



The Future of Wellbeing at Tertiary Institutions

1/23

Dr Dan Weijers, University of Waikato

New Zealand Tertiary Recreation Conference 29 November 2019

What is wellbeing?

- Human wellbeing is the life going well for the person living it
- Intrinsic vs instrumental goods
- Health and wellbeing

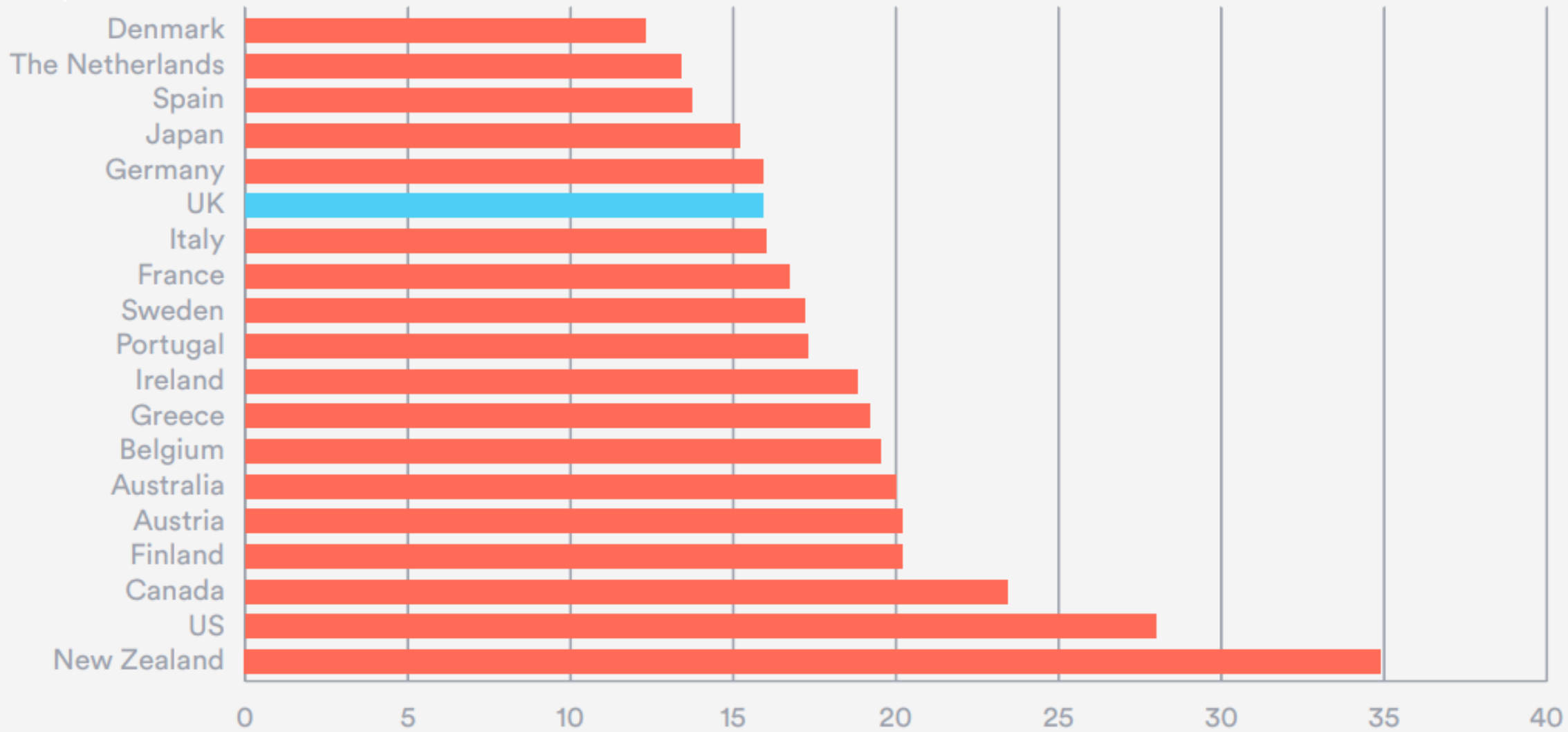


Why should student wellbeing be important to us?

- ▶ We have a duty of pastoral care to this young and vulnerable group
- ▶ Youth health and wellbeing in NZ isn't great¹



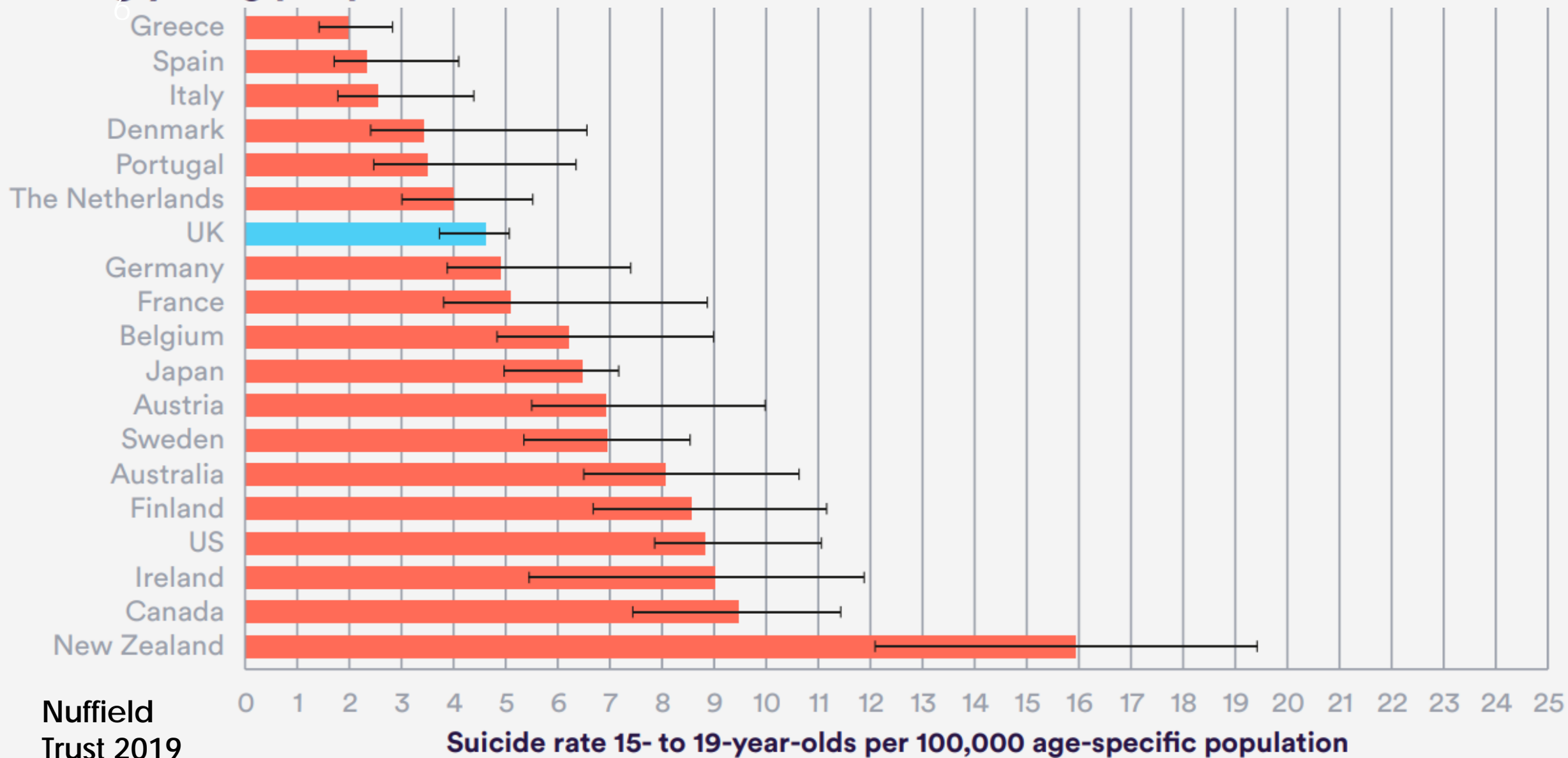
Figure 2.2: Comparison of adolescent all-cause mortality rate per 100,000 adolescents, 10–19 year old population, 2015



Why should student wellbeing be important to us?

- ▶ We have a duty of pastoral care to this young and vulnerable group
- ▶ Youth health and wellbeing¹
- ▶ Youth suicide¹

Figure 5.9: Comparison of suicide rates per 100,000 age-specific population among young people 15- to 19 2016



Why should student wellbeing be important to us?

- ▶ We have a duty of pastoral care to this young and vulnerable group
- ▶ Youth health and wellbeing¹
- ▶ Youth suicide¹
- ▶ 79,000 young NZers with anxiety or depression (2017)²
- ▶ Almost 1/3 of young NZers self-harmed over 2012-2016²
- ▶ Academic pressure was the greatest cause of stress, depression, and anxiety amongst students³
- ▶ What would you want for your children?

Are our students flourishing? 1

- ▶ Happy yesterday? (0-10)... **6**
- ▶ Worried or anxious yesterday? (0-10)... **5**
- ▶ In general, how happy do you usually feel? ...**“Slightly happy (just a bit above normal)”**
- ▶ Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days? (0-10)... **6**
- ▶ Best vs worst possible life (0-10)... **6**

PHILO225-18A
students

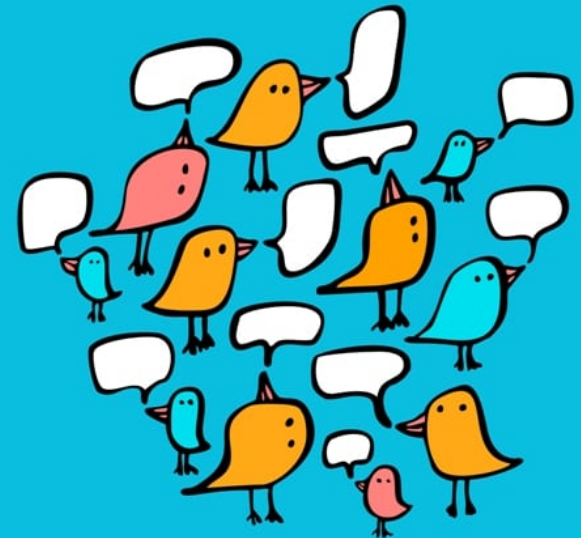
Are our students flourishing? 2

| Domain | Average Satisfaction (0-10) | Average importance (0-10) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Family | 6 | 7 |
| Friendship & social life | 5 | 6 |
| Education | 5 | 6 |
| Physical health | 5 | 6 |
| Fun & leisure | 5 | 6 |
| Intimate relationships | 4 | 6 |
| Spirituality | 5 | 4 |
| Community life | 5 | 4 |
| Work | 4 | 5 |
| Financial matters | 4 | 5 |

PHILO225-18A
students

Is wellbeing valued highly enough at your tertiary institution? 1

- ▶ Think about student and staff wellbeing
- ▶ Discuss with the others on your table

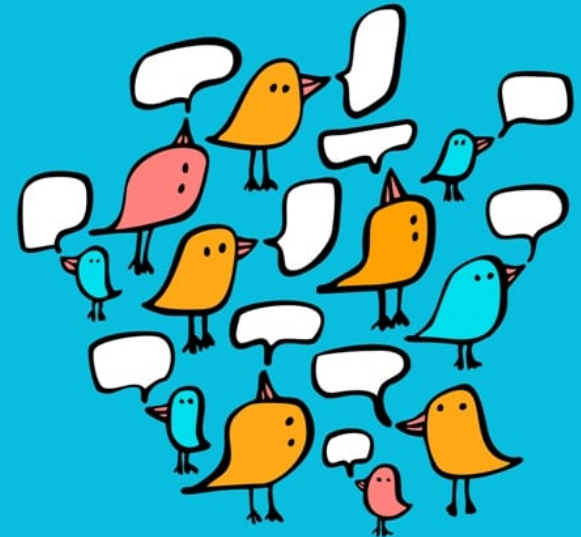


Is wellbeing valued highly enough at tertiary institutions? 2

- Deaths in halls (new law could mean \$100,000 fine)⁴
- 2 week+ waiting lists for counselling, especially at peak times³
- Demand for counselling services increased by over 10% per year (2015-2017)³
- Some actions taken, but improvement of services seems to have revealed more problems
 - Waiting 2 hours to see the emergency mental health nurse

Imagine an institution that really valued wellbeing

- What would it look like?
- What would the students' lives be like?
- What facilities and policies would be in place?
- Discuss with the others on your table



A positive tertiary institution

- Fully distributed, comprehensive, personalisable wellbeing programme with institution-wide buy-in and appropriate funding
- Requires:
 - Science
 - Technology
 - Institution-wide integration and advertising of the programme
 - Much more funding
 - Being careful about ethical issues

The Science of wellbeing

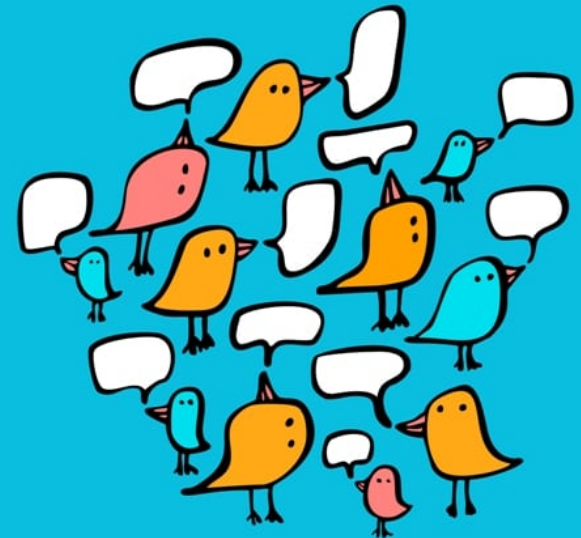
- ▶ The science is not settled, but it is getting more useful all the time. 2016 stats from Google Scholar
 - ▶ 101,000 works mention happiness or wellbeing
 - ▶ 122,000 works mention depression
- ▶ E.g. positive psychological interventions help all age groups and clinical and non-clinical populations⁵
- ▶ Subjective wellbeing provides benefits⁶
 - ▶ Health and longevity, reduced risk of disease, faster recovery
 - ▶ Productivity, showing up, working hard, earning more
 - ▶ Pro-social behaviours, less risk-taking

Technology matches needs to services

- ▶ Biannual comprehensive wellbeing surveys
- ▶ Weekly short wellbeing pulse surveys behaviour and wellbeing status
- ▶ Consider gamification of the programme
- ▶ Specific targeted interventions suggested and personal preferences balanced with scientific evidence
- ▶ Lots of players in this market, but none seem to have nailed it just yet

Removing barriers 1

- Technology helps with convenience (auto compares timetable, one-click booking)
- Motivation and reminders
- Some services should be free, others very cheap
- Specific intervention suggestions may make the suggested service free
- What other barriers can you think of?



Removing barriers 2

- ▶ This will require a huge amount of funding
- ▶ Universities should tap into the government's increased mental health funding
- ▶ Universities should reconsider some of the strategic goals and the strategic activities that cost a lot of money
 - ▶ E.g. growth and efficiencies
- ▶ *Who are strategic goals for, anyway?*

Is wellbeing a strategic goal? 1

- Goal 1 An organisational culture focussed on high performance
 - Goal 2 Teaching and research programmes distinguished by academic excellence and relevance
 - Goal 3 A comprehensive programme of community engagement
 - Goal 4 Improved operational efficiency and facilities
 - Goal 5 A distinctive UoW student experience
 - Goal 6 Investment in growth
-
- Are these the goals you would come up with if you cared about current and future students and staff?

Is wellbeing a strategic goal? 2

- ▶ Out of 2408 words in the University Strategy 2017-2021, wellbeing occurs once:
- ▶ Goal 3: A COMPREHENSIVE PROGRAMME OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT
 - ▶ Make a substantial contribution to improving health outcomes, wellbeing and equity in the communities of the central North Island and of Māori.
- ▶ A worthy goal, but unfortunately no mention of staff or student wellbeing

Ethical issues

- Privacy: Who should be notified when pulse survey scores drop?
- Fairness: Is it fair to give benefits (cheaper services) to students who agree to join the initiative?
- Misuse of data: Kicking out students with mental illnesses!⁷
- Cultural appropriateness: Will the initiative be flexible enough to properly accommodate Māori and other groups? (One size doesn't usually fit all)

The role for rec centres

- Physical health, nutrition, and sleep (flow on effects)
- Social sport and other social positive/healthy activities
- Team up with student health, counselling, and other student services to push for a wellbeing focus
- Co-opt e-sports (don't fight it!)
- Identify and use student recreation ambassadors to selectively invite other students with special offers
- Targeted "grit" interventions for new students
- Mixed "grit" interventions to combat racism etc.
- Wellbeing Adventure Race (start a WAR)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NyKwvZT3VtE&feature=youtu.be>

Conclusion

- There are many barriers, but they are falling away
- Wellbeing is too important to leave to chance
- Wellbeing also enables better education and learning
- So, a wellbeing focus should be a “no-brainer”
- Rec centres should team up, tech up, and help push for better lives for students and staff

References

1. https://www.nuffieldtrust.org.uk/files/2019-02/1550657729_nt-ayph-adolescent-health-report-web.pdf
2. <https://www.noted.co.nz/health/health-psychology/more-and-more-kids-are-returning-to-school-with-anxiety-disorders>
3. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/students/pages/295/attachments/original/1540925981/_University_Counselling_Statistics.pdf?1540925981
4. <https://www.odt.co.nz/star-news/star-christchurch/strict-new-laws-after-student-found-dead>
5. Sin, N. L., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2009). Enhancing well-being and alleviating depressive symptoms with positive psychology interventions: A practice-friendly meta-analysis. *Journal of clinical psychology*, 65(5), 467-487.
6. De Neve, J. E., Diener, E., Tay, L., & Xuereb, C. (2013). The objective benefits of subjective well-being. *World Happiness Report*.
7. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/28/us/college-suicide-stanford-leaves.html>