



Supporting Postgraduate Taught Student Wellbeing:
Building a Student-Led Community Through Valuing
the Student Voice

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Introduction

For many, the postgraduate taught (PGT) student journey feels like entering a “labyrinth” (White & Ingram, 2021). Transitioning from a well-supported undergraduate degree to a more complex PGT degree full of unknown pathways can be an incredibly daunting experience. PGT students must navigate an intricate set of academic, social, and relational challenges due to the unique, multifaceted identities that make up the student population. Finally, while many eventually reach the end of this maze and achieve their PGT degree, it often comes with a mental cost, with one in four master’s students experiencing “symptoms of anxiety and depression” throughout their studies (Bekkouche, 2024, p.3039). This essay aims to understand the factors behind this cost.

The ‘postgraduate taught’ title first appeared in the Universities Statistical Record in 1994, written as “Taught higher degrees” (Burgess et al., 1998, p. 155). Since then, there have been fundamental changes in postgraduate education (Burgess et al., 1998), ranging from developments in its structure, to significant increases in student population (Marshall et al., 2026). The PGT student population is an incredibly diverse cohort, with students from around the world (HESA, 2026), bringing with them a range of cultures and beliefs. Such diversity is often a selling point for many universities, as it demonstrates their inclusivity and range of academic inputs. However, universities must also consider that within this mixed population, PGT students often carry a unique set of responsibilities, such as parental care, caregiving, and employment (White & Ingram, 2023). Consequently, supporting these circumstances requires additional PGT-specific student support. However, the fluctuating numbers of university students over the last few years (HESA, 2026) intensifies the pressure on universities to ensure that wellbeing support keeps pace with the student population. If this balance is not maintained, greater numbers of PGT students could suffer from poor wellbeing, causing them to struggle to succeed at university. One challenge to maintaining this balance is the significant gap in the literature on the wellbeing of postgraduate students, with most studies focusing on undergraduate students (Casey et al., 2022). Without a sufficient theoretical foundation, universities cannot develop supportive measures that effectively address PGT-specific wellbeing challenges. This paper aims to fill this gap by providing student-led insights into PGT students' wellbeing through an analysis of the core themes that affect them.

To address this gap, this essay draws on a thematic literature review (see Appendix A) of existing research and findings from a PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop conducted as part of this study at the University of St Andrews. Beginning with an initial overview of the background of wellbeing, this essay then analyses the historical, geographical, and social factors that continue to affect PGT student wellbeing. Lastly, the paper offers a series of potential interventions in the form of student-led frameworks and recommendations for higher education institutions and policymakers before limitations and overall conclusions of the research are drawn. Ultimately, this essay argues that the wellbeing of PGT students continues to be overlooked due to insufficient recognition of the student voice. A holistic,

student-led investigatory approach to wellbeing is essential for developing a supportive master's community that values PGT students' experiences.

Literature Review of Previous PGT Student Wellbeing Research

Firstly, a literature review of existing research was conducted to identify the key gaps within PGT student wellbeing. These themes informed the questions asked during the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop that was conducted as part of this study. With only eight papers meeting the acceptance criteria for review, this emphasises the need for more PGT student wellbeing research, as few papers specifically addressed PGT student wellbeing. Many papers failed to differentiate between PGT and undergraduate (UG) students or between PGT and postgraduate research (PGR) students (Marshall et al., 2026). This differentiation is much needed because PGT students face unique circumstances compared with other degree programmes, including the PGT degree's limited one-year time frame. The results from the literature review were organised into a pie chart (see Figure 1).

Database: Google Scholar

Search terms: "Postgraduate taught student wellbeing" "PGT wellbeing" "wellbeing intervention postgraduate taught" "flourishing postgraduate taught"

Inclusion criteria: PGT student-specific papers

Exclusion criteria: non-PGT student-specific papers

Initial database search= 59,000 hits -> 13 hits (non-PGT student-specific results were then extracted) -> 8 hits

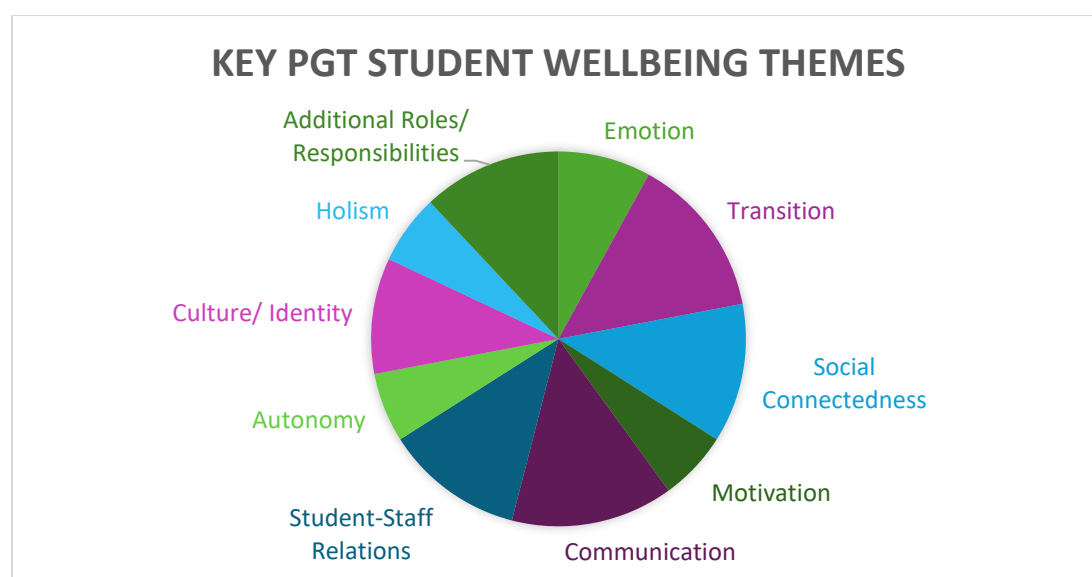


Figure 1: Pie chart detailing the key themes of PGT student wellbeing within existing literature.

PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop at The University of St Andrews

Methodology and Intervention

A qualitative workshop was conducted at The University of St Andrews to better understand PGT student wellbeing and develop student-led interventions. PGT students were invited via email to take part in the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop. A groupwork approach was taken, as previous research indicated that group interventions can support the development of social connectedness (Cipolletta et al., 2024), thereby supporting student wellbeing within this workshop. Two participants took part in the intervention workshop. The workshop was held in a classroom, and participants received refreshments as an incentive. The workshop lasted around two hours and began with an anonymous pre-intervention survey (See Appendix B) asking general questions about students' wellbeing experiences throughout their studies. After this, Professor Paula Miles gave a PowerPoint presentation discussing her previous findings regarding PGT student wellbeing. Finally, participants were encouraged to brainstorm ideas either on poster paper or verbally, in response to questions about what a supportive wellbeing intervention would look like (See Appendix C). After the session, participants completed an evaluation form (See Appendix D) and were provided with the researcher's email (Hannah Treagus) for any further queries. None of the students contacted her. After analysing their answers, the students' thoughts were combined into a series of recommendations and supportive outputs such as a leaflet (See Appendix E).

When designing the pre-intervention survey, resources from Imperial College London and The BMJ were used to increase the accessibility and reliability of the survey within the design and structure of the questionnaire (Boynton & Greenhalgh, 2004; Imperial College London, n.d.).

Results

The results were categorised using the six-step thematic analysis framework developed by Clarke et al. (2019). Hannah had no previous experience with PGT students, so bias was not a concern within the analysis.

The main themes that emerged within the workshop were a desire for self-development resources to prevent feelings of loneliness and isolation, a need for greater connectedness within the PGT student cohort, and a need for more PGT-targeted socialisation events. Furthermore, students wanted a greater awareness of the wellbeing resources that were available to them, continued PGT Thursday socials over the summer, and more communication and support from academic staff.

These results led to the development of a series of interventions and recommendations.

Conclusion

With over 1,000 postgraduate students emailed about the workshop, 6 signing up and only 2 attending, this suggests we need to investigate further how we can encourage greater PGT student engagement and socialisation, to support students' development of community and belonging. Furthermore, while drawing conclusions from only 2 participants raises concerns about the generalisability of the results across a wider PGT population, the findings aligned with the results from the literature review, providing the confidence needed to develop effective interventions and recommendations.

Defining and Measuring PGT Student Wellbeing

One of the first challenges in investigating PGT student wellbeing is the lack of agreement on the definition and measurement of wellbeing, with this debate originating back to the time of the Greeks (Cooke et al., 2016). One definition suggested by Keyes (2002) was the idea of 'flourishing'. Keyes had the idea that you either flourished when you "had mental health" or languished "in the absence of mental health" (Keyes, 2002, p.207). However, the term 'mental health' continues to be a phrase of debate. This conflict regards its ability to fully encompass the complete range of non-emotional factors that impact the wellbeing of a student, such as environmental factors (Gautam et al., 2024). Alternative contributions to understanding wellbeing notably include Seligman's PERMA acronym of "positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment" (Huppert & So, 2013, p.839), which describes the factors that make up wellbeing. This model provides a more inclusive approach by accounting for the external social factors that can affect a student's wellbeing. Finally, in more recent literature, many now view wellbeing through the categorisations of "hedonic", "eudaimonic", "quality of life", and "wellness" measures (Cooke et al., 2016, pp. 732-733). While this range of definitions and categorisations continues to be debated, many scholars agree on the multifaceted nature of wellbeing (Huppert & So, 2013). Thus, the implications of this debate suggest that there is no single definition of wellbeing. Instead, a more appropriate solution is to tailor the definition to the object of classification, such as the wellbeing of PGT students. Just as we cannot treat postgraduate students with a "one-size fits-all approach" (White & Ingram, 2023, p.1), nor can we do the same for the definition of wellbeing. To align with the various responsibilities PGT students have, we need to develop a flexible wellbeing framework tailored to each student's identity. Furthermore, continuing the debate between academics regarding the categorisation of wellbeing, fosters healthy cross-checking between scholars. This ensures that the most current and accurate theoretical approaches are being published and used in practice, thus allowing scholars to reliably advise wellness services on the most relevant tools to support students' wellbeing (Zhang et al., 2024).

In terms of measuring wellbeing, there have been a multitude of scales produced, each with their own advantages and flaws. While this broad range allows researchers to tailor each measure used to the population being investigated (e.g. Warr's scale investigating "job-specific" wellbeing (Laguna et al., 2016, p. 118)), if researchers begin to investigate

wellbeing too narrowly, they may fail to assess the diverse range of factors that can affect wellbeing (Zhang et al., 2024). However, on the opposite end, researchers may also mistakenly use overly vague concepts within their assessment, which could prevent a reliable understanding of PGT student wellbeing from being developed. For example, the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey is a commonly used assessment administered by universities and completed by PGT students. Within the survey, student satisfaction is frequently assessed (Quinn, 2025). The issue with the measure of “satisfaction” is that the term is highly subjective (Costa-Pereira, 2026) as students may have experienced varying levels of satisfaction throughout their degree, depending on when they took the survey. For example, a student might rate their degree satisfaction highly when feeling the relief of submitting their dissertation. However, their satisfaction at the end of their degree may not reflect the mental struggles they faced throughout their studies (Costa-Pereira, 2026). Therefore, although student satisfaction is often displayed on university websites as an appeal to prospective students, this measure may fail to truly capture students lived experiences. In response to the difficulties faced when identifying appropriate measures of wellbeing, this paper investigated two alternative measures of wellbeing that support the development of a holistic understanding of PGT students. Unlike measures of student satisfaction, the following scales were selected because they capture the multidimensionality of wellbeing, a key variable for assessing the multifaceted nature of PGT student wellbeing.

Firstly, WEMWBS is a “14 item scale” focused on identifying “positive mental well-being” (Taggart et al., 2013, p. 1) and has recently been developed and widely used to measure student wellbeing (Perera et al., 2025). By focusing specifically on the unique challenges faced by students, the scale allows us to make generalisable conclusions about wellbeing across different student populations. However, the scale also has its flaws due to differing cultural interpretations within some of the questions asked, such as the phrase “interested in other people”. Some respondents from China and Pakistan interpreted this as a romantic question rather than a question about sociality (Taggart et al., 2013, p. 7). Therefore, it raises concerns about the accessibility of this scale among international PGT students, as varying cultural interpretations may reduce the overall validity of the results.

Secondly, the ICOPPE scale is an alternative measure of wellbeing that addresses the gaps left by WEMWBS. This scale is multidimensional in nature and covers the wellbeing dimensions of “Interpersonal, Community, Occupational, Physical, Psychological, and Economic” (Prilleltensky et al., 2015, p.201), which make up the ICOPPE acronym. The wide range of wellbeing fields covered by the “21 item” scale (Prilleltensky et al., 2015, p.203) allows us to understand the student from a holistic perspective. The scale achieves this by developing an overall understanding of wellbeing from several sets of questions, each assessing an area of the ICOPPE acronym, such as the economic challenges that PGT students may face. Furthermore, in contrast to the WEMWBS scale, the ICOPPE scale has demonstrated its applicability to international students through cross-cultural success in Hispanic populations (Myers et al., 2016). These findings demonstrate that the ICOPPE scale is generalisable across several cultures, a key factor in ensuring that wellbeing scales are clearly accessible and representative of diverse student populations.

The History of PGT Student Wellbeing

To further understand student wellbeing, we need to look back to the theory of human evolution to grasp the importance of student connection. Humans are naturally pack animals (Costa-Pereira, 2026) and thus the need for socialisation and belonging forms an innate part of student wellbeing. The limited one-year duration of a PGT degree disrupts this natural ability to form a long-term pack, as evidenced by the low ranking of “community” in the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (Quinn, 2025, p. 4). Therefore, universities must focus on implementing additional measures to support the social development of PGT students early on. Thus, while many universities continue to focus on achieving optimal academic outcomes for their students, they neglect the social foundations on which those outcomes rest. To understand why current PGT students have such poor wellbeing rates (Miles, 2024), we need to investigate the foundations of the PGT degree. This will allow us to understand the impact that structural policies within higher education have had on student wellbeing.

Through a global comparison of postgraduate degree structures, we can investigate how other countries have successfully developed measures to support the wellbeing of postgraduate students. This comparison will allow us to develop a series of structural PGT degree recommendations, aimed at enhancing the wellbeing of students within the UK. Huppert & So (2013, p. 848) compared flourishing rates among citizens across 22 European countries and found that Denmark had the highest flourishing rate, at 40.6%, compared to the UK's at around 20%. Given the significant differences in wellbeing rates between the two countries, we can investigate whether these rates are similarly reflected within each country's higher education system. Similar to the UK, Denmark participated in the Bologna Process, which was signed in 1999 by “European ministers” to align higher education across Europe (Ulriksen, 2021, p. 135). Sin (2012) found that in Denmark, one of the biggest structural changes was the adoption of the Bologna-recommended 3+2 structure, a 3-year bachelor's degree followed by a 2-year master's degree. The study found that this was a welcome change for students, in contrast to the previously offered 5-year degrees many had taken on. This development provided students with the mobility to change location or programme of study in between degrees. This was a much-needed structural change, as even with its notably high wellbeing rates overall, Denmark still received mixed feedback from students regarding its higher education structure and in ratings of overall student wellbeing (Ozer & Schwartz, 2019). However, in comparison, within the UK, the higher education system diverged from the Bologna-recommended structure and maintained its one-year master's degree. This decision has been scrutinised, with many questioning the ability of UK master's degrees to cover an appropriate amount of content compared with alternative two-year master's programmes offered by many universities across Europe (Kehm & Teichler, 2006). Therefore, as many UK postgraduate students come from international backgrounds (HESA, 2026), this raises questions about the likelihood of their acceptance into international post-university opportunities, given the perceived recognition of a UK master's degree. Furthermore, another significant structural difference in education between the UK and Denmark is the assessment style. The UK focuses on more traditional written exams, whereas Denmark often uses an

oral examination approach, in which students present to an examiner (AU Admins Template, 2026). To practice speaking in front of others during their oral exam, students may practice with peers, fostering a more social form of revision and supporting their sense of belonging. Finally, another significant structural difference between the two countries is the financial cost of a postgraduate degree. In terms of fees, “EU and EEA & Switzerland” citizens get free access to master’s degrees in Denmark (European Commission, 2026), something not offered as standard practice in the UK (UCAS, 2025). This significant difference in financial accessibility between the two countries clearly reflects the different economic structures of higher education in Denmark and the UK. This evidence suggests that financial stress may be a much greater stressor on student wellbeing in the UK than in Denmark, as students receive the same qualification at a much higher cost.

For students in the UK who face financial struggles, affording to stay and achieve their degree can put significant strain on their wellbeing. Over one in five PGT students report that the cost of living has negatively affected their education (Quinn, 2025, p.35), and this struggle has been most pronounced among Nigerian students (Quinn, 2025, p.31). Therefore, to adequately support PGT students in their studies, additional financial support must be provided. Universities often benefit significantly from the economic profits generated particularly by international students, who often face greater fees (Choudaha, 2017). Therefore, in response to this additional financial pressure on international students, universities should provide more scholarships to students from countries most vulnerable to financial challenges. Furthermore, within universities, they should continue to develop financial support initiatives, such as the Campus Larder at The University of St Andrews, where students can access basic household essentials free of charge (University of St Andrews Students’ Association, 2026).

For many students, financial stress is often accompanied by the need for employment to supplement their living costs. However, employment can strain students’ ability to maintain work-life balance and keep up with their studies. Geertshuis & Liu (2025) found that students who work over 20 hours per week, perform poorer academically because they are unable to set boundaries between their different roles. If they fall behind in one role, this can negatively impact their ability to maintain their other roles. This mental strain can cause a buildup of pressure, resulting in mental overload and drastically decreasing students' wellbeing. However, one way that employers can assist working students, is by supporting the development of their academic skills within their job (Creed et al., 2015). Employers and students can work together to identify skills that cross over between work and study, such as encouraging an English student to write a critical review of a novel whilst working in a bookshop. This encourages the development of fluid boundaries between work and study, lessening the burden on students’ wellbeing.

Alongside adjustments in their academic and working lives, some international PGT students face significant challenges in adapting to new cultural norms that may, in turn, impact their wellbeing. For example, in some cultures it is considered rude to express your opinion to a lecturer during a class (Li & Shen, 2025). If these cultural differences are not acknowledged by lecturers and supported within the classroom, it can lead to feelings of social isolation. To

support students' cultural transition, they need to be able to connect not only with other PGT students but also with teaching staff, to gain a greater understanding of cultural norms and how to adapt to them. International students could be encouraged to attend language cafés, such as those offered at The University of St Andrews. This allows students to meet fellow nationals and/or improve their ability to speak the language at their place of study. Students could also be socially prepared, through specific cultural guidance booklets provided to them on arrival. It is important to provide holistic cultural support to incoming international PGT students across their academic and social lives, to prevent feelings of neglect and isolation.

Alongside cultural identity, many other factors make up the identity of a PGT student that, if ignored, can significantly decrease students' wellbeing and sense of belonging. For example, across PGT student research, Marshal et al. (2026) found that students who were part of an ethnic minority group, had faced discrimination from their own academic school. With this harmful behaviour originating within universities themselves, it emphasises the need to conduct broader institutional investigations into existing university policies and support measures to prevent institutions from discriminating against minority groups.

Whilst the evidence above emphasises the significant impact that external circumstances can have on students, it is also important to understand how students' internal thoughts and beliefs can also impact their wellbeing.

Firstly, emotions lay at the core of wellbeing (White & Ingram, 2021), as they directly influence how students feel and learn to interact with life at university. While positive emotions can act as a motivator and drive students to succeed in their work, negative emotions can hinder a student's potential by causing them to become socially isolated and less engaged academically (Geertshuis & Liu, 2025; White & Ingram, 2023). Students' emotions are driven by appraisals, which dictate how a situation is interpreted (White & Ingram, 2023). For example, if the body evaluates an event as positive, then the resulting emotion will also be positive. In practice, if a PGT student receives constructive criticism from a tutor but interprets the feedback negatively, this could cause negative emotions of self-doubt to arise. Therefore, emphasising the importance of establishing clear communication between students and academic staff is essential. PGT students should not only be taught about the academic skills needed to succeed, but also about the emotional resilience skills needed to help them adapt to challenges at university. The development of emotional resilience skills can also prevent students from following the existing norms of a neglected work-life balance, reported amongst PGT students during the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop. However, many students fail to seek support because they believe that, as PGT students, they should not require as much assistance from support services given their age and experience (Costa-Pereira, 2026). Therefore, if PGT student wellbeing was widely acknowledged and accepted by students, it could cause significant pressure on student support services.

While emotions can be a valuable resource for encouraging drive and motivation, when students are particularly incentivised by goals, they can become overly dependent on positive emotions (such as drastic increases/decreases in self-esteem depending on their grade on a

paper) to sustain their drive (White & Ingram, 2023). Motivation is thus intrinsically linked to wellbeing, with a two-way relationship in which positive emotions lead to a greater sense of wellbeing and negative emotions lead to a poorer sense of wellbeing. Motivation can also be categorised into intrinsic (self-motivated) and extrinsic (external) factors (Reiss, 2012). These two types of motivation can have varied implications for wellbeing, with perfectionism being a prime example of this. Perfectionism can be produced as a result of both internal desires through intrinsic motivation (Mills & Blankstein, 2000) and by external motivation, through feelings of pressure, either from comparison to other people's successes, or from parental pressure, ultimately resulting in reduced motivation (Mills & Blankstein, 2000). To prevent PGT students from developing an overly perfectionist mindset, educators should review academic policies that may contribute to such a mentality. It is also important to develop early interventions such as preventing prize-giving for the most academically successful students in early education, as encouraging excessive competition from a young age may lead to burnout by the time that students reach postgraduate studies. This is supported by Mueller and Dweck (1998) who discussed the significant impact that academic praise can have on children's standards of success and self-worth in the future.

Frameworks for PGT Student Wellbeing Support

Based on the research conducted in this paper, the following frameworks could be incorporated into university policies to better understand and support PGT student wellbeing. These frameworks have been selected for their ability to represent the PGT student experience holistically from a student-led perspective.

Firstly, one way that we can ensure effective translation between PGT student wellbeing theory and practice is by encouraging educators to adopt a biopsychosocial approach in their work with students. This approach incorporates the "biological, psychological and social factors" of an individual's health (Ho et al., 2026, p.5) and can be applied to develop a holistic understanding of students' wellbeing beyond their academic profile, whilst also taking into account their unique individual identity.

Secondly, another framework that can assist in developing a more holistic approach to PGT student wellbeing is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. This is a frequently used framework that provides a tiered approach to understanding PGT student wellbeing. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a 5-stage pyramid, with each level describing the needs individuals must have met in order to move up to the next stage. The tiers move from the essential foundation of physiological needs to the end goal of self-actualisation (see Figure 2, "Original Model"). However, one challenge with this framework is that its one-size-fits-all design is unsuitable for PGT students who lead unique lifestyles with additional roles and responsibilities. In response, the "Adapted Model" in Figure 2 modified from Wu (2012), proposes an alternative tier system originally designed for college students, that can be used to reflect the hierarchy of PGT students' needs.

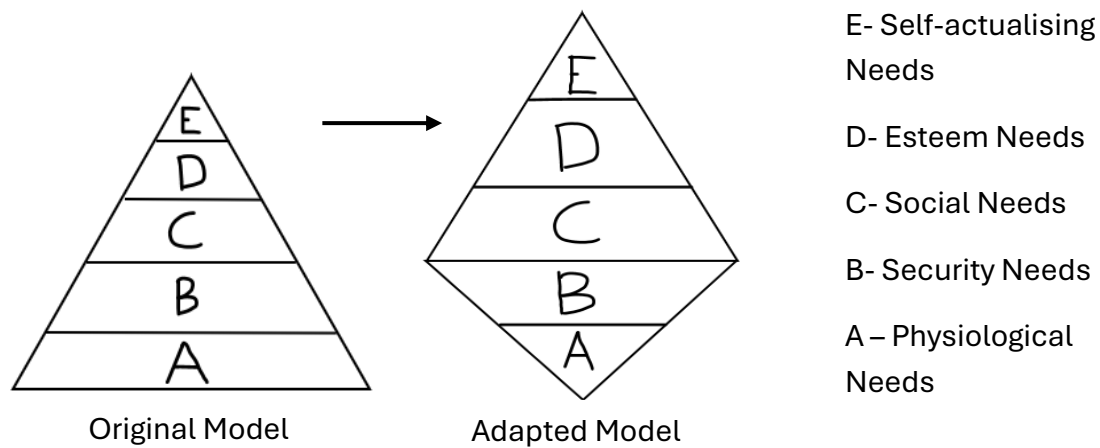


Figure 2: The alteration of the original model of the hierarchy of needs (Kenrick et al., 2010) to an adapted model for PGT students from Wu (2012, p.1336).

PGT students require an adapted hierarchy, as they are at a unique stage of development in which their social needs (tier C) play a fundamental role in their wellbeing. Within the adapted model, whilst students' physiological and security needs remain at the bottom of the diagram as foundational aspects of wellbeing, the social needs tier is significantly larger than in the original model. This reflects that, in a new environment, PGT students must build entirely new connections to support their wellbeing. Without the fulfilment of their social needs, students may struggle to progress onto higher stages of the hierarchy of needs. While universities often spend significant funds on supporting students' physiological needs, such as through accommodation support (shelter), they may neglect a greater need for social support (Brookman, 2026). To ensure that students can perform well academically, universities need to build them up from the bottom of the hierarchy so they can spend more time focusing on academic matters.

Another supportive framework that universities could embed into their PGT student wellbeing policies is the person-centred practice model. This framework is an individualised approach to care that emphasises putting people and their personal needs first (Attard et al., 2025). In practice, this holistic approach would involve developing a student-led action plan outlining the measures that individuals, families, and universities could implement to support each PGT student during their transition and time at university (Gray & Woods, 2022). This approach has been successfully implemented in schools, resulting in reduced anxiety among students, a more developed sense of school community, and greater student empowerment, by providing students with the ability to lead conversations (Gray & Woods, 2022). This model could also particularly support students who may need additional support with the transition to a postgraduate degree, such as neurodivergent individuals or those experiencing significant cultural changes. Co-producing scaffolding for and with students also helps to reduce the isolation and pressurised autonomy that many postgraduate students reportedly experienced, discussed in the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop.

PGT Student Wellbeing Recommendations

Based on the findings of my work, the following targeted recommendations are proposed to address the current gaps in literature and practice regarding PGT student-specific support. Below I present a list of broader wellbeing recommendations that can also be found in Appendix F. However, a list of recommendations specifically tailored for the University of St Andrews was also presented to the Provost of St Leonards College and can be found in Appendix G.

Degree restructuring

After researching the differences between Danish and British postgraduate master's education, it may be time to investigate the restructuring of the UK master's degree. By converting to a 2-year model and providing more financial aid/ lowering tuition fees, this may improve overall student wellbeing and reduce the strain on wellbeing services.

Teaching Style

Dr Ana Costa-Pereira (2026) highlighted the importance of how lectures are run in the UK. If students walk into a classroom and are faced with a lecturer standing and talking at them, it significantly reduces their motivation to learn and engage. Developing a two-way conversation during class time would be much more effective. For example, encouraging students to read the lecture notes before class and then running a group problem-solving activity during class would increase students' engagement with one another and with the lecturer. This technique is known as the flipped classroom approach (Gopalan et al., 2022)

Assessment Style

Supporting efforts to increase the number of assessments that focus on group-work-led assignments could allow students to fulfil both their social and academic needs. These could include group presentations, posters and reports.

Supervisor Training

During my PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop, students reported receiving inconsistent support from their supervisors. Therefore, ensuring that supervisors receive training or an information sheet at the start of the academic year that includes common questions that PGT students may have, could prevent miscommunication or challenges later in the year. Students and supervisors must be aware of and agree on a defined set of expectations to ensure they work together effectively.

Space

Universities should encourage students to explore a diverse range of study locations, both on and off campus, by providing information leaflets or maps that help them find the most effective study location for themselves. The ability to study in varied locations provides students with the flexibility to tailor their study environment to their personal needs for

comfort and accessibility (Beckers et al., 2015). Having adjustable study spaces supports students' studies by allowing them to feel safe enough in their study space to take "psychological risks" (Cox, 2011, p. 199) that help them challenge themselves and develop academically. Furthermore, universities must ensure students have a wide range of adaptable study spaces to support disabled PGT students, who are statistically less likely to feel part of a community (Quinn, 2025, p. 4). Providing a wider range of environments to meet their needs could help students study in more social settings. However, contrary to this idea, alternative research suggests that students are, in fact, becoming more socially restricted in their study locations (Beckers et al., 2016). This is primarily due to the increased "virtualization" of university (Cox, 2011, p.204). With many lecturer-student interactions now online, this prohibits the formation of social connections between students, as fostered in traditional classroom-based environments where students sit next to one another alongside lecturers. Results from the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop conducted as part of this study found that once students began a routine of studying at home, many maintained this structure for the rest of the year. While this routine works effectively for some, it can lead students to neglect the importance of socialisation. Therefore, for PGT students on programmes being offered in-person, they should be provided with both compulsory on-campus classes alongside ample time to study in a location of their choice.

The PGT Student Wellbeing Guide

Alongside my list of recommendations, I developed an output in the form of a leaflet for use by PGT students. A leaflet form was chosen due to Coneyworth et al.'s (2019, p.267) study indicating that PGT students favoured "posters" as a method of correspondence.

The leaflet was created in response to views shared in the PGT Student Wellbeing Workshop, of a lack of understanding of the resources available to PGT students, particularly those tailored specifically for them. The leaflet contains wellbeing-related resources, obtained from the University of St Andrews and the University of St Andrews Students Association.

Implications

The implications of this research are, firstly, to provide The University of St Andrews with a greater understanding of PGT student wellbeing and to provide the University with a series of student-led recommendations that they could implement to help improve the wellbeing of PGT students.

On a broader scale, this research supports the advocacy for an increased recognition and awareness of the neglected voice of PGT students in existing literature. It reinforces the need for action across universities in the UK.

This research is relevant to policymakers, researchers, academics and educators across the UK, as I have provided nationally applicable recommendations to improve the quality of PGT education. Furthermore, the advocacy in this paper for developing wellbeing interventions created for students, by students, is applicable across all aspects and levels of education to

ensure that interventions provide more effective wellbeing support. To implement this, it is vital to investigate the extent of student voice inclusion in existing education policies.

Limitations

If this study had been conducted over a longer research period, I would have liked to have worked with a larger cohort of PGT students, as only a limited number participated in the workshop. However, the low attendance could indicate poor wellbeing amongst PGT students, as they did not attend even with the benefits of socialisation and refreshments. Furthermore, this result also reinforces the numerous factors affecting PGT students' wellbeing discussed throughout this essay that could prevent them from attending.

The study used a cross-sectional design and volunteer sampling because of the limited time frame. If more time had been available, I would have expanded the study to include more students across different stages of their PGT degree to gather a more diverse understanding of the most effective PGT student wellbeing interventions.

Conclusion

With an increasing cost of living crisis and an increasingly divided world, the challenges for PGT students to achieve a degree and sustain their wellbeing have never been greater. We must continue to hold universities to account against the goals of the United Nations to increase accessibility and promote equal access to higher education (United Nations, n.d.). In particular, we must ensure that universities put students' wellbeing above the financial gain they obtain from them. Therefore, a full-scale educational evaluation of PGT wellbeing must be taken across all levels of education to break this ongoing annual cycle of poor wellbeing. To prevent this, universities need to develop more intentional student-led measures to support students' wellbeing and foster a sense of belonging. A holistic approach, including supportive wellbeing measures focused on PGT students' lives both within and outside their studies, must be taken to protect PGT students' multifaceted identities.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Literature Review of Existing PGT Student Wellbeing Research

Study	Sample	Method	Themes
(White & Ingram, 2021)	N/A	Investigating wellbeing through an ‘integrated framework’ (p.1454)	Labyrinth- intra and interpersonal processes Emotion Transition Goals Diversity (ethnoculturally) Feedback Social connectedness Culture Academic University Services Daily Life Many lives and roles Work-life-study balance Biopsychosocial Motivation Communication Student-staff connections
(Bamber et al., 2017)	204 master’s students in two schools at a university	Questionnaire (quantitative) assessing the confidence of participants within different elements of a master’s degree using Masterness: ‘Autonomy, Professionalism, Complexity, Depth, Abstraction. Unpredictability, Research (pp.6-10)	Unclear communication Transition- including UG to PG Lack of research Maslow Autonomy Culture Complex roles, group differences - Subject/demographic - Professional/ societal Widening access Communication Student-staff connections
(Li & Shen, 2025)	12 Chinese university students “Beyond academic support, there is a crucial need for initiatives that facilitate cultural	Case study at a Russell Group university: 1:1 interviews and focus groups, then analysed with thematic analysis	International students Gap in PGT research Culture Social connectedness Transition Employment 1 year intense- condensed nature Motivation Holistic Academic disengagement

	and social integration” “Universities could implement mentorship programmes that pair international students with domestic students or with fellow international students from different countries.”		Thematic analysis: ‘Motivation’, ‘Lecturer Support in Academic Learning’, ‘Being Silent in Class’ Communication Student-staff connections
(White & Ingram, 2020)	40 PGT students at a Scottish University	Mixed methods quantitative survey, qualitative focus group interviews, thematic analysis	Uniquely ‘Complex journey’ ‘Multiplicity of interconnected factors’ Biopsychosocial Motivation Culture and identity Emotion Connectedness Coping appraisal- challenge vs threat Transition Autonomy Communication Feedback Satisfaction= bad Holistic Student-staff connections
(White & Ingram, 2023)	111 PGT students at a School of Education and Social Work at a Scottish University.	Mixed methods survey: Likert scale and free text questions, focus group	Holism Emotion-centric appraisal Social connectedness Threat Biopsychosocial Student-staff connections Intra and interpersonal processes Goal-oriented interests Cognitive appraisals Sociocultural histories of students
(Marshall et al., 2026)	21 participants at 1 Scottish university	“Four focus groups and two interviews” “Thematic analysis” (p.1)	Transition Social connectedness Academic supervisor Culture- international students Student services Communication Academic pressure

		Qualitative case study within a mixed-methods longitudinal study	Work-life imbalance EDI/culture Staff-student relations Flexibility Routine Identity- LGBTQ, BAME, gender, geographic region, demographic groups etc. part-time vs full time Diverse group Intersecting factors affecting wellbeing “Factors that help university support and interventions socialising with others routine and activity mode of teaching” (p.1) “Factors that hindered wellbeing were university communication and support, social and physical isolation, mode of teaching, increased academic pressures, and factors related to equality, diversity and inclusion.” (p.1)
(Coneyworth et al., 2019)	70 PGT students at the School of Biosciences in a UK university	Completed a PGT student experience survey (gathering both qualitative and quantitative data) and then took part in a postgraduate taught support programme alongside providing verbal and survey-led feedback from this initiative (gathering both qualitative and quantitative data)	Prior experiences Cultural norms Part-time work/caring Financial struggles Accommodation Teacher- students’ relations Transitions Academic contact time Assessment style Social interactions Autonomy Communication
(Bownes et al., 2017)	108 took part in the surveys, 2 took part in interviews, and 8	Surveys, interviews and a workshop (qualitative and	Transition UG focus on universities= neglected PG’s Finances

	took part in a workshop	quantitative data were gathered)	Preparation for PG-expectations Communication Student-staff relations Lack of group work Interventions Assessment Style Degree choice uncertainty Emotion Social connectedness
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Appendix B: Pre-Intervention Survey Questions

What are some things that increase your sense of well-being?

Are there any things that the University does to increase or aid your wellbeing?

Are there things that you do independently that increase your well-being?

Are there things that you think the University could incorporate to increase your well-being?

What are some things that decrease your sense of well-being?

Are there any things that the University does to decrease your sense of well-being?

Are there things separate to the University that decrease your sense of well-being?

How has your living situation affected your well-being during your PGT course?

From our survey, it shows that PGT students feel they identify more with their academic School than they do with the University as a whole, or with the wider St Andrews community. Do you feel this is true? Not true? Why? Why not?

How does this affect your sense of well-being?

What is your biggest challenge at St Andrews?

In our questionnaire, many students have reported that their biggest challenge at St Andrews is trying to juggle everything. For example, keeping up with their studies whilst also making friends, and having financial worries. How much do you agree/disagree with this?

Do you feel this is particularly pertinent in PGT studies rather than Undergraduate studies?

What has helped you the most at St Andrews?

In our questionnaire, many have attributed various relationships (family, friends, significant others, class mates, University staff) as helping their well-being at St Andrews. How much do you agree/disagree with this?

Do you feel there is anything different about the things that help your University wellbeing in your PGT studies as opposed to your Undergraduate studies?

Appendix C: PGT Student Wellbeing Intervention Questions

The questions asked within the intervention were as follows:

- What does a supportive wellbeing intervention look like to you?
- What areas would it cover? (student services, careers support, wellbeing advice such as...?)
- What would it look like? (containing pictures/videos or more textual style, how long should it be?)
- Who would you like to hear from? (previous PGT students, lecturers, student services)
- Any additional thoughts

Appendix D: PGT Student Wellbeing Intervention Evaluation Form

Evaluation Form

- 1) Did you find the session valuable? Why/why not?

- 2) Did you feel like you learnt something new today?

- 3) Do you feel that you've been able to contribute to the future of PGT students by contributing to this workshop?

- 4) Which part of the workshop did you find most useful?

- 5) What would could be improved for next time?

Appendix E: Postgraduate Taught Student Wellbeing Guide Leaflet

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Security and response: +44 (0)1334 46 8999
Nightline: 01334 46 2266 8pm-7am, seven days a week during term time
Student Advocacy and Advice:
unionadvocacy@st-andrews.ac.uk/
01334 462700

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/support/>

Financial Support- fees@st-andrews.ac.uk
<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/fees/financial-assistance/>

Postgraduate Loans- fees@st-andrews.ac.uk
<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/study/postgraduate/fees/loans/>

<https://thewellbeingthesis.org.uk/>

WELLBEING OFFICERS

Each School has a wellbeing officer who is able to help signpost you to available resources, as well as ensuring you are aware of what support and adjustments may be possible. They can also work with other staff in the School if needed. You can contact your school for more information.

PG THURSDAY'S

A weekly PG Social - a relaxed and friendly get-together for postgraduate students. It's a great chance to unwind, meet new people, and catch up with friends over casual conversation, games, or refreshments. Everyone is welcome, so drop by, bring a friend, and enjoy a laid-back evening!

<https://www.yourunion.net/about/news/article/7090/PG-Thursdays/>

PG CAFE

PG Café is an informal gathering for all St Andrews postgraduate students (taught and research), organised by St Leonard's College. It normally takes place monthly, usually in Old Burgh School.

<https://stleonardscollege.st-andrews.ac.uk/community-and-events/pg-cafe/>



University of
St Andrews

POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENT WELLBEING GUIDE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ST ANDREWS

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the University of St Andrews Wellbeing Leaflet.

As a Postgraduate Taught (PGT) student, we recognise that you are part of a unique student cohort, where each one of you brings a unique set of identities and responsibilities, requiring recognition and support. This is where this leaflet can help.

This leaflet lists several PGT student support options that are available for you at The University of St Andrews, to help you make the most of your time at university.

No two PGT student journeys are the same; therefore, the support offered by St Andrews can be tailored throughout your time here to meet these needs.

CAREERS SERVICE

The Careers Centre has dedicated staff and has extensive resources and offerings specifically for postgraduate students.

The Careers Centre can help with many aspects of your career journey, including:

- exploring your career options and what makes you curious
- providing personalised advice
- finding jobs and work experience opportunities
- preparing for interviews and assessment centres
- supporting you to make applications
- providing opportunities for you to improve your skills.
- PG internship scheme

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/careers/>

CHAPLAINCY

The Chaplaincy offers support and guidance to all students and staff regardless of their faith or philosophy of life. The University has two chapels, St Salvator's Chapel and St Leonard's Chapel. These chapels are the central points for most University services of worship. Services in the University chapels are organised by the Chaplaincy team, headed up by the Chaplain to the University, the Rev Dr Donald MacEwan.

<https://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/chaplaincy/>

STUDENT SERVICES

Every postgraduate journey is different. At Student Services, Postgraduate Wellbeing Advisers provide bespoke, one-to-one support tailored to your individual circumstances to help navigate any academic, personal, or other wellbeing challenges throughout your time at St Andrews.

Where needed, advisers can signpost and refer students to appropriate University resources and external support services, helping you access specialist support tailored to your needs during the time of your study. Student Services also offer groups and workshops throughout the year on topics such as Imposter Syndrome and other aspects of postgraduate wellbeing.

<https://www.standrews.ac.uk/about/professional-services/student-services/>

WRITING RETREAT

These provide protected time to work on academic writing alongside a community of peers, with encouragement and support from the Learning and Writing Centre team. These retreats include a Thesis Writing Retreat (PGRs) and a Dissertation Writing Retreat (PGTs).

<https://learning-writing-centre.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/writing-retreats/>

PGT AND PGR PRESIDENT

PG Reps are there to represent your student voice. They have the power to advocate on curriculum, assessment, progression, achievement, guidance, support, teaching, learning resources, among other elements of the learning or research experience.

<https://www.yourunion.net/representation/networks/education/class-reps/>

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<https://www.yourunion.net/representation/networks/education/class-reps/>

PGT Student Wellbeing Recommendations

Wider Focus

Financial Support

PGT fees reaching the cost of a Ford Puma
Work-life balance alongside employment

Teaching and Assessment Style

Collaborative teaching contact time, student engagement
Group presentations, posters, reports

Degree Restructuring

Comparison to Denmark
2 years vs 1 year
Oral vs written assessment
EU, EEA, Swiss citizens get free access vs no free access

Wellbeing Frameworks

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs
Person-Centred Practice

Advisor Training

Ensure consistent support across supervisors
Timely feedback and pre-defined expectations discussed by students and their advisors

Lecturer Communication

Rules for the timeframe between assignment feedback and the next assessment submission

Hannah Treagus (hat2@st-andrews.ac.uk) and Professor Paula Miles

PGT Student Wellbeing Recommendations

The University of St Andrews Focused

Alternative academics

Evening seminars
Auditing modules

Targeted Correspondence

PGT-specific emails
Specific office hours for student services/careers services, etc.
2 separate writing retreats
STEM and Humanities

PG Representation

PG representation within the University Court
Postgraduate President- full time staff member

Freshers Week

Normalising social connection
PG plant sale
Meet the PG President pub/cafe crawl

PGT events

Greater use of the Old Burgh School
Information leaflet
Accommodation-specific events
Expression boards
Dog walking

PG dates for diary

Students receive dates for their diaries, including PG Thursdays, evening seminars, etc.

Hannah Treagus (hat2@st-andrews.ac.uk) and Professor Paula Miles