Support Mechanisms For Undergraduate Students Experiencing Loneliness Or Isolation: Newcastle University

---

Report written for the charity, 'Youth Focus: North East', exploring whether the implementation of mental health support mechanisms for students in Newcastle University are sufficient to combat the growing population experiencing loneliness and isolation.

Author: Ciara Henderson

Work Placement Supervisor: Steve Watson

Date: May 2019

<u>Table of Contents:</u>

Introduction

This report will explore whether or not the current support mechanisms that Newcastle University offers it students are effective and sufficiently meeting the needs of the growing population of lonely and isolated students. It will then propose a series of recommendations which improve upon existing support measures and create new opportunities for the non- profit organization, 'Youth Focus: North East', to become institutionally involved in delivering expertise to Newcastle University regarding the issue of student loneliness and isolation. This report builds on the previous research conducted by students at 'Youth Focus: North East' and their findings that indicated 94% of the undergraduates surveyed experience some form of loneliness or isolation (Willis and Douglas Project Report, 2018: 8). Prolonged feelings of loneliness and isolation in students can be detrimental to both their studies as well as their mental and physical health (Co-op, British Red Cross and Kantar Public, 2016; Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010). Therefore, it is crucial that Newcastle University provides sufficient support for students who feel lonely and or isolated.

The research conducted took place through both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The first method used to gather data was a survey analysis of undergraduate students studying in the Geography, Politics and Sociology departments at Newcastle University. The 31 voluntary respondents answered a twenty question survey regarding their feelings of loneliness and support from the university. The questionnaire was developed using the third version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale as a model for question structure and response format (Russell, 1996: 20- 40; Russell et al., 1980; Russell et al., 1978). The third version of this scale was utilized as it is the simplified version of the previous Loneliness Scales, which were difficult for respondents to understand. This scale was also used because the scoring pattern features reverse scoring of some questions, making it more difficult for

respondents to modify their answers and decipher how the responses are scored. The survey data was used to compile the total Loneliness Score for each participant, in order to determine how lonely they are. Responses for each question were then thematically analysed in order to determine emergent themes of lonely individuals.

Finally, semi- structured individuals were conducted with two students who completed the survey, one who was considered more lonely and one who was considered less lonely. The interviews helped to facilitate a deeper understanding of the emergent themes present in the survey data and perceptions of the support mechanisms offered at Newcastle University. The third interview conducted was with a staff member from the university who was able to provide a more detailed picture of the current programs in place to support student mental health. This staff member was also able to provide insight into the direction of university involvement in mental health programs for students.

This report has found that while students are surrounded by companions with similar interests, many feel that they are lacking more meaningful connections and friendships with those around them. This has contributed to feelings of loneliness within students and an inability to reach out for support. This report also found that while the university offers several initiatives to combat mental health issues, no programs are specifically targeted towards loneliness and isolation. Furthermore, the current programs being run through the Student Health and Wellbeing Service are understaffed and underfunded. These programs also lack a level of student engagement as well, as students feel disconnected from the programs and lack awareness of the different mental health initiatives offered.

<u>Literature Review</u>

This literature review will identify the gaps in current research on loneliness and isolation within the United Kingdom as well as this report's contribution to the field of study.

In the last five years there has been a surge of research on the impact of loneliness and isolation on communities throughout the country, however there has been a distinct lack of research on the youth community- specifically undergraduate university students. The communities which have been the focus of this research are those with evident triggers of isolation such as, retirees, elderly, or bereaved individuals (Co-op, British Red Cross and Kantar Public, 2016). Furthermore, there has been extensive research on the mental, emotional and physical impact of loneliness on individuals (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010: 218) but a lack of research on the support mechanisms for those suffering from feelings of loneliness. This report will explore both of these gaps through an analysis of 31 students' feelings of loneliness and isolation at Newcastle University.

For the purpose of this report, the analysis will not differentiate between social and emotional loneliness, or the lack of a social network or lack of a truly intimate tie (i.e. significant other, parent, etc.) respectively (Weiss, 1973). Instead, this report will operationalize a broader definition of loneliness: "the absence or perceived absence of satisfying social relationships" (Young, 1982; Peplau and Perlman, 1982; Green et al., 2001: 281). This distinction was not made in order to determine how undergraduate students experience loneliness and isolation, as socially lonely people will typically report smaller social networks while emotionally lonely people will report a perceived lack of intimate attachment (Green et., 2001: 281).

Previous research surrounding loneliness and isolation is primarily based on its triggers and its effects. In 2016 the Co-op and British Red Cross launched an investigation into the triggers of loneliness and isolation by identifying six population groups which experienced dramatic life events including: young new moms (aged 18- 24), individuals with mobility limitations, with health issues, those recently divorced, retirees and those recently bereaved (Co-op, British Red Cross and Kantar Public, 2016). The survey reached 2,523 UK

adults (those aged 16 and up) and those with loneliness triggers were interviewed further. Young people do not often experience the same triggers for loneliness and as a result only 2% of those surveyed believed young people were 'most likely' to experience loneliness and only 21% responded that youth communities experience any forms of loneliness (Co-op, British Red Cross and Kantar Public, 2016: 19). This widespread belief is contradicted with the findings of the report which indicate that environmental factors trigger identity crises in individuals, and these individuals are most likely to suffer from feelings of oiliness and isolation. For example, young people moving and attending university experience a significant life event which may trigger identity crises if they are far from home or not with the support system which is familiar to them. As a result, these undergraduates experience levels of loneliness and isolation through triggers which are not immediately seen. This report address this gap in research of by surveying and interviewing youth communities, specifically undergraduates, who are experiencing loneliness and isolation.

This report will also examine the support mechanisms which are available to university students and whether or not they are perceived to be sufficient. The analysis of sufficient support systems to address loneliness and isolation is crucial because of the mental and physical consequences of sustained loneliness (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010). Research demonstrates that loneliness increases risk to "morbidity and mortality" due to an accelerated physiological aging (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010: 219). A Health and Retirement Study indicates that chronic loneliness, rather than situational loneliness, increases cardiovascular health issues such as "systolic blood pressure, HDL cholesterol levels and glycated haemoglobin concentration" (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010: 219). Loneliness creates these health risks through individual inability to self- regulate healthy behaviour. Those who suffer from feelings of loneliness perceive the world as more threatening and ultimately create

negative social expectations for those around them through their feelings of hostility, anxiety and pessimism. For example,

"In middle-aged and older adults, greater loneliness was associated with less effort applied to the maintenance and optimization of positive emotions [31]. Compromised regulation of emotion in lonely individuals explained their diminished likelihood of performing any physical activity, and loneliness also predicted a decrease in physical activity over time [31]" (Hawkley and Cacioppo, 2010: 220).
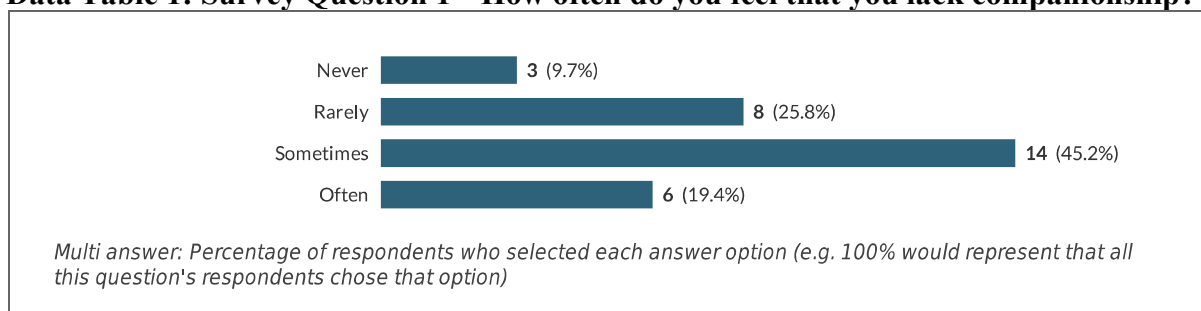
This report's recommendations are centred around the improvement of university support systems for lonely and isolated students because of the detrimental long term effects sustained loneliness has on these individuals. Without the proper support systems, students are at risk of prolonged (the duration of their studies) feelings of loneliness and isolation at university which can contribute to a decline in both their physical and mental health.

Data Analysis: Survey Responses

The third version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale was adapted to fit the needs of this report by extrapolating the questions most related to feelings of loneliness and companionship for the first half of the survey (questions 1- 10). Then using the same grammatical format as the UCLA Loneliness Scale, new questions surrounding Newcastle University's support mechanisms were developed in order to gage whether or not students felt mental health support was necessary and if so, how much trust they have that the University has sufficient means to support them. This was done in order to establish the base rating of loneliness that the participants were feeling, as well as to understand if there was a need from lonely/ isolated participants for external support. The last question of the survey deviated from the scale in order to ask if the participant was willing to take part in an interview regarding the survey, and give their email address. Six students provided their email addresses and after sending several emails to all the provided emails, only two students volunteered to be interviewed for the report.
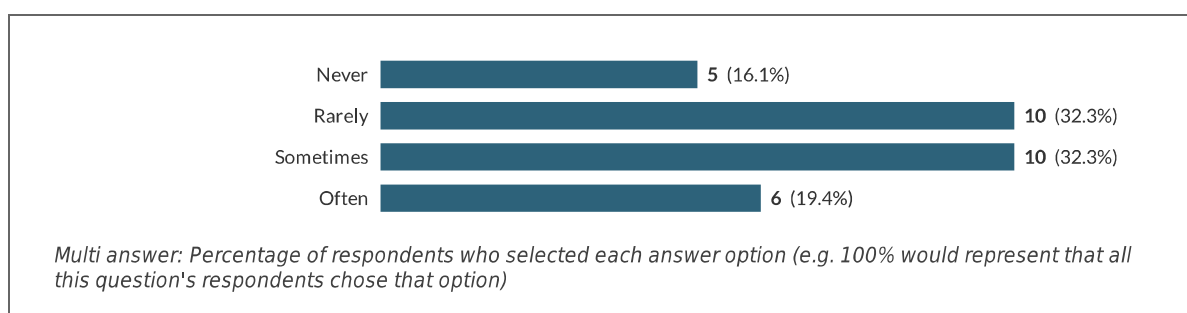
This data builds on the previously report written for 'Youth Focus: North East' entitled 'Loneliness and Isolation in Undergraduates' which found that approximately 94% of the survey respondents reported feeling lonely or isolated. This research has attempted to differentiate this figure by establishing *how* lonely these respondents are (from rarely feeling lonely to experiencing frequent and intense feelings of loneliness and isolation). This report has also attempted to demonstrate the relationship between companionship and loneliness. It is important to note that it is normal for many individuals to experience loneliness or isolation at some point in life. However, this research is concerned with the individuals experiencing loneliness and isolation over a prolonged time, to the point of needing external intervention to subdue these feelings. When participants were asked, 'How often do you feel that you lack companionship?' a majority of respondents (45.2% or 14 participants) said that they lacked companionship 'sometimes' and 19% said 'often'. Data Table 1 below details these responses.

Data Table 1: Survey Question 1- 'How often do you feel that you lack companionship?'

Never	3 (9.7%)
Rarely	8 (25.8%)
Sometimes	14 (45.2%)
Often	6 (19.4%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
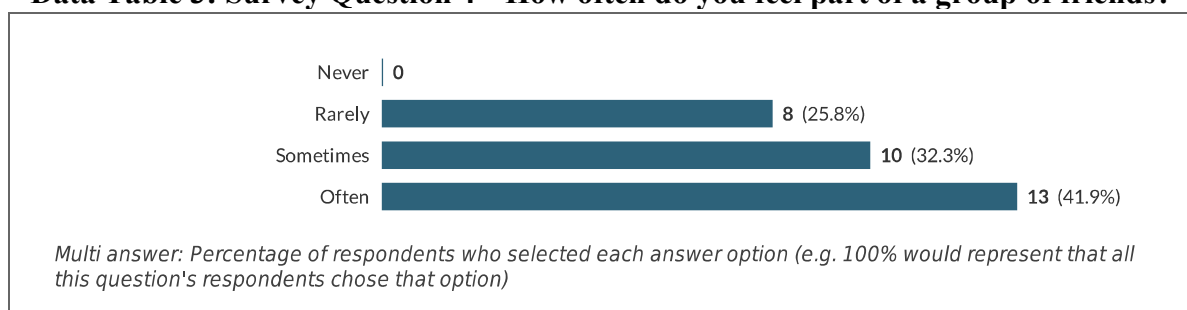
Similarly, there was mixed responses towards the second survey question, 'how often do you feel that there is no one you can turn to?'. Twenty of the thirty- one responses were evenly distributed between 'sometimes' and 'rarely'. The first two questions help lay the foundation for the first finding of the survey data, which is that students are not lacking companionship, but seem to lack deep and meaningful friendships.

Data Table 2: Survey Question 2- 'How often do you feel that there is no one you can turn to?'

Never   **5** (16.1%)
Rarely   **10** (32.3%)
Sometimes   **10** (32.3%)
Often   **6** (19.4%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
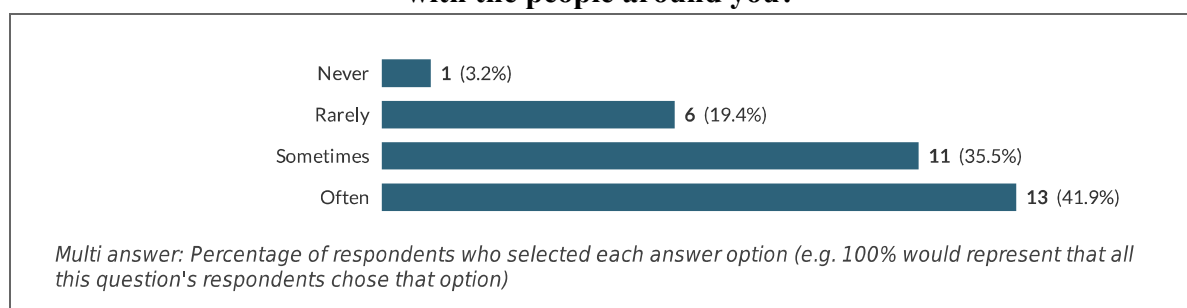
Questions four, five, seven, eight and nine demonstrated this finding by establishing that students are often surrounded by people with similar interests and a group friends, most likely through participating in the university societies or through their degree course. As a result, an overwhelming number of respondents (15) recorded 'often' feeling outgoing and friendly and a further 14 feel outgoing 'sometimes', totalling 93.6% of all participant responses. Furthermore, as students felt mostly surrounded by companions they 'rarely' feel left out (shown in question nine). These findings are demonstrated in data tables 3 to 7.
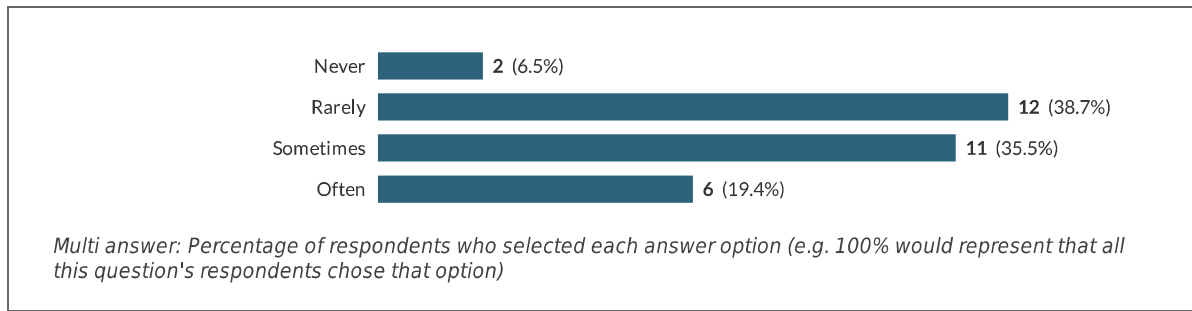
Data Table 3: Survey Question 4- 'How often do you feel part of a group of friends?'

Never   **0**
Rarely   **8** (25.8%)
Sometimes   **10** (32.3%)
Often   **13** (41.9%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Data Table 4: Survey Question 5- 'How often do you feel that you have a lot in common with the people around you?'

Never   **1** (3.2%)
Rarely   **6** (19.4%)
Sometimes   **11** (35.5%)
Often   **13** (41.9%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Data Table 4: Survey Question 7- 'How often do you feel that your interests and ideas are not shared by those around you?'

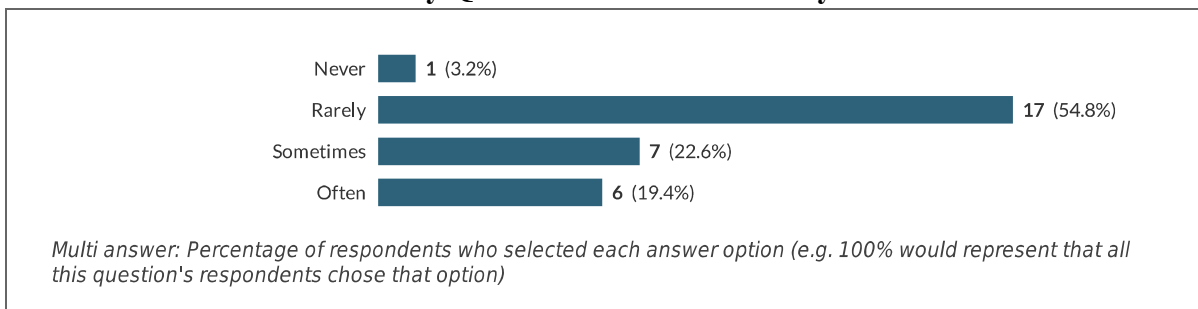|	
Never	**2** (6.5%)
Rarely	**12** (38.7%)
Sometimes	**11** (35.5%)
Often	**6** (19.4%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

Data Table 5: Survey Question 8- 'How often do you feel outgoing and friendly?'

Never	**0**
Rarely	**2** (6.5%)
Sometimes	**14** (45.2%)
Often	**15** (48.4%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
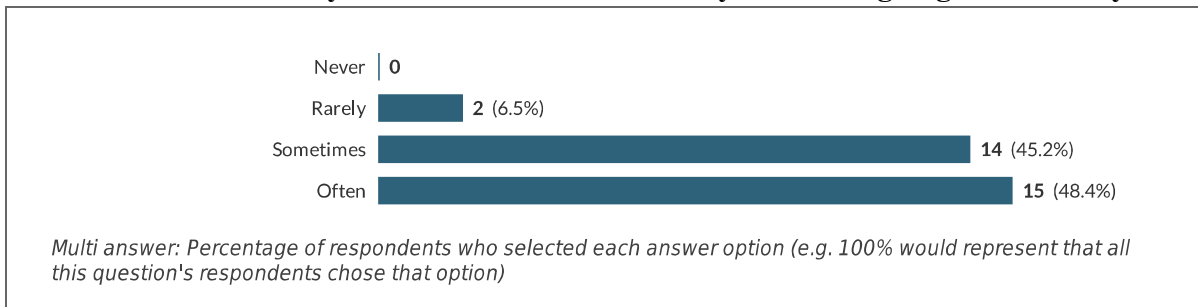
Data Table 6: Survey Question 9- 'How often do you feel left out?'

Never	**1** (3.2%)
Rarely	**17** (54.8%)
Sometimes	**7** (22.6%)
Often	**6** (19.4%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
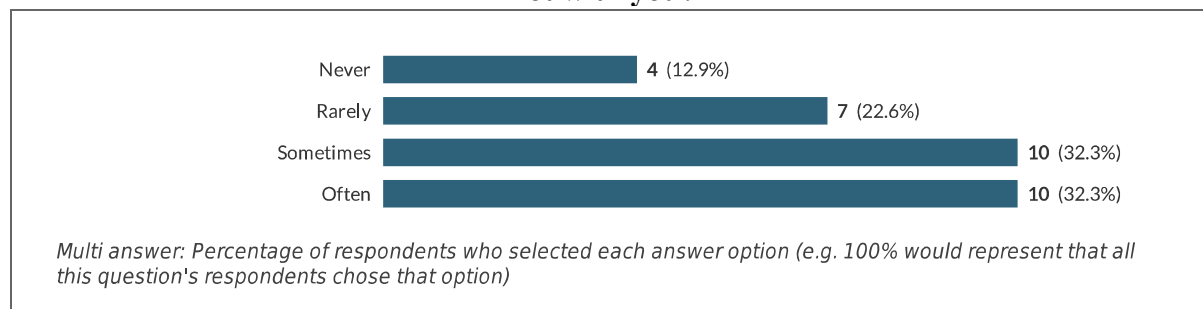
These responses are in direct contrast to the feelings of loneliness that the participants recorded. The highest response rate to question three, how often the students feel alone, was 'sometimes' at 48.4% and the second highest response rate was 'often' at 29%. These responses were interesting as a primary reason that youth communities have traditionally been overlooked as a group that would experience loneliness or isolation is the amount of companionship around them, as opposed to the elderly community which typically experiences loneliness and isolation. However it is clear in Data Table 7, that a majority (77.4%) of the students who were surveyed sometimes or often feel alone/ lonely despite feeling that they are surrounded by companions who share similar interests. This may indicate that students are lacking deeper, more meaningful, relationships with those around

them. These findings can be summarized in Data Table 8, which shows that 64.6% of students feel that people are around them, but not with them. This shows the disconnect that students experience from being around many friends, but not the support they necessarily want.

**Data Table 7: Survey Question 3- 'How often do you feel alone?'**

Never 2 (6.5%)
Rarely 5 (16.1%)
Sometimes 15 (48.4%)
Often 9 (29%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)
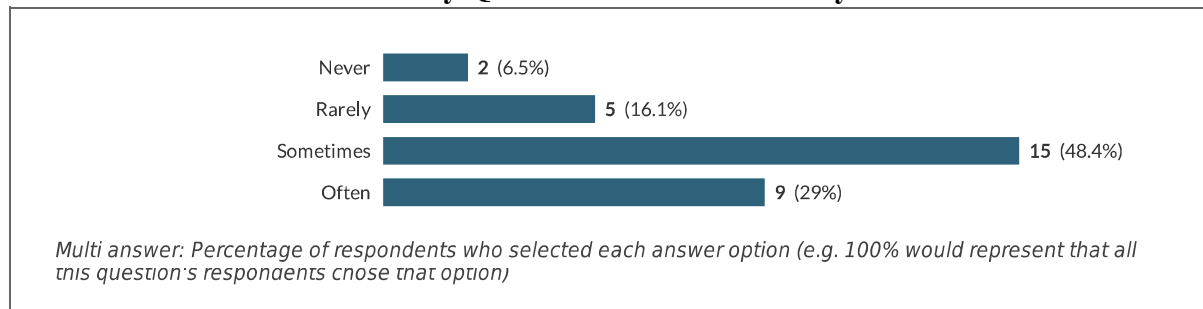
Data Table 8: Survey Question 13- 'How often do you feel people are around you but not with you?'

Never 4 (12.9%)
Rarely 7 (22.6%)
Sometimes 10 (32.3%)
Often 10 (32.3%)

Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)

By using the UCLA Loneliness Scale as the foundational model for this survey, the responses were able to be quantified and loneliness measured. This allows us to create a general idea of how 'lonely' a respondent is. The scale ranges from not lonely at all at 20 points to very lonely at 80 points. Each response in the survey is coded for a value, and each response is added to form this total. For example if a respondent recorded each answer as 'never' (a response with a value of 1) then their total loneliness score would be 20. The range of total loneliness scores of all 31 participants has been tallied and presented in 'Graph 1: Total Loneliness Scores of all Participants'. The majority of respondents (22) fell into the two middle categories of 38- 50 or 50- 62, there were very few participants whose scores were in the highest category of recorded scores, 62- 74. The highest loneliness core was 67, meaning

that there were no respondents in the highest 17% of possible scores (70- 80). This is

relatively positive as no students in this case are considered 'extremely' or the 'most' lonely

possible according to the third version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale. The total loneliness

scores also demonstrate that there are few students who never experience loneliness as 22 of

the student respondents are grouped into the two median categories, 58- 50 and 50- 62. The

scores are broken down further into a table which shows the number of scores at intervals of

ten. The total scores reflect the findings of the individual survey question analysis, the

students experience moderate levels of loneliness which is subdued by the amount of

companionship they experience in their day to day life.

Graph 1: Total Loneliness Scores of all Particpants
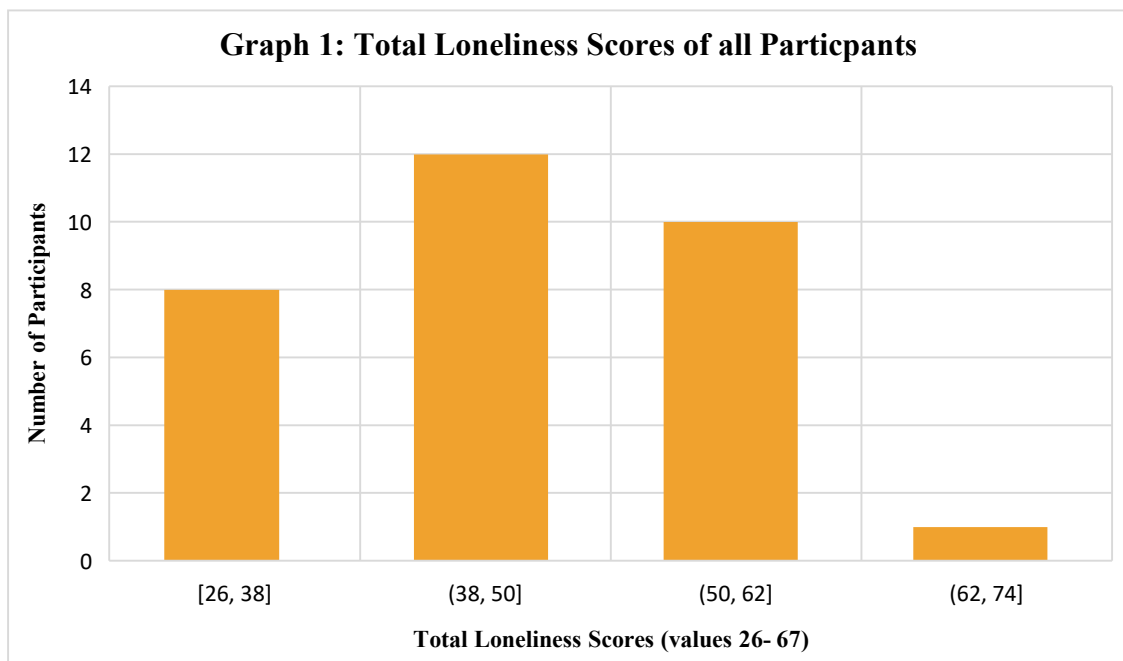
Data Table 9: Total Loneliness Scores of Participants at Intervals of 10						
Score Interval	20- 29	30- 39	40- 49	50- 59	60- 69	70- 79
Number of scores	2	6	8	12	3	0

The survey data analysis has shown that there is a complex relationship between

university students and the traditional measures of loneliness and isolation. The university

naturally provides an environment in which students are surrounded by peers who share

similar interests, whether through their extra curriculars or degree subject. Similarly, the university has an extensive support network in place for students' material and emotional needs, which most likely contributes to some feelings of comfort and support (which are depicted in the varied responses to questions 15- 20). However, despite the natural university environment mitigating some of the indicators of loneliness and isolation such as companionship, there is significant evidence pointing to widespread feelings of sustained and moderate feelings of loneliness and isolation in the students surveyed.

Data Analysis: Interview Responses

Three interviews were conducted to supplement the survey data taken, including two from survey participants and one from a member of university staff involved in student wellbeing on campus. A thematic analysis will be applied to the first two interviews in order to identify any specific environmental factors at the university which contribute to students' feelings of loneliness and isolation, as well as any suggestions for university improvement. The third interview will be used to identify any shortcomings of current university support mechanisms and potential changes that the university could make to create support structures specifically aimed at loneliness and isolation.

Interview 1- Student A

Student information: International, Stage 1, BA (Hons) Politics and Economics

This student declined to be audio recorded in order to protect their rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

Total UCLA Loneliness and Isolation Score: **56**

As an international student, the first time this student had visited the United Kingdom was when they moved to the country for university. They live in university accommodation with other flatmates who attend the university, however they often do no interact as they lack common spaces. Although this student would like to create deeper relationships with their flatmates, they do not believe that it would've helped improve their feelings of loneliness. When asked how lonely they normally felt, they responded 'not often' but instead described experiencing large amounts of solitude as there are 'not many people to connect with'. The accommodation was describes as lacking a 'sense of belonging' (to its detriment). Similarly, they detailed that they have not made any friends in university that they felt they could reach out to or rely on. Instead, they preferred to use friends from home as their meaningful social network. As a result, even around other people they always feel alone, but at the same time would like to have more meaningful relationships with those around them. There is a tension in this student with the desire for deeper friendships, however the need does not seem great enough to override their hesitation to creating these relationships. There is a content-ness on not having to rely on others for support.

When discussing the role of the university in supporting students, there seemed to be a distinct lack of awareness about the programs the university offers in terms of mental health. The only program that the student new of specifically was the counselling that the Student Wellbeing Centre offers. Only being aware of this type of help, influenced the student negatively and resulted in deterring the student from approaching the university for forms of mental health support. This is partially due to the continued stigma around counselling, but it may also be considered unnecessary if the student feels that the counselling is too 'intense' for feelings of loneliness that they can 'live with'. The lack of communication between the university and its students has also contributed to this student's reluctance to become a part of university societies. This student does not actively use social

media and felt that societies primarily use these platforms for mass communications with students, instead of varied methods such as emails or more personalized messages. The student elaborated on several ideas for improving their experience with the university but the primary point concerned with student support was the role of lecturers.

The student believes that they would benefit from deeper connections with lecturers, one which is similar to the relationship students have with their personal tutor. This student detailed what appeared to be the importance of guidance from mentoring figures and engagement of university staff with students on a more personal level without feeling as if the individual was 'judging' them.

Interview 2- Student B

Student information: Stage 3, BA (Hons) Politics

This student agreed to being audiotaped for the purpose of this report, this analysis is based off of notes taken from the audio recording.

Total UCLA Loneliness and Isolation Score: **37**

In contrast with Student A, Student B had a much lower total loneliness score at only 37. Student A on the other hand scored almost twenty points higher, indicating that they are significantly more lonely than Student B. Despite Student B considering themselves rarely lonely, they did discuss environmental factors at university which has contributed to this sense of community and inclusion with the university. Student A enjoyed living in university accommodation, and has continued to do so for all three years of their degree as they have made several friends by living with other university students. Having agreeable flatmates each year developed a sense of community within the accommodation, and as a result, increased the amount of companionship Student B had during university.

In addition to accommodation providing companionship and friendship, Student B also cited the in depth experience in two university societies (fencing and politics) which helped to build bonds between themselves and their fellow course mates. Through the participation in university societies, Student B was able to forge deep and meaningful friendships. However, how the society is structured will determine how much support a student feels that they have from the society. Student B identified the 'welfare officers' as being important points of contact for students in societies as their primarily duty is the care of their members, materially or emotionally. These positions re important because, "societies have a large role in student wellbeing, they become [their own] communities."

Student B felt that the university actively supports them, but can improve on the delivery of their programs. Similar to Interview 1, the theme of personal engagement arose again. Personal tutors and professors are important points of academic, as well as personal, contact. The peer mentoring program was also discussed, however Student B felt that the idea of peer mentoring was positive but did not actually provide the level of support that was expected. Instead, the contact with their peer mentor was limited to seeing them on 'nights out'. Student B believes that students would benefit from small group activities, whether through a department's peer mentoring or through the university itself. Indirect group programs could be used to address loneliness and isolation because students do not necessarily want to address their loneliness. Student B suggested that the Accommodation Service introduce a service where students looking for accommodation could meet each other to see who they connect with and want to live with, rather than looking for accommodation on their own if they do not have friends to live with.

Interview 3- Staff Member A

Staff member information: position responsibilities include student wellbeing

This staff member declined to be audio recorded in order to protect their rights to confidentiality and anonymity.

Staff member A described their role in the university as one which enhances student experience through facilitating and coordinating different programs which improve student wellbeing on campus. The activities that are offered are created around the 'five ways of wellbeing' which are published by the National Health Service (NHS). These principles include, "connect [with people around you]; be active; keep learning; give to others; and be mindful" (NHS, 2018). Staff member A discussed the primary initiatives currently being used to tackle loneliness and isolation (and mental health issues more broadly) as well as future programs which the university are currently developing.

At the moment there are no programs that the university offers which specifically address loneliness and isolation. While the staff member acknowledged that they were aware that loneliness and isolation was a an issue that should be addressed, students do not bring their concern about it forward to the university. Without student interest in specifically addressing loneliness and isolation the university must turn their attention to the issues students have specifically flagged as their primary interests. While it is positive that the university support system is reactive to contemporary student needs, there is a lack of initiative from the university to provide for an issue that is understood to be widely present. Loneliness and isolation is often seen as linked to or a symptom of mental health issues, and therefore 'treated' with mental health services. (Note: while loneliness and isolation can be indicative of a mental health disorder many young people experience it as a separate concern, without the presence of other mental health issues). These programs attempt to give students the 'tools' necessary to address the state of their mental health. Current mental health initiatives that the university offer are:

- **Counselling services:** Students can attend up to six sessions with a licenced counsellor, if more sessions are necessary they are referred to their General Practitioner (GP).

- **Wellbeing workshops:** Group activities for students to address difficult topic regarding their wellbeing. Workshops can address wellbeing directly or indirectly, for example an art experience to channel the 'five ways of wellbeing' (NHS, 2018) would be an indirect method while a workshop on anxiety is a direct approach. Capacity in the workshops ranges from drop- in sessions to sessions with a capacity for 50 students (Student Health and Wellbeing Service, 2019).

- **Sport for mental health:** The Newcastle University Students' Union is a signatory of the Mental Health Charter for Sport and Recreation which requires them to, "tackle discrimination on the grounds of mental health [and] support a pan- sport platform to develop and share resources and best practice" (Isaac, 2017). This includes organizing events such as "This Girl Can, Nutrition, Mental Health and Rainbow Laces" (Newcastle University Students' Union).

When asked about the obstacles or challenges these initiatives face at the university, the staff member cited funding as the primary obstacle for implementing the programs. As a result, the counselling sessions cannot intake all the students who reach out right away and must go through waiting periods before they can attend their first session. When attempting to reach out to the counselling service for an interview for this work placement, queries sent through the email address and questionnaire forms provided on their websites were routinely ignored. After an in person conversation with their reception I received a different email

address to contact. When in contact with the staff members, they declined to be interviewed as they lacked the time and staff to participate.

While discussing the challenges of promoting positive mental health, staff member A mentioned that another challenge to implementing this culture university wide is the outlook of the academic staff. The staff member believes that much of the stress students report is due to the academic workload of university and that the academic staff have a role to play in easing this stress. Lecturers and personal tutors are often the first point of contact for students who are experiencing this stress and more can be done to make lecturers feel comfortable engaging in this dialogue with students who reach out to them. Staff member A is hopeful that the future '#stepchange', 'SilverCloud' and 'Residents of Life' programs will help with both of these obstacles.

- **#stepchange:** A visionary framework proposed to all universities apart of Universities UK to adopt mental health as a "strategic imperative." It seeks to create partnerships between the universities, the NHS, employers and parents to coordinate student care. It lists the risk to students, state policy, responsibility of higher education regulations, and student success as the four primary reasons for mental health as a strategic priority (West, Universities UK, 2017).
- **SilverCloud:** Bought by the university, but not yet released. An online health provider which provides customers (students) customizable mental health care support. An online provider such as SilverCloud attempts to increase the reach of wellbeing services and enhance support for issues like anxiety, depression and stress (SilverCloud, 2018).
- **Residents of Life:** The Accommodation and Estate teams from the university have engaged in research based in the United States and the dormitory model of their

university accommodation. This is in the attempt to address loneliness and isolation within accommodation by building student villages and a sense of community.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations for Youth Focus: North East:

1) **'#stepchange' as a source of funding and partnership for events with Newcastle University**: The implementation of the #stepchange program at the university serves as an opportunity for Youth Focus to participate in events concerning loneliness and isolation at the university if it is framed in terms of mental health. Funding for the current loneliness and isolation programs at Youth Focus ends in August 2019. The new #stepchange initiative is funded directly to the university through Universities UK, and through this, the university could help fund potential Youth Focus involvement in the program. Furthermore, #stepchange aims to link the university to the support systems of the greater community including the NHS and local authorities. Petitioning the university of the importance of the role of non- profit organizations in supporting students' mental health could lead to a more institutionalized role in providing support for loneliness and isolation at Newcastle University.

2) **Collaboration of the third sector**: The #stepchange initiative has not been deployed, and the creation of the strategy could involve the collaboration of several local charities to create a well- rounded and researched approach to addressing loneliness and isolation as a fundamental obstacle to positive improvement of student mental health. Collaboration between several non- profit organizations is more likely to persuade the university of the importance of the issue and the involvement of the third sector for expertise.

3) **Participation in wellbeing workshops:** Preparing and delivering wellbeing workshops at the university provides valuable expertise and perspective for the university's wellbeing serve. The university may be incentivized to allow Youth Focus to participate in these workshops as it may help to decrease the workload of the wellbeing staff (which is understaffed and underfunded). Workshop topics could range from specifically addressing loneliness and friendship to other values of Youth Focus which relate to the five ways of wellbeing.

4) **Training academic staff:** Student responses have shown that there is an important link between students and feelings of support from their points of contact in their degree. Youth Focus could help with potential training of academic staff through the use of the video produced by its students about loneliness and isolation in order to help convey the importance of student experience of loneliness and isolation.

5) **Improvement of society welfare officer training:** Interview data with Newcastle University students indicates the importance of societies in maintaining and forming friendships at universities. As a result the welfare officer of each society must be trained properly to ensure that students are able to develop feelings of trust and companionship with other society members.

Through the analysis of the responses to the student survey and interview data this report found that students feel lonely and isolated despite the companionship provided in the degree and university societies. This is most likely due to the fact that students are not developing deep and meaningful relationships with those around them. Secondly, this report has identified lecturers and academic staff as important points of contact for students to feel supported at university. Recommendations 4 and 5 above aim to improve these relationships through the involvement of Youth Focus training and improvement of information

Bibliography

Carragher, J. and McGaughey, J. (2016). 'The effectiveness of peer mentoring in promoting a positive transition to higher education for first-year undergraduate students: a mixed methods systematic review protocol'. *Systematic Reviews,* 5 (68), 1- 9.

Co-op and British Red Cross. (December 8, 2016). 'Lonely Life Stages: New Study Reveals Triggers for Loneliness Epidemic in the UK'. Kantar Public: United Kingdom.

Green, L.R., Richardson, D.S., Lago, T. and Schatten-Jones, E.C. (2010). 'Network Correlates of Social and Emotional Loneliness in Young and Older Adults'. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 1 (1), 281- 288.

Hawkley, L.C. and Cacioppo, J.T. (2010). 'Loneliness Matters: A Theoretical and Empirical Review of Consequences and Mechanisms'. *The Society of Behavioral Medicine*, 40 (1), 218- 227.

Matthews, T., Danese, A., Wertz, J., Odgers, C., Ambler, A., Moffitt, T. and Arseneault, L. (2016). 'Social isolation, loneliness and depression in young adulthood: a behavioural genetic analysis'. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology,* 51 (3), 339- 348.

NHS UK. (2018). 'Mood Zone'. [Online] National Health Service, UK. Available at:
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/improve-mental-wellbeing/
[Accessed 13 May 2019].

Russell, D. (1996). 'UCLA Loneliness Scale (Version 3): Reliability, validity, and factor structure'. *Journal of Personality Assessment,* 66 (1), 20- 40.

Russell, D., Peplau, L.A. and Cutrona, C.E. (1980). 'The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: Concurrent and discriminate validity evidence'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 39 (1), 472- 480.

Russell, D., Peplau, L.A. and Ferguson, M.L. (1978). 'Developing a measure of loneliness'. *Journal of Personality Assessment,* 42 (1), 290- 294.

Student Wellbeing at Newcastle University. (2019). 'Wellbeing Workshops'. [Online] Student Health and Wellbeing at Newcastle University, UK. Available at: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/students/wellbeing/support/counselling/WellbeingGroups.htm [Accessed 13 May 2019].

Universities UK. (2017). '#stepchange'. [Online] Universities UK, UK. Available at: https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/stepchange/Pages/default.aspx [Accessed 13 May 2019].