests and coursework) than first years. Strategies to develop resilience for later years of study could therefore include stress management.

BAME students scored higher on emotional control than White British students, but lower on social relationships and integration. It is likely that higher levels of living at home contribute to this difference among some ethnic groups. However, active strategies to promote inclusion, including within accommodation and other social spaces, could also make a difference.

Gender differences

Female students scored slightly lower on the overall resilience index than male students, and were only two thirds as likely as male students to score over 75 per cent.

The most significant difference was in the emotional control domain, in which they scored 8 percentage points lower. Within this, they were more likely to report an internally-experienced impact following a setback, a negative impact on confidence or dwelling on the negative experience for longer than they should have. This difference may be to some degree socially produced by societal expectations around gender roles.

Female students scored slightly higher than males on the social relationships domain, with the main difference being around the depth and intimacy of social relationships with other students.

Although female students may be having a different experience than male students, they do not appear to be disadvantaged significantly. In fact, according to HESA data they tend to outperform male students academically at first degree level. It is likely that the different domains have different levels of impact on academic achievement, though this is outside of the scope of this dataset. We do however know that social relationships have a stronger correlation with life satisfaction than emotional control, though a weaker correlation with consideration of dropping out.

We now turn our attention to groups of students who do appear to be disadvantaged both in terms of their resilience and their outcomes.

Students from socio-economic groups D and E

Students from socio-economic groups D and E have a slightly lower resilience score than those from the A and B groups. Their self-management skills and emotional control were on a par with other groups, but they did score lower in all three of the social and support domains.

Even within their student accommodation, students from D and E socio-economic groups who live away from home were less likely to feel integrated with flat or housemates, and less happy with those relationships than those from C1C2 or AB groups.

Is this a case of them 'lacking social capital', or is it rather that they are entering into a space that is culturally different from their experiences to date, a cultural challenge their middle class peers do not have to negotiate? Students from D and E socio-economic groups were less likely to have a best friend at university, meet friends that are not housemates, or have trusted friends at university they can turn to for advice.

Other factors may also be at play, for example students from socio-economic groups D and E were less likely to report they are able to turn to family for support.

This group of students also showed indications of a poorer student experience and outcomes. For example, according to the wider dataset, students from D and E socio-economic groups were more likely to have strongly considered dropping out of their course, had lower life satisfaction and were less happy with where they live.

Students with a mental health condition

Respondents who self-declared with a mental health condition scored much lower on outcome indicators than average. For example, almost two thirds of this group had considered dropping out of university, compared to just over a third of respondents overall. A fifth had strongly considered dropping out.

Moreover, about half of students with a mental health condition were satisfied with their lives compared to two thirds without. Sitting beneath this, students with a mental health issue reported much higher levels of negative feelings such as isolation, rejection, feeling down or stressed, and much lower levels of positive feelings such as confidence, calm and optimism.

Students with a mental health condition scored lower on the overall resilience index than average, and lower than any other identified group. They scored lower across each of the domains, but particularly on emotional control. Students with a mental health condition were more likely than average to agree with each of the statements:

- I have dwelt on negative experiences for longer than I should have;
- A setback negatively impacted on my confidence for some time;
- My reaction to a situation made things worse; and
- I overreacted to a setback, damaging relationships with friends or flatmates.

It is difficult to know where causation lies in all of this: whether difficult emotions and emotional reactions are triggering mental ill-health, or are caused by it. It is likely that for some students, difficult external conditions and events have triggered or are perpetuating mental ill-health, which is evidenced by the higher levels of mental ill-health found among groups such as care leavers or estranged students within this survey. For others, it may be the nature of their reaction to events that are causing or exacerbating difficult emotions, which would be consistent with a cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) perspective.

Students who are estranged from their parents

Students who are estranged from their parents showed a higher incidence of mental ill-health than average – about a quarter, compared to about an eighth of all students. This means that this group was not mutually exclusive from the group discussed above.

Estranged students have been shown to be disadvantaged in a number of ways compared to students in general, including financially and emotionally. The charity Stand Alone has shown that estranged students are more likely to have considered dropping out, and are more likely to have actually dropped out from their course than students in general.

Students who are estranged from their parents scored lower across each of the resilience domains, with the greatest differential being on social relationships. Students in this group were less likely to meet friends who aren't housemates regularly, go to friends for relationship advice or have friends that they can trust with deeply personal secrets. Research carried out by the University of Cambridge on behalf of Stand Alone has shown that family estrangement can create a barrier to trust and intimacy with others, linked to feelings of stigma and shame. As well as the obvious negative consequences associated with this challenge of trust, it may also reduce a student's ability to adapt to university life and the stresses and strains this brings.

Chapter Five:

Recommendations

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Recommendations

In the Executive Summary we set out a general recommendation that student resilience is explored seriously within higher education policy and practice, and that the characteristics of *The Resilient Student* should be understood with a view to supporting the development of resilience among students.

Based on conclusions from our scholarship and findings from our research, we propose that not only will student outcomes be improved, but that HE institutions will further their endeavour to nurture independent learners and positive contributors to society.

Our specific recommendations are:

Develop a new model

- We propose the development of a new model for the sector that demonstrates the characteristics of *The Resilient Student* and the environmental factors which help *The Resilient Student* to thrive. We invite colleagues from the sector to build on and develop the Resilience Index outlined above and to test its application within both the academic and non-academic student environment.
- We propose that the characteristics of resilience be discussed at length within the sector and with students so that a clearer understanding of its meaning and its significance can be reached. Awareness should also be raised about how the characteristics of resilience can be nurtured and developed.
- There is an opportunity to link the development of student engagement and learning analytics with the resilience agenda so as to ensure that there are ways of capturing data associated with the development of resilient characteristics.

External dialogue

- We propose that the HE sector engages with government, policymakers and other education providers, including further education (FE) colleges, to provide a coordinated approach to developing students' resilience.
- We further recommend that the sector engages in a dialogue with charitable organisations already working in this area to inform a coordinated and professional approach to developing resilience, working together to bring about necessary change.

Practical measures

- We recommend that a Resilience Toolkit is created for the sector, in accordance with the above definitions, to ensure that HE institutions are supported to create the conditions for the development of student resilience and to share approaches, innovations and best practice.
- Curriculum design and assessment could incorporate the development of resilience, specifically 'mistakability', comfort with uncertainty and risk-taking.
- Assessment design could consider the importance of helping students to develop their skills in process and systems thinking. There is a lot to explore here in terms of how the provision of placements, internships and higher apprenticeships can inform this agenda.
- There is an opportunity for students to be supported, at every level, to set meaningful short, medium and long-term goals which are aligned with their interests and expectations.
- Further consideration needs to be given to the importance of mindfulness and mindfulness techniques and their significance to the development of resilience.

Inform student-centred strategy

- Resilience has the potential to inform student-centred strategy – especially around learning, teaching & assessment, pedagogical innovation and the student experience.
- Learning development interventions, learning technologies and graduate attributes could be revised to reflect the development of resilience and its key characteristics, ensuring that students continue to recognise its importance in their learning.

The built environment

- The overall learning environment, including classrooms, social spaces and libraries, may be developed so as to ensure that resilience characteristics are nurtured and developed.
- The development of resilience can also be a consideration when designing non-academic spaces and services for students, including accommodation, social space and co-curricular activities.

The student journey

- There is a real opportunity to consider resilience factors when designing welcome and induction activities.

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- Student communications and marketing materials, including social media feeds, could take account of resilience and its key characteristics so as to normalise uncertainty, risk-taking, and the importance of failure in the learning journey.
 - Resilience may inform the development of approaches to personal tutoring, ensuring that the environmental conditions support the development of its key characteristics and a dialogue about its significance can continue beyond welcome and induction.
 - The development of resilience could be a key consideration in understanding student transitions and the student journey, particularly across the first year of study and preparation for graduation. This should be understood not only by HE institutions, but also by others who play a key role in these transitions, including accommodation providers and graduate employers.

Peer-to-peer support

- Further thought could be given to the role that informal peer support could play in supporting student resilience, particularly informally among house- or flat-mates.
- Peer mentoring and other peer learning interventions such as Peer Assisted Study Sessions (PASS) may play an important role in the development of student resilience, particularly around normalising uncertainty and offering for new students the benefit of their peers' lived-through experience. Their benefits and outcomes should be explored further.
- Other forms of non-academic peer-to-peer support may also wish to take account of the need to develop resilience, including sub-wardens or residential assistants in student accommodation.

Mental health

- Given the wider results of the survey, further attention should be paid to the experience of students with a mental health condition, and further strategies developed to ensure inclusion and parity of experience.

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Appendix 1:

Resilience Index methodology

The analysis carried out for this report draws on the dataset from the Unite Students Insight Report 2016. This study was fielded between 24th March and 22nd April 2016, hosted by YouthSight and was answered by 6,504 undergraduates studying at UK universities. To ensure that the sample was representative, quotas were set in line with HESA student population data (2014/15) for EU and non-EU international students, gender, course year and university group. During analysis, data was weighted in line with these representative quotas.

Method

A staged analysis process was undertaken. The first stage took the variables related to resilience and cross tabulated these with demographic variables within the students' population.

The second stage created a Resilience Index:

- Seven questions were identified as being indicators of student resilience. Each response to each question was given a score based upon whether the response was a 'positive one' i.e. 'well integrated' or a 'negative' response i.e. 'very unhappy'.
- The scores were then analysed to create an overall score for each question and to create a composite indicator of resilience.
- Within the overall index five individual domains were created.

The third stage of the analysis looked at the relationship between the Resilience Index and the individual variables and other indicators of the student's experience. This analysis was undertaken using bivariate correlation (Pearson) analysis, and cross tabulation of some questions.

- It is important to note that this is not proof of causation, rather a correlation in the data. This enables us to interpret which resilience factors have more of a relationship with different aspects of the student experience.

Resilience Index variables

Social relationships domain

Which of the following statements, if any, about your friends at university do you feel applies to you?

Please select all that apply.

- My best friend goes to my university
- Excluding housemates, I have friends who I meet to socialise with (outside of study) at least twice a week
- I have friends at university who I speak to for dating or relationship advice
- I have friends at university that I trust with deeply personal secrets
- I have spoken to a friend at university about my financial concerns
- I have spoken to a friend at university about my health concerns

Social relationships domain

On the scale below, please indicate how happy or unhappy you feel about each of the following relationships.

Please select one option in each row

- Relationships with my family
- Relationships with my house/flat mates
- Relationships with friends not at university
- Relationships with other students on my course
- Relationships with my friends at university (not housemates or on my course)
- Very happy
- Fairly happy
- Neither happy nor unhappy
- Fairly unhappy
- Very unhappy
- Don't know

Social relationships domain

Compared to other people you know, to what extent do you do each of the following?

Please select one option in each row.

- Have friends and acquaintances
- Belong to groups/cliques of friends or acquaintances
- Belong to clubs or organisations
- Far less than others
- Less than others
- About the same as others
- More than others
- Far more than others

Self-management domain

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- If something is worth starting, I'm going to finish it
- I tend to panic under pressure
- I can become upset when things do not work out as planned
- I am quick to get help from others when I encounter problems.
- I depend on myself to find a way through anything
- I consider the impact of my actions on others
- I tend to take on short term discomfort for long term gain
- I have clear idea of goals I would like to achieve in the year ahead
- Disappointment doesn't stop me from trying again
- I tend not to complain if I can help it
- I am able to plan my way out of negative situations
- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Self-management domain

Everyone experiences setbacks in life. Which of the following have you experienced in the last year at university after a setback? Please try to think of specific circumstances when answering.

Please select all that apply.

- I have not faced up to my failure and blamed others instead
- I have relied too much on others to make decisions for me
- I have avoiding doing something from fear of failure

Emotional control domain

Everyone experiences setbacks in life. Which of the following have you experienced in the last year at university after a setback? Please try to think of specific circumstances when answering.

- I have dwelt on negative experiences for longer than I should have
- A setback negatively impacted on my confidence for some time
- I overreacted to a setback, damaging relationships with friends or flatmates
- My reaction to a situation made things worse

Integration domain

How integrated, if at all, do you feel at university in the following areas?

Please pick one option only for each statement

- Students in my flat or house
- Students in my accommodation block
- Students on my course
- Students at my university overall
- Well integrated
- Somewhat integrated
- Not integrated

Support networks domain

Thinking of the same setbacks, did you turn to anyone in order to help resolve it? Who did you turn to and who could you have turned to but didn't?

- University support staff
- Tutors
- Wardens or residential assistants
- Designated student mentors/buddies
- Staff I could talk to in my accommodation
- House/flat mates
- University counsellors
- Family
- Friends at university
- Friends from home (i.e. not at university)
- Would not be able to turn to
- Could turn to
- Could turn to and have turned to in the past

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Emily has more than 10 years' experience in teaching, student experience and learning & development roles, with particular expertise in student transitions and engagement. She Chairs the University Student Engagement & Transitions Research Group and is leading on a project, funded by a 2016 Jenkinson Award, entitled "Early Intervention, Transition & Engagement - Mapping the Student Journey". Emily holds a Bachelor of Laws undergraduate degree (LL.B Hons), a MRes in Medieval History, a PG Cert HE- Teaching and Learning, and a PhD in Medieval History. Emily is also a Senior Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (SFHEA), is a member of several professional bodies and is on the steering & research committees of UKAT, the UK Advising & Tutoring organisation.



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Jenny is Head of Student Services & Insight for Unite Students - the UK's leading manager and developer of student accommodation. She is responsible for spearheading Unite Students research into the impact and influence of student accommodation on resilience and is the senior lead for student welfare in the business. Prior to working for Unite Students, Jenny worked at senior level in the UK HE sector to widen participation in higher education and open up new pathways to university for marginalised groups. She also provided leadership in both the Aimhigher and the Lifelong Learning Networks programmes; consultancy to the HE Academy, the Equality Challenge Unit and Supporting Professionalism in Admission (SPA); and has written extensively on issues of widening participation, including peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, international conference papers and items in the media.



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