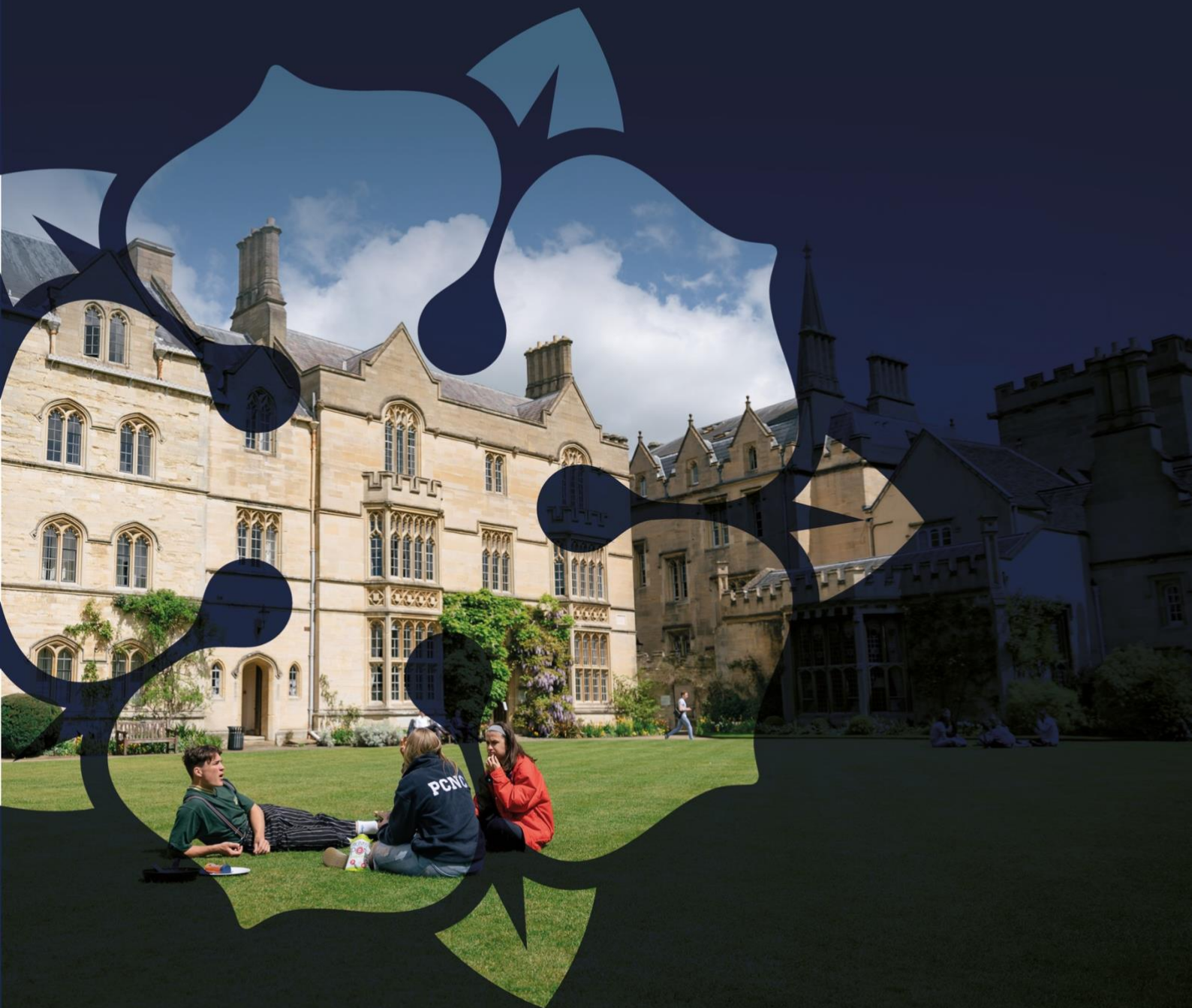


# Welfare and Wellbeing in Pembroke College



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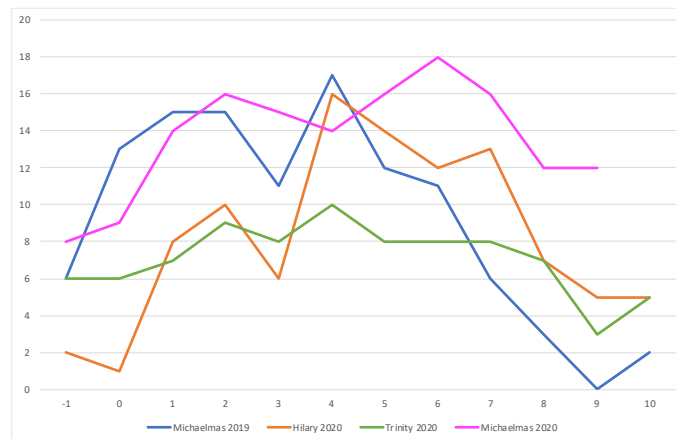
I have been Pembroke College's *Welfare and Wellbeing Coordinator* since September 2019. It has been exciting to develop the role and to shape the direction of Welfare and Wellbeing provision within College. At the outset, the role was 15 hours per week during Weeks 0-9 of term. In 2020, Governing Body approved an increase to 20 hours per week during Weeks 0-9, with increased hours effective from Michaelmas 2020.

As a result of the Coronavirus Pandemic, the nature of welfare and wellbeing support has shifted. In my time in the role, I have experienced very different terms and have adapted the type of support to the changing climate:

- Michaelmas 2019/Hilary 2020: Regular College term. All students living in Oxford. Welfare meetings in-person. Wellbeing events in-person including twice weekly walks in Christ Church Meadows, a morning running group, and a Japanese Tea Ceremony.
- Trinity 2020: Remote Term. Most students living at home. All teaching online. Welfare meetings over telephone and Teams. Virtual wellbeing events including weekly virtual coffee breaks and a virtual Sleep and Insomnia Workshop (led by Dr Ruth Collings from the University Counselling Service).
- Michaelmas 2020: Students were living in College, lectures were all online, some tutorials were in person. I provided online Welfare and Wellbeing support. With regards to Welfare, meetings were over Teams as were daily virtual coffee breaks for those in isolation. With regards to Wellbeing, virtual events included an Imposter Syndrome Workshop and an Anxiety Workshop (both led by Dr Tim Knowlson from the University Counselling Service), weekly virtual coffee breaks, and weekly zoom yoga (led by Dr Daria Ricchi). I also offered, for those in College, virtual tea breaks in the weeks around Christmas (including on Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve).
- Hilary 2021: Remote Term. Most students living at home. All teaching online. Welfare meetings over Teams. Virtual Wellbeing events including a Writing Breakfast (led by Dr Emily Troscianko), a discussion about Dealing with Adversity (led by Sir David Capewell), a discussion about Coping with Transitions and Not Knowing What Happens Next (led by Dr Maya Shankar), and weekly zoom yoga (led by Dr Daria Ricchi).

### Welfare meetings with students

Keeping track of meetings with students has highlighted patterns that seem to be fairly consistent across terms in terms of peak points of demand and points at which students are not reaching out for support.



### Range of challenges for which students seek support

Students request welfare meetings for varied issues. Where appropriate, I aim to signpost students to College (e.g., Tutors, Academic Office, Study Skills Support, Chaplain), University (e.g., Counselling Service, Sexual Harassment and Violence Support Service) and NHS (e.g., College GP) Services.

Examples of the types of challenges for which students seek support:

- Anxiety
- Feeling of not belonging in Oxford
- Low mood
- Difficulties with sleep
- Academic worries
- Lack of confidence in tutorials
- Difficulties with motivation and structuring time
- Loneliness, lack of connection
- Homesickness
- Challenges of lockdown
- Disordered eating
- Support with long-standing mental and physical health conditions

## Wellbeing challenges

Wellbeing events are organised with the view that by proactively supporting student wellbeing, we may reduce the need for 'welfare' support. The events are also organised so as to address some of the challenges that students are regularly mentioning in Welfare Meetings.

To address loneliness and lack of connection:

- Virtual coffee breaks
- **Weekly Yoga Sessions with Dr Daria Ricchi (Michaelmas 2020, Hilary 2021)**
  - Generously funded by a College donor.
  - In Michaelmas 2020, 25 students took part (12 JCR, 12 MCR, 1 Senior Status student).

*"Not only is the course beneficial in the positive physical and mental impacts of the movement itself, but also in providing a weekly check in and reminder of the community. It is great, each week, to see the same faces logging in, serving as a reminder that we are each experiencing similar things, and providing some support." (MCR Student)*

- In Hilary 2021, we have combined the student and staff yoga to create "Pembroke Community Yoga". At each session, there are approximately 20-25 attendees, most of whom are students.

To address difficulties with sleep:

- We hosted a Sleep and Insomnia Workshop led by Dr Ruth Collins from the University Counselling Service. There were 36 attendees (students and staff) at this workshop which was 1 hour over Zoom.

To address the feeling of not belonging in Oxford:

- We hosted an Imposter Syndrome Workshop led by Dr Tim Knowlson from the University Counselling Service. The Workshop was generously funded by a College donor. There were 50 attendees (students) at this workshop which was approximately 45 minutes over Zoom. Tim's talk was recorded and is available on the Pembroke Website:

<https://www.pmb.ox.ac.uk/content/imposter-syndrome-workshop-dr-tim-knowlson>

*"I had a really good time and I'm really glad that you and Tim ran this session, it felt like you were reading student's minds, including my own. The presentation was particularly*

*useful, it was smart, dense in a good way (content-packed), well-targeted to us and the tone was friendly, supportive and respectful. The discussion was also insightful.” (MCR Fresher)*

To address anxiety:

- We hosted a Reframing Anxiety Workshop led by Dr Tim Knowlson from the University Counselling Service. The Workshop was generously funded by a College donor. There were 22 attendees (students) at this workshop which was approximately 45 minutes over Zoom. Tim’s talk was recorded and is available on the Pembroke Website: <https://www.pmb.ox.ac.uk/content/tim-knowlson-reframing-anxiety-workshop>

*“I thought it was really helpful, particularly knowing some of the science and reasons behind anxiety, which can make it feel much more manageable and less daunting. The process of hearing someone else talk about it is also always helpful as a reminder that it is normal to some degree, and something many people experience.” (JCR Fresher)*

To address academic worries and difficulties with motivation:

- We hosted a Writing Breakfast led by Dr Emily Troscianko. There were 12 attendees (students) at the workshop which ran for 3 hours over Zoom.

*“There were a lot of useful tips, but I think the one that was most useful to me was the part where we had to answer a few questions at the beginning about what we were planning to do and how we'd go about it - one question was about why we were writing the essay, and it led to a really interesting discussion in my breakout room because we very rarely think about exactly why we're writing essays for tutorials. beyond "my tutor asked me to". I ended up coming to the conclusion that the essays are useful to me as a revision tool, and that I was ultimately writing it (and the notes I prepared while reading) for my future self. I've found myself thinking about my future self while writing essays since, and it's really helpful for deciding what to include.” (JCR Fresher)*

*“It was so helpful to set clear objectives for the session and to recognise what I can achieve when I cast aside all other distractions.” (JCR Student)*

To address challenges of lockdown (as well as loneliness and lack of connection) we have hosted two “Campfire Side Discussions” in Hilary 2021:

- Sir David Capewell: Dealing with Adversity. There were 20 attendees at the talk/discussion which was approximately 45 minutes.

*“The talk was a great mix of perspective and inspiration, and comfort as well as reality, and summed up great tips in a meaningful and accessible way. During times of isolation with the internal dialogue this brings and without external chit chat, it’s really beneficial to hear from others about life before, through and after challenges, and to gain a different perspective of and beyond the pandemic. In the absence of such socialising and the natural conversation and cogitation that this brings, it’s so valuable and enjoyable to hear from others and connect in this way.” (MCR Student)*

- Dr Maya Shankar: The Path isn’t Always Straight: Being Okay with Uncertainty and Transitions. There were 36 attendees at the talk/discussion which was approximately 30 minutes.

*“Listening to Maya was so reassuring and so inspiring in so many ways. I particularly liked the ideas of choosing a job just because it works with your values and energy rather than fitting a long-term trajectory, being friends with your colleagues and wanting to actually champion a cause when working somewhere. I always liked these things but it always seemed that you had to ‘grow up’ and ‘grow out’ of them. Please accept my thanks again for arranging this talk, it really gave me a lot to think about. Please convey my thanks to Maya as well.” (JCR Student)*

## Vision

Our capacity to offer Welfare and Wellbeing support is constrained by the budgetary impact of the pandemic. We are seeking to fund the post for the next three years as the College recovers and, if possible, to offer a broader programme of events that is both reactive (responding to the current needs of students) and proactive (equipping students with stress-coping mechanisms and tools to be able to thrive at university and in life).

Examples of the types of events/support that we would like to offer or continue offering include:

- Weekly Therapeutic Yoga
- Workshops on Issues that affect our students such as imposter syndrome, resilience and self-confidence anxiety, sleep and managing eating disorders in the university setting
- Fortnightly Writing Workshops covering a range of themes to meet both academic (e.g., motivation, structure) and welfare (e.g., anxiety, lack of connection) needs.

Our priority is to raise £15,500 p.a. to fund the salary of the Welfare coordinator. Secondly, we would like to provide her with the funding to provide the kind of activities outlined above, which would require approximately £9,500 a year. Any commitments made in support of these endeavours is very much valued, and support of a significant nature brings with it naming opportunities and other benefits.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this initiative more fully with you.

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