Session title: Creating supportive student communities: enhancing students' peer interactions with a universal training course.

Session type: Lightening Talk

Main presenter(s): Jenny Stowar, London School of Economics

Co-presenter(s): Anna Baker

Session summary:
This talk aims to explore the role of Education Developers in creating supportive and open communities in our institutions through student training. The LSE Principles of Peer Support e- module (currently in its beta testing phase, full launch expected in September 2023) aims to address the gap between universities expectations and students' experience of supporting each other. Offering all students the opportunity to be trained in key wellbeing skills of good listening, talking and signposting.

Session outline:
In this lightning talk we would like to explore the key issue of the role of Educational Developers in enhancing the sense of community at a university by giving every student the tools to support each other's emotional development. Students' sense of belonging has a significant impact on their time at university and thus their educational outcomes. (Araújo et al, 2014; Pedler et al, 2022) Equally students' mental wellbeing is essential for integration and retention (Baik et, 2019). At LSE we have campaigns encouraging students to reach out to peers, check in with a friend etc., but if difficult conversations should arise, or a cultural barrier may exist, we do not always give students the tools to handle those conversations appropriately.

Like many universities, LSE has multiple schemes running where students interact and support their peers. Therefore, at many times across the academic year, training is being offered to these students and there is a lot of natural crossover between this training. In 2022 the Student Academic Mentor (SAM) programme at LSE was given additional funding to create a central module that all students taking on a peer to peer support role could take. Initially aimed at saving student time, staff time, and resources, we soon realised these were key skills that all students would benefit from gaining. The LSE Principles of Peer Support (LPPS) module is therefore now aiming to offer this training to any student at LSE. By expanding this module out to all students and helping students to talk, listen and signpost more effectively with each other, we argue that this is something we have a responsibility as Education Developers to facilitate: to train and support students to do this effectively and not just expect students to do this without support and guidance.

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