Student Perception Of A Healthy University

A Brief Summary
The Centre for Public Health MMU

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Aims of study

- This consultative research study aimed to explore and develop an understanding of student perceptions of a healthy university.

- This could then be used to inform the development of the healthy universities initiative nationally and to support MMU, and other HEIs, in the healthy university journey.

Methodology

- Two methods of data collection were used.
- Opportunistic student surveys asked students to complete in writing, the sentence '*a healthy university is one which'*.
- Focus group students were asked to bring a visual object that, for them, represented a healthy university. This object acted as an icebreaker and stimulated discussion.
- Semi-structured questions were used as focus group prompts as follows:
  - Please could you tell me about the object you have brought along to the focus group?
  - Why does the object you have brought in represent a healthy university to you?
  - What do you notice immediately when you walk into a university?
  - What do you think a healthy university is?
  - What would be present within a unhealthy university?
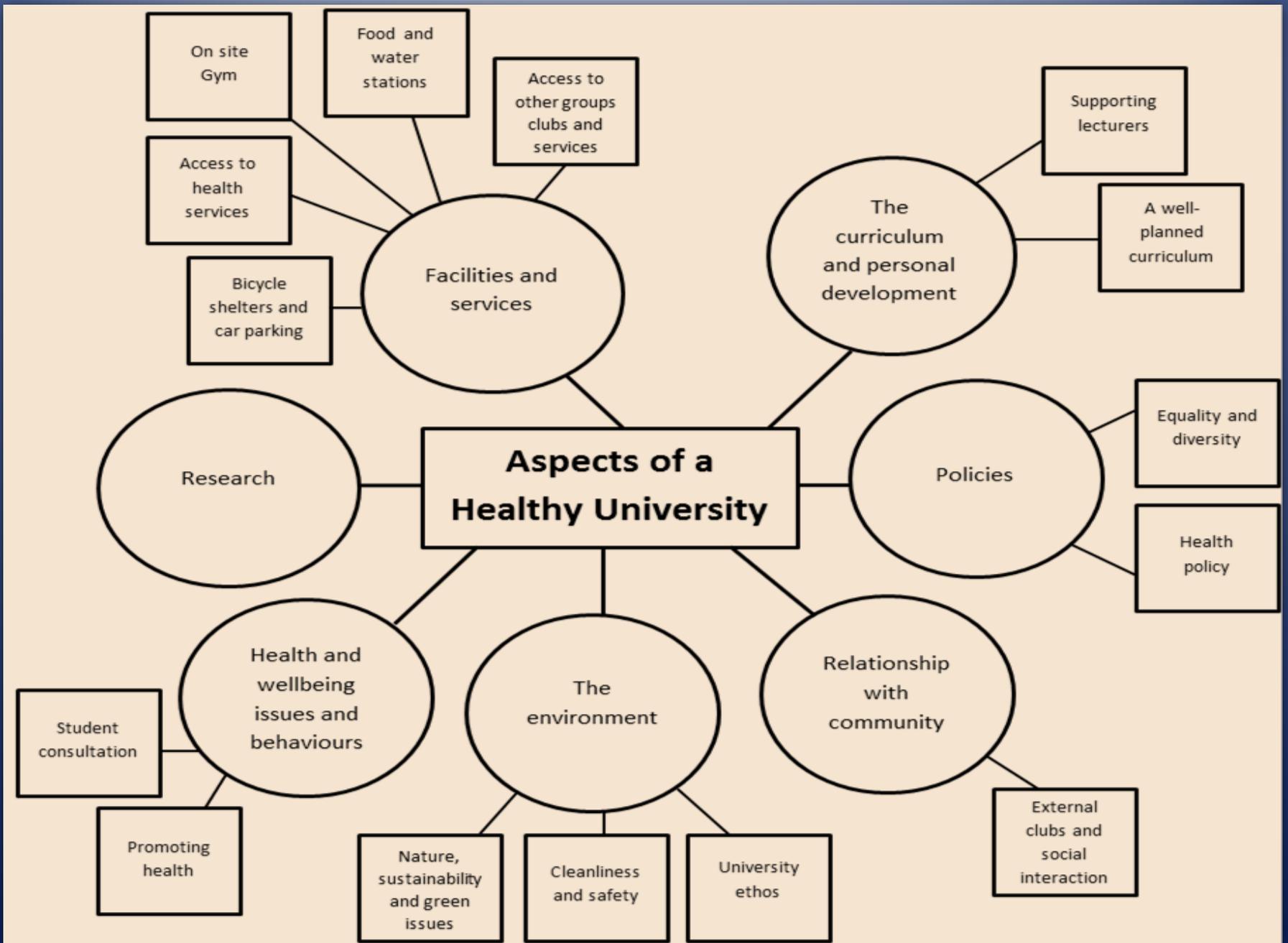 - What are the most important of these?

Participants

- Eleven universities participated in the study (England n=7, Scotland n=2 and Wales n=2).

- Data were gathered from 423 (Business and Law, Science and Engineering, Education, Health, Psychology and Social Care, Arts, Apparel, Food and Tourism , Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences)

- Opportunistic student surveys (n= 367) and six student focus groups (n=56).

Analysis

- *A priori* themes from previously agreed definitions, literature and constructs.

- Our model for a HU is derived from the frameworks for a healthy university identified in an earlier report and from the themes of the self-review toolkit.

- Responses were transcribed and using the *a priori* themes, were coded thematically.

- This enabled further sub-themes to be generated and refined using a form of thematic networks, or web-like illustrations that summarize the main themes.

On site Gym

Food and water stations

Access to other groups clubs and services

Supporting lecturers

The curriculum and personal development

A well-planned curriculum

Access to health services

Facilities and services

Bicycle shelters and car parking

Equality and diversity

Research

Aspects of a Healthy University

Policies

Health policy

Student consultation

Health and wellbeing issues and behaviours

The environment

Relationship with community

Promoting health

Nature, sustainability and green issues

Cleanliness and safety

University ethos

External clubs and social interaction

Findings

- **Facilities and Services**
    - **Food and Water Stations.** Access to a variety of healthy, reasonably priced food was a predominant feature for students across all universities.
    - **On -Site Gym.** The provision of an on-site gym or reduced price student gym membership.
    - **Bike Shelters and Car Parking**
    - **Access to Health Services.** Convenient and efficient access to health services.

The cheaper food options are mainly the unhealthy ones. Chocolate is always cheaper than the fruit **(History Student).**

Make exercise a concern/priority of student health **(Business Management student).**

These should be appropriate to student needs and should be on campus, or very close by (Law student)

- **Policies**
  - Students discussed health terms of healthy food optio
  - A *safe* place to study and live
  - Meets all the regulations for inclu of its student population.
  - Consults with its students, communicates effectively and, where necessary adapts to change.
  - A healthy university would ens and provided incentives for s
  - A balance between the core and wellbeing of students wa

Responds to criticism, adapts to individual needs and leads the way constructing and implementing the latest government strategies
(Medical Genetics student).

A Healthy university is willing to share its financial wealth in order to establish that students are experiencing their peak spiritual, emotional, and physical health
(Diagnostic Imagery student).

- **The Environment**
  - **University Ethos.** The feeling or general atmosphere of the university that they experienced at the onset.
  - First impressions were important in helping students choose their university, and key to this was the way in which university staff, in particular tutors, present themselves as being calm, friendly and supportive.

Has a warm and friendly atmosphere so students want to attend, teachers who are there to support their students when possible and one where students and teachers are respected and feel comfortable being around each other (Fashion student).

*Gets people smiling (*language student).

- **The Environment**
  - **Cleanliness and Safety.** A safe and clean place to study
  - **Nature**
    - Loo
    - Well i_____ aylight to promote a s_____
    - A healthy university would effectively prepare students as global citizens who consider the importance of issues such as recycling, and the need to live and work in harmony with each other.

Has pride in the environmental factors that affect the world and encourage us to use bins and has no smoking areas all over campus (Theatre student).

- **Health and Wellbeing Issues and Behaviours**
  - **Promoting Health.** Health promotion as a fundamental feature of its business and that simply providing resources and facilities is, on its own, not enough
  - **Student Consultation.** Reflect its commitment to wellbeing through inclusive processes. Specifically, consult with students about what makes them healthy and what they need to succeed

Informs me of how I can live healthy every day and helps me when I feel like I need help. Especially when stressed, depressed or burned out (Business Management student).

Allows the opportunities for individuals to define what makes them feel healthy through activities of all types helps to create an environment to theoretically prosper (History student).

- **The Curriculum and Personal Development**
  - **Supporting Lecturers.** outstanding lecturers, who were able to support students with both academic and personal development through the curriculum
  - **A Well-Planned Curriculum.** Promote health through its curriculum with tutors facilitating healthy messages through the curriculum.

Has a student interest deep at heart and strives to give the students the best education possible with the greatest chance of employment once finished (Physics student).

Lecturers need to promote health in lectures and encourage students to be healthy.
They are not there just to teach the subject (Pharmaceutical student).

- **Relationship with the Community**
  - **External Clubs and Social Interaction.** access to external clu~~~~~~~~~~~itate social inter~~~~~

  - Ex~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ditional skills~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~olved in community ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~eering.

  - Some students felt that a healthy university should be a community of its own, developing its own characteristics and ethos.

> *It would feel like a community as opposed to a cold organisation* (Law student).

- **Research**
  - Research was not identified as a specific characteristic of a healthy university for students in this study.
  - It tended to be classified as having excellent and knowledgeable lecturers and a contemporary curriculum.
  - Students tended to look at issues discussed thus far in this paper such as facilities and tutor support.

What Does This Mean

- **Students:**
  - Students come to university with a set of values that are important to them, their health and their academic performance.
  - However, once entering university these features are sometimes overridden by other factors.
- **Universities/HEIs:**
  - Raises important issues for universities in meeting student need and expectations.
  - E.g. free water through water fountains is a multifaceted issue related to both health and sustainability
  - Presents a dichotomy for healthy universities as often water is sold by catering facilities and represents a significant source of revenue
  - For HEIs, the concept of a healthy university that can tailor its facilities, services, environment and overall 'offer' to the needs and expectations of its students will:
    - Support its own institutional objectives relating to an enhanced student experience
    - Contribute to the development of students who are active global citizens – able to value and prioritise their own health, the health of others and wider societal and planetary wellbeing, both in the short term and in their future lives and roles within families, workplaces and communities.

- **UK HU Network & Umbrella bodies**:
  - It is important and valuable to find ways to engage with, listen to and respond to the student voice.
  - UK Healthy Universities Network specifically, it may be valuable to revisit the Self-Review Tool and consider whether its content and/or process of implementation could benefit from refining to ensure that student perspectives and views are fully incorporated