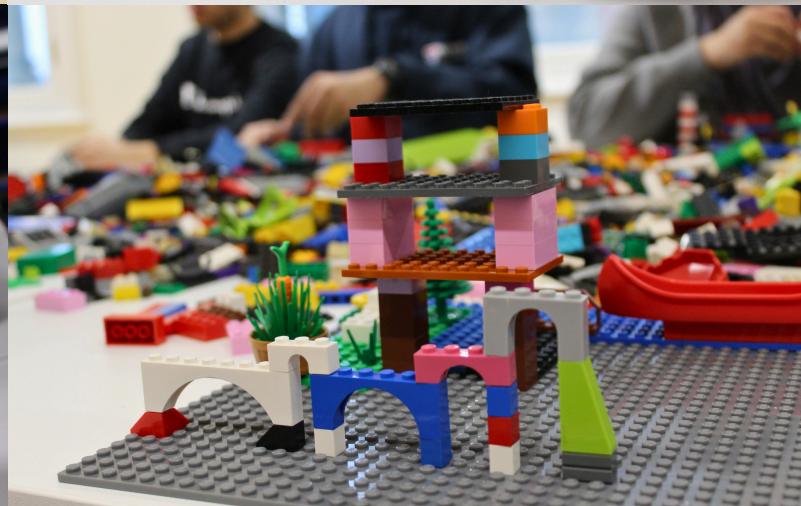


July 2025

Get Creative

Evaluation Report

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Executive Summary

Get Creative was a project funded by the Catherine Cookson Foundation, trialling approaches to improving the wellbeing of first and second year undergraduate students, thereby helping to create a sense of belonging and enabling them to make progress and succeed. Drawing on the NHS's 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing, workshops were developed that incorporated cultural and heritage resources from Newcastle University's Special Collections and Archives focused on a particular theme. Participating students used these as inspiration for activities led by specialist creative practitioners in one of the University's cultural venues.

Impact on student mental health

There is a gap in current provision regarding a creative offer for students. International and postgraduate students are particularly keen to participate in informal, cost-free creative activities. Participating in creative activities has a positive impact on wellbeing and provides students with an opportunity to make friends, relax and take necessary time out from their studies. There is also evidence of a positive impact on motivation.

Student Health and Wellbeing Service

Having Student Health and Wellbeing counsellors present at the workshops raised awareness of, and personalised, the services offered by the University, and as a preventative offer Get Creative has the capacity to reduce the strain on other Wellbeing services like counselling.

Student interactions

The Get Creative workshops that brought students together from across subject disciplines and year groups were considered effective and students spoke positively of the mixed nature of the groups. The Get Creative Anatomy workshops where the archival resources and creative activity focused on anatomy, and where only medical students took part, had positive social and study-related impacts.

Special Collections and Archives

The inclusion of resources from Special Collections and Archives as a stimulus for the Get Creative workshops was not typically the main attraction for those attending, although it did add significantly to the students' overall positive experience.

Cultural Venues

Holding workshops in the University's cultural venues and providing curated tours raised awareness of their offer, resulting in students being more likely to visit again and

developing a positive sense of place. This is particularly important for international students who 'can face unique challenges relating to isolation, integration and cultural expectations' (Lewis and Stiebahl).

Project team

The collaborative planning of the project by the project team representing Library Education Outreach, the Student Health and Wellbeing Service, the Great North Museum: Hancock, the Farrell Centre, the Hatton Gallery and academics from the School of Medicine was crucial to the project's success.

Ways forward

There is a need for free creative activities to be offered to students and when they take place there is a positive impact on wellbeing and the potential to reduce strain on other vital University services. There is also evidence to suggest students can benefit from engaging with cultural venues and that cultural venues can benefit from students visiting their spaces.

1 Project overview

Get Creative was a pilot project funded by the Catherine Cookson Foundation, trialling approaches to improving the wellbeing of first and second year undergraduate (UG) students, thereby helping to create a sense of belonging and enabling them to make progress and succeed. The project was developed by a team made up of representatives from Newcastle University Library's Education Outreach team, the Student Health and Wellbeing Service (SHWS), the Great North Museum: Hancock (GNM), the Hatton Gallery and the Farrell Centre. They were later joined by academics from the School of Medicine.

Drawing on the NHS's 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing,¹ workshops were developed that would incorporate cultural and heritage resources from Newcastle University's Special Collections and Archives focused on a particular theme. Participating students would use these as inspiration for activities led by creative practitioners that took place in one of the University's cultural venues – the Hatton Gallery, the Great North Museum: Hancock, or the Farrell Centre. These creative activities were intended to foster social connection as well as connection to the University, the wider city and the North East by introducing the students to the venues and their collections.

This pilot built on earlier iterations of the Get Creative project that started during the pandemic and took place solely at Newcastle University Library (i.e. they did not involve the cultural venues). These earlier iterations were for students in any subject, aiming to support students' wellbeing through encounters with Special Collections and creative wellbeing activities. They were then adapted specifically for medical students by Education Outreach and academics from the School of Medicine, this time centred on the theme of anatomy. These workshops have been running since 2022.

A further series of Get Creative anatomy-themed workshops for Medicine students was separately funded by the Catherine Cookson Foundation in 2024-25 at the same time as Get Creative. Survey data collected from these workshops has been included in the findings of this report in order to draw on the learning of all of the Get Creative workshops that have taken place throughout the academic year.

Delivery across the project can be considered as four distinct strands with different methodologies, and the anatomy-themed workshops are considered as one of these strands for the purposes of this report. This has enabled comparisons to be made in relation to the planning process, workload, delivery and impact.

¹ NHS 5 Steps to Mental Wellbeing: Connect with other people; Be physically active; Learn new skills; Give to others; Pay attention to the present moment (mindfulness)
<https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/self-help/guides-tools-and-activities/five-steps-to-mental-wellbeing/>

- **Strand 1**
Get Creative workshops: opt-in (offered to all students across all faculties)
- **Strand 2**
Get Creative workshops: referral via counsellors within the Student Health and Wellbeing Service
- **Strand 3**
Get Creative Drop-ins
- **Strand 4**
Get Creative Anatomy workshops: opt-in (offered to students in the School of Medicine)

1.1 Strand 1: Get Creative workshops - opt-in (all students across all faculties)

Students would be asked to sign up for any individual sessions from six activities. The workshops each had twelve spaces available, and six of the twelve spaces for each workshop were allocated for opt-ins.

Culture and heritage link (archival resources)	Creative wellbeing activity	NU heritage/cultural venue
Poetry and creative writing archives	Journalling and paper art workshop	Library and Hatton Gallery
Stained glass archive and Thomas Bewick images	Stained glass workshop	Library and Great North Museum: Hancock
Trevelyan archive and Thomas Bewick images	Printmaking workshop	Library and Farrell Centre
Local Illustrations	Watercolour painting workshop	Library and Hatton Gallery
Sir Terry Farrell archive	Lego building workshop	Library and Farrell Centre
Nature and coastal images	Mosaic tile workshop	Library and Great North Museum

1.2 Strand 2: Get Creative workshops - Referral via counsellors within the Student Health and Wellbeing Service

The remaining six spaces in the workshops outlined in the previous section would be allocated to students personally referred by counsellors from the Student Health and

Wellbeing Service. They would focus on students who it was considered would benefit from making social connections with others.

1.3 Strand 3: Get Creative Drop-ins

Two drop-in creative activities would take place in the Philip Robinson Library. Each participant would be able to take away something that they have created and contribute to a larger group piece which would be put on display in the Library.

1.4 Strand 4: Get Creative: Anatomy workshops - opt-in (School of Medicine)

Six workshops would be offered to Medical students studying anatomy in the School of Medicine. These would take place in the Philip Robinson Library and would draw on specific historical anatomical texts ranging from late 14th century to mid-19th century.

Date	Creative wellbeing activity	Location
Oct-24	Printmaking	Library
Nov 24 & Feb-25	Stained glass	Library
Jan-25	Watercolour painting	Library
Feb-25	Watercolour painting	Library
Mar -25	Embroidery	Library

2 Why was this project needed?

Students with a mental health condition 'are more likely to withdraw from courses, or to underachieve, and are less likely to progress' (Universities UK, 2024). A recent research briefing published by the House of Commons Library (April 2025) highlights that 'the number of [university] students with a mental health condition has almost quadrupled in the decade to 2023/24' (Lewis and Stiebahl, p. 9). The briefing identifies a range of factors that contribute to this, including 'moving away from home, academic and financial pressures, and the absence of familiar social and emotional support networks (*ibid* p. 5). For students studying Medicine, the literature reports particular health and wellbeing concerns as well as particular stressors associated with learning anatomy, especially in the dissection room (Bergmann et al: Klein and McCarthy; Plaisant et al and Romo Barrientos et al.).

Universities are therefore taking the matter of student mental health seriously, with the majority (including Newcastle University) committing to the University Mental Health Charter developed by Student Minds. It is within this context and because of these priorities that the Get Creative project was developed.

3 Evaluation approach

3.1 Approach

An evaluation was conducted that aimed to explore the following research questions:

- 1) Is there a need to provide students with creative activities that encourage the positive development of wellbeing (particularly UGs in Stages 1 and 2)?
- 2) What impact does participation in the creative wellbeing activities have on the students who take part?
- 3) Of the four methods of delivery trialled, which is/are the most effective and why? (taking into account the impact on students, attendance and logistical management)
- 4) Does the fact that the creative activity takes part in the University's cultural venues have any impact? (e.g. increased visibility of the venue, student enjoyment, tour attendance)

3.2 Methods

In order to answer these questions, both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were adopted that ranged from quick feedback (e.g. exit ball poll at the drop-ins), to in depth 1:1 interviews with a sample of students. The aim was to collect robust data that would enable the research questions to be addressed. The interview data and open survey responses were analysed thematically adopting the approach developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This report also includes data collected by the School of Medicine in the form of an optional survey which was distributed after each workshop. This contained a series of 7-point Likert scale questions and opportunities for open responses.

Method	N=
Pre-project interviews with student experience consultants by project team member	3
Student survey (post-workshop)	36
Student interviews	3 full interviews plus brief talks with 32 students during the workshops and drop-ins
Observations of workshops and drop-in field notes	7 (researcher), 2 (project team member)
Drop-in exit polls (ball count)	23
Interviews with project team members from GNM and Student Health and Wellbeing Service	2
Survey data collected by the School of Medicine	21
Project planning/evaluation meetings field notes	6

3.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval for the evaluation of the project was obtained from the School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Strands 1, 2 and 3) and the Faculty of Medical Sciences Research Ethics Committee (Strand 4).

4 Findings: Get Creative workshops (strands 1 and 2 – opt-in and referrals)

Drawing on learning from previous projects, three UG students were employed as Student Experience Consultants at the start of the project. They were interviewed to ensure that the content of the workshops would be relevant and accessible and to consider how they should be advertised. This shaped the language that was used and the channels the workshops were marketed through. The six workshops were thus advertised via a range of channels, including emails sent by the school-based Student Wellbeing Advisors (SWAs), several academics, Canvas announcements, campus messaging screens, and the Library's social media.

The workshops that took place all followed the same format. The participants were brought together in the Collaborative Learning Space in the Philip Robinson Library where they were introduced the member of the Education Outreach team who would be hosting the session, and a representative from the Student Health and Wellbeing Service who also took part in the workshop alongside the students. Archival material from the University's Archives and Special Collections that was linked to the creative

activity by theme and/or technique was then made available for the students to look at (see p. 7).

The students then walked over to the venue that was hosting the creative activity. These activities were led by a range of creative practitioners and required different amounts of input depending on the complexity of the activity. For example, the journaling (paper folding) activity that was observed necessitated continuous demonstrations. In contrast, the Lego session involved little demonstration. At the end of each session, a tour of the venue was offered.

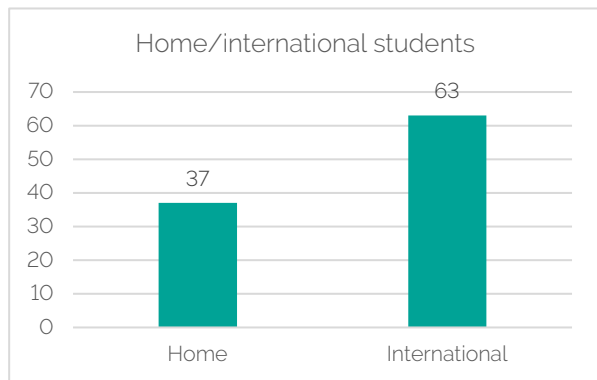
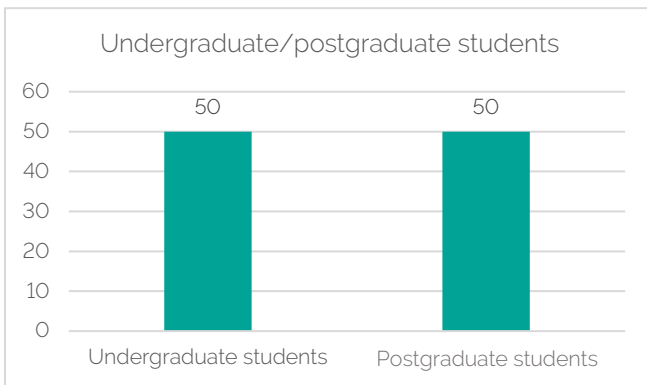
4.1 How did the students hear about the workshops?

Survey responses evidenced that emails from the Student Wellbeing Advisors was the most common way that the students found out about the workshops. This email provided a link to the Student Health and Wellbeing Service workshop sign-up page. Each workshop was fully booked (12 students) and had waiting lists. Attendance on the day ranged from six (during the strike period) to 12. The waiting list system relied on a student who could not attend emailing SHWS in advance, but this system did not work effectively.

The direct referral route whereby SHWS counsellors would recommend a workshop to individuals in their care proved to be too challenging, particularly at the time of year that the workshops were first being offered. With these starting in October/November, it was too early for counsellors to have identified students who might benefit.

4.2 Who took part? (demographic data)

Whilst the initial aim of the project was to provide workshops intended for Stage 1 and 2 undergraduate students, the demographic data provided in the surveys evidenced an exact split between undergraduate and postgraduate students taking part. What became increasingly clear as each workshop took place was that a significant number of the participants were international (63%), of which 25% were undergraduates and 75% postgraduates. As one of the interviewees observed, *'quite a few seemed to be international students so they need to have a place where they can find other people or to have a hobby'*. Of the UG students, 47% were in Stage 1, 26.5% in Stage 2 and 26.5% in Stage 3. Of the PG students, 33% were in Year 1, 47% in Year 2 and 20% in Year 3.



During the interviews, the participants all stated that they enjoyed the fact that there were students in the workshops *'from different courses and different year groups'* and that they considered this to be a positive feature. When asked if they saw any benefits in having subject-focused workshops where they would be working alongside others studying their subject (i.e. like the School of Medicine), all stated that they thought this would also be effective too, potentially attracting more participants.

Many students attended several workshops and the drop-ins.

4.3 Why did students take part?

When asked why they signed up for a workshop, the students who completed the survey cited an interest in the creative activity itself and the opportunity to learn something new, and/or a focus on wellbeing. 56% of the respondents cited a specific wellbeing reason – particularly doing something relaxing that alleviated the stress associated with their studies, as well as the prospect of meeting new people:

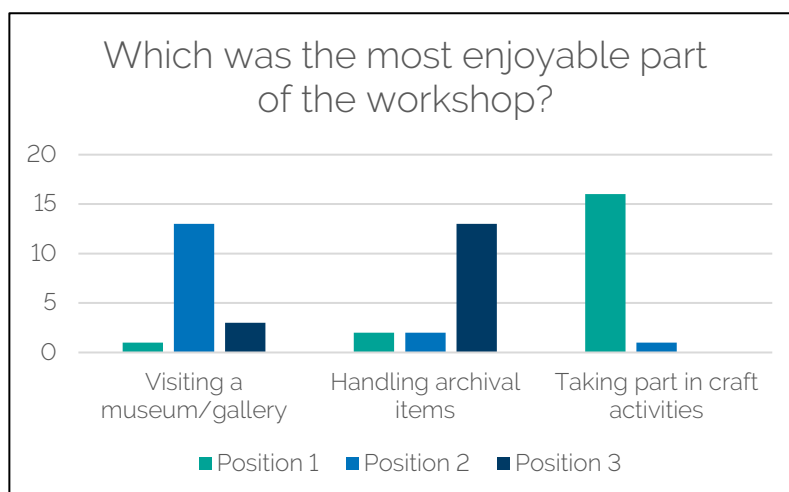
- **Creative activity reason:**
'I really enjoy creative art and I have been meaning to try mosaics' (UG Home student, Stage 1)
- **Wellbeing reason:**
'Mental wellbeing' (UG Home student, Stage 1)
- **Wellbeing reason:**
'I occasionally build Lego sets to relax and loved it as a child. It calms me down' (PG International Student, Year 1)
- **Both:**
'To try something new and meet new people' (UG Home student, Stage 1)

- Both:
'I want to do some activities aside from my research to feel relief from the stress of my work and also try something new' (PG International student, Year 2)

During the interviews, all of the students commented that there are few creative activities on offer for either postgraduate or undergraduate students despite the fact that many enjoy doing creative things. One stated *'I've not see anything like it.'* Another commented: *'I'm not aware [of any activities on campus] and personally I do quite enjoy doing creative activities like this* (UG international student, Stage 2). One student also stated that creative activities often have financial implications and are *'normally pretty expensive and as a student that is quite out of my budget'*. They appreciated the opportunity to do this for free.

4.4 What did students enjoy most and why?

In the survey question where the students were asked to rank the different elements of the workshop according to enjoyment (visiting the museum/gallery, handling the archival items, taking part in the craft activities), it was participation in the creative activity that was ranked first by 94% of the respondents. In contrast, the handling of the archival objects was ranked third by 76% of the respondents.



In light of the main reasons for the sign-ups identified earlier, as well as how it was advertised, the ranking was not unexpected. More nuanced feedback about the impact of Special Collections was obtained via a further question, the results of which are discussed in section 7.

In the open questions, the reasons for the rankings evidenced that taking part in the workshops was enjoyed because it provided the students with the opportunity to be

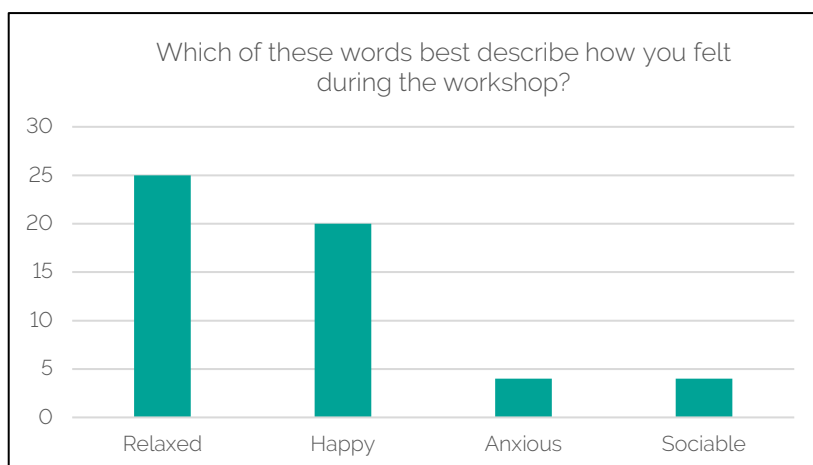
creative and immerse themselves in an activity in a *'safe and comfortable environment'*; to *'relax'*, *'connect with others whilst doing things'* as well as *'meet new people'* and the chance to *'observe Special Collections'*. One UG student commented during an interview that they *'really enjoyed it, and that each week they had 'something to look forward to that was new'*.

4.5 The impact of participation in the workshops on the students' wellbeing

The survey data would suggest that students have a good general awareness of both the importance of wellbeing and who an appropriate contact is at the University should difficulties arise. The role of the School-based Student Wellbeing Advisors appears to be crucial, with the majority of the respondents stating that they found out about the workshops via emails from their SWAs. Additionally, in the interviews all of the students could name their Student Wellbeing Advisor and described meeting them during induction weeks. One stated that if they had a problem they would look up the SWA because *'she's mine'* and so *'I'll go to her'*.

When asked why they had attended the workshops, many students identified wellbeing issues and stated that they were looking for opportunities to alleviate these. Several described how their workloads were difficult. For example, *'The second year has been very stressful. I've got right now four exams and three pieces of coursework'* (UG Home student, stage 2) and *'The stuff was a good way to get away from work'* (PG Home student, Year 2). Many students described having just completed assignments and needing a break before starting the next one. Others described a desire to make friends and meet new people.

When asked in the post-workshop survey which word best described how they felt during the workshops, 'relaxed' and 'happy' were predominantly selected. One of the students who stated 'anxious' qualified this as relating to being able to complete the creative piece on time. This would suggest that participation had a positive impact on wellbeing.



One UG home student stated in the survey that the workshop had provided them with the opportunity to *'forget [their] worries'*. During the interviews, two students commented on the positive impact that making time for themselves had on stress, or as one described it, when they felt *'mentally overwhelmed'*. They both stated that taking this time out results in achieving more. For example, *'I think the benefits were having time to allocate to yourself and learning something, because you can't really think about other things when you're trying to figure out how to learn something new. And I like that'* (UG Home student, stage 2).

One commented that they were surprised by the impact that taking part in the workshop had on his motivation to do work: *'But then the creative side, oddly enough, I came out of it quite refreshed if that makes sense. I had some kind of peak motivation straight after it, doing work. And I don't know if that's because you're doing something creative and it's shut your brain down then it starts back up. It shocked me how much the creative side I actually felt "oh that was quite good"'* (PG Home student, Year 2).

Interestingly, one of these students continued with mindfulness activities after attending the journaling workshop: *'After I did the journaling one with the origami, then I bought an origami book that has paper inside, but you can rip off and start to fold with instructions'* (UG Home student, Year 2).

It was observed by the evaluator that in those activities where more input from the creative practitioner was required, less talking occurred between the participants during the actual workshops. Interestingly, where only a small group took part (due to turnout), this proved to lead to more conversation as one of the participants described: *'People definitely worked on their own pieces, but there was a conversation going on in the background [...], it was kind of like a commentary on our own pieces and just stuff going on in people's lives'* (UG international student, Year 2).

The students who were interviewed considered that the opportunities to talk, but also be quiet and concentrate, were appropriate in the workshops and that the tour

afterwards often resulted in more chatting. Several survey open comments in response to the question 'What did you enjoy most?' highlighted that the students enjoyed having the chance to meet new people and chat:

- *'Communicating with other people through doing things together'* (PG International Student, Year 2)
- *'Discussing everyone's reasons for their [Lego] builds and everyone was so friendly'* (UG Home student, Stage 2)
- *'Ability to connect with others whilst doing things'* (PG Home student, Year 2)

One PG student who was interviewed described how, although they hadn't spoken to many people during the workshop (they attended the journaling one which required a great deal of demonstration), they recognised one of the participants at a conference they attended a few weeks later and stated *'it gave me the opportunity to talk to her that I don't think I would have done otherwise'*.

The students did not typically approach the counsellors from the Student Health and Wellbeing Service during the workshop, although there was one occasion where a student requested to speak to the counsellor at the end, and they left to find a private place to talk. The general consensus, however, was that it *'was good to have them there'*. One UG international student commented during an interview that the counsellor *'was really nice to talk to'* and that it was *'also nice to be able to see someone from the Wellbeing team directly in person'*.

4.6 Suggested improvements

In terms of improvements that could be made to the workshops, the general consensus across the survey and interview data was that little, if anything, needed to be improved. The following were typical comments:

- *'So it was all kind of like a good atmosphere for that. So I don't think I would change anything or there's anything I dislike'* (PG Home student, Year 2)
- *'Please be more frequent'* (PG International student, Year 2)

Of the few comments where suggestions were made, these were typically of a practical nature. A few related to having longer sessions because *'for creative pieces you do need more time'* and some wanted *'more spaces for others to join'*.

One student stated that they felt that more explicit connections between the actual creative activity itself and the impact on wellbeing could have been made. They cited the journaling example, which it was felt had *'obvious'* potential connections (i.e. as a mindfulness activity), but maybe not to those *'who are quite new to this'*.

5 Findings: Drop-ins

Two Get Creative drop-ins took place in the Philip Robinson Library during December 2024. Again, these were advertised via emails from the SWAs, on campus messaging boards, on Canvas, via social media and on a board in the Library itself whilst the activity was taking place. Each session was facilitated by a creative practitioner.

The first drop-in was an origami session where the students were able to make their own paper stars but also contribute to a larger shape. The second drop-in was a willow weaving session where the students could choose what they made supported by the creative practitioner. 25 students took part over the two drop-ins.

The following findings are based on conversations with 11 students across the two drop-ins and the results of the exit (ball) poll where the students were asked to answer the question 'What impact did attending this workshop have on your day?'. They could choose from four options for their answer: It improved my day a lot; It improved my day a bit; It didn't improve my day much; It didn't improve my day at all.

5.1 How did the students hear about the workshops?

The majority of the students spoken to had received an email via their Student Wellbeing Advisor. One saw it on a campus messaging board and one on Canvas. On the second day, several came along because they had been the day before.

5.2 Who took part?

Of the students spoken to, 64% were undergraduate students with half in Stage 1 of their studies. The postgraduate students who attended were studying for PhDs and Master's. The students represented a range of subject areas including: Business, Finance, Art, Psychology, Mechanical Engineering and Architecture.

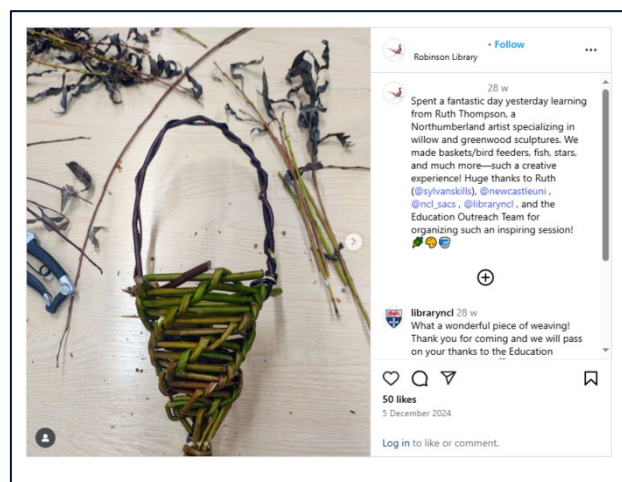
5.3 Why did the students take part?

The students spoken to identified a variety of reasons for taking part. Many talked about '*decompressing*' after completing work deadlines and having '*a breather*'. One Stage 1 student described having '*low moments*' particularly whilst trying to find a house for the second year and they welcomed the opportunity to '*do something different*'. Several students mentioned the creative activity itself as the reason for attending, with many stating that there were few opportunities to do creative things on campus. The drop-ins attracted students studying art who enjoyed taking part in a creative activity for pleasure. Two described how they had just handed in an assignment, had their degree

show next week and wanted to do something to *'de-stress but is still creative'*. One of the international postgraduate Master's students stated they were trying to increase *'the interesting things in my year here'* and that this would create an *'interesting memory'*.

5.4 What impact did it have on the students' day?

The results of the exit poll evidenced that the activity impacted positively on all those taking part with 87% agreeing with the statement 'it improved my day a lot' and 17% that 'it improved my day a bit'. The students described the activities as *'relaxing'* and *'friendly'*. One student posted on Instagram after taking part, describing it as *'such a creative experience'* and an *'inspiring session'*.



An Instagram post referring to the willow weaving drop-in.

5.5 Observations from the project team and evaluator

The numbers attending the drop-ins were generally lower than anticipated, with students tending *'to stay for a long time rather than "dropping in" in the conventional sense'* (project team member notes). There were opportunities for the project team members to signpost information to students about the Wellbeing service and heritage venues, and one student was directed to a Student Wellbeing Advisor. The atmosphere at each drop-in was relaxed and friendly and there were many examples observed of students chatting to one another about their courses and helping each other, despite not knowing each other.

6 Findings: Get Creative Anatomy (Strand 4 – School of Medicine)

The six workshops were advertised via email to all Stage 1, Stage 2 and A101 (accelerated) Medical students, with Personal Tutors signposting the sessions to any students they thought were struggling. This resulted in 123 signups. Numbers were limited however to 20 per workshop. The workshops were designed to change the students' perspectives of anatomy, encouraging them to see it as creative and also to begin to consider it within a historical context.

Each workshop followed the same structure. The students arrived at the Philip Robinson Library and were taken to a seminar space. The session was introduced and expectations outlined. A member of the Student Health and Wellbeing Service was present and made themselves known to the students via introductions and welcomed them to have a discussion about their wellbeing practice throughout the session.

The students started by viewing the historical anatomical texts ranging from the late 14th century to mid-19th century. This included a second edition of Vesalius's 'The fabric of the human body' and lift the flap anatomy books from the 1600s. Following this, the students moved to a different room to engage in the artistic practise having taken inspiration from the texts. This part of the workshop was facilitated by a local creative practitioner. The first workshop was lino printmaking with a creative practitioner from Northern Print and the second workshop was watercolour painting with a creative practitioner from the Hatton Gallery. For the third workshop, a new format was trialled whereby two members of staff from the School of Medicine with experience of embroidery hosted the session.



Get Creative Anatomy workshops, including printmaking and watercolour painting

The workshops were well attended, although drop-outs did occur. Again, the system to contact people on the waiting list did not work effectively as it relied on non-attendees to email in advance. This rarely happened.

6.1 What did the students enjoy?

100% of the survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed with the statement 'I enjoyed the workshop'. When asked in a follow-up open question what they enjoyed, the students highlighted several aspects:

- **The creative activity:**
'I enjoyed making the lino prints, it was nice to craft and find different ways to be creative without being good at drawing.'
'The freedom to experiment with the printing.'
- **The relaxed and friendly environment:**
'The art was fun and the staff really friendly.'
'A lovely atmosphere'
'It was a fun informal way to revise and unwind'
- **The focus on anatomy**
'Anatomy archives'
'I really enjoyed the special works part of the of the workshop.'

The focus on Anatomy as the theme of the workshop was considered by all of the respondents to be important, with 100% of the students answering 'yes' to the question 'Did you like the anatomy theme of this workshop?'. One student stated *'I wouldn't have done it if it wasn't anatomy'*. Students commented that the focus ensured a level of *'familiarity'*, but that it presented the subject in a new light enabling the students *'to appreciate the artistic side of anatomy...and the beauty of it.'*

Several students commented in the survey and during talks with the evaluator that participation in the workshops supported their learning, with one first year student describing it as *'gentle revision'*. Other comments of this nature included *'It was fun drawing out the structure, which has helped me learn them'* and *'I count it as some level of revision on a topic I know, but not on a computer'*.

Several students explained during the workshop that they looked at the texts to see if *'there are things we can recognise'*. One Stage 2 student described how it gave them *'a confidence boost'* when they could label the parts. Having attended several of the Get Creative Anatomy workshops whilst being taught anatomy, this student was also able to see how their knowledge was improving.

Although for many of the students it was the creative activity that *'drew them in'*, several stated that seeing the resources from Special Collections had *'added interest'* and that it was good to see things that *'are normally in a museum'*. One student described the archives as *'cool'*. It was clear that this blend of creativity and subject content was a powerful driver to sign-up for the workshop:

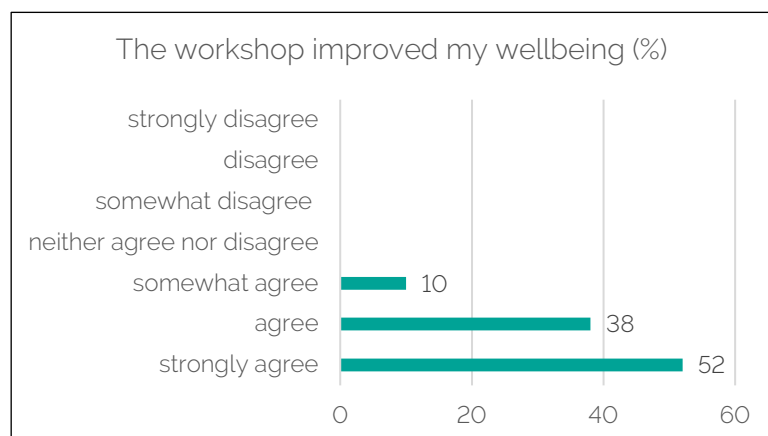
- *'I liked the blend of looking at the books and the art stuff'*
- *'Relevant and familiar to me but still completely different to course work'*

6.2 The impact on Medical students' wellbeing

Several of the survey questions explored the impact of participation in the workshops on the students' wellbeing and of having representatives from the Student Health and Wellbeing Service present.

90% of the students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement 'The workshop improved my wellbeing' and many of the open comments evidenced this as an important impact:

- *'I really liked how distracting the lino printing was and how it occupied my focus and mind - great way to improve and maintain mental wellbeing'*
- *'It was a fun informal way to revise and unwind'*
- *'The crafts did help my wellbeing'*



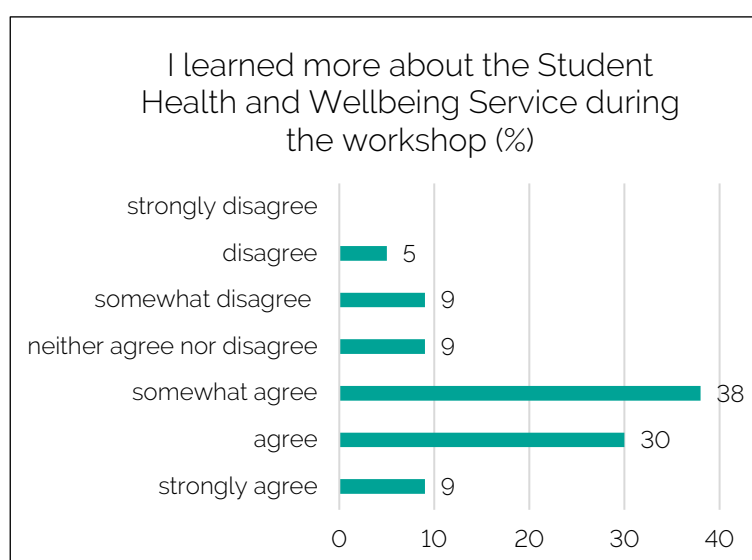
When talking to the students they commented on the social aspect of the workshop, and observations evidenced that there was lots of chatting. Several of the students went with friends, but many went alone in the knowledge that they had the subject matter and their course experience in common. Discussions with the project organisers highlighted that the room layouts and table configurations were changed after several workshops in order to encourage informal conversations and this had a positive effect.

Academics from the School of Medicine, and sometimes staff from Library Education Outreach, also participated in the creative activity and this fostered positive relationships, providing the students with the opportunity to see staff in a more relaxed context. For example, one student commented *'The teacher was lovely, and the staff present were really easy to talk to.'* The final workshop where the creative activity was delivered by staff from the School of Medicine, and attended by several academics,

had a particularly relaxed and friendly atmosphere, possibly due to the already established relationships between staff and students.

In a conversation with a group of students during a workshop, the issue of the lack of such creative opportunities (that they knew of), especially ones that have no cost attached and particularly in the Medical School, was also raised. One student described the fact it was free as a '*massive pull*'.

The majority of the students (77%) agreed to some extent with the statement that through attending the workshop they had learned more about Student Health and Wellbeing, and 57% stated that they would be more likely to contact the service if they needed wellbeing support. It was clear that having someone from the Wellbeing service present, introducing themselves and the service at the start, and providing information had a positive impact.



In terms of feeling able to ask questions about wellbeing during the workshop, 81% stated they felt comfortable to do so, although feedback from the project organisers would suggest this did not happen. One student did comment in the survey that '*it seemed a little bit strange to talk about my wellbeing in a room full of people so that's why I didn't.*'

6.3 Suggested improvements

The students identified very few improvements, but those that were mentioned included:

- having relaxing music in the background,

- having more time to do the creative activities,
- having more opportunities *'to integrate with others'*,
- having a few additional resources from Special Collections added in to each workshop as some students attended multiple sessions and would have liked to see different texts.

6.4 Next steps

The success of the Get Creative Anatomy workshops since 2022 and the continued positive feedback from students has ensured that these will continue into the future. Steps are also being taken to extend the creative aspect of the project into activities in the Dissection room, which has been shown to cause anxiety for a significant number of students. It is hoped that through providing activities like watercolour painting in the room, it will reduce any negative feelings that students may associate with the space. This is being trialled in the 2025-2026 academic year.

7 Findings: Impacts on the cultural venues

The three participating cultural/historical venues (Great North Museum: Hancock, Hatton Gallery and the Farrell Centre) were keen to take part in the project because of a desire to engage with more university students than is currently the case. The team members representing the venues all commented that they struggle to attract students to visit their space and take part in events, other than those who are studying subjects linked in some way. For example, students studying Museum Studies, Archaeology or Biology may visit the GNM, Fine Art students may visit the Hatton Gallery and Architecture students may visit the Farrell Centre. One PG History student spoke of how one of their lecturers had pointed out the Hatton Gallery *'because I was doing a Jarrow Crusades module at the time and I think he pointed out in terms of culture in the North East of England and how it's changed since the 1930s'*.

The workshop survey responses evidenced that, whilst the majority of students were aware of the existence of the Farrell Centre (87.5%) and GNM (75%), only 43% knew about the Hatton Gallery. Despite this awareness, however, the number who had actually visited the venues was extremely low. One student commented: *'I've been meaning to visit the museum since I moved to Newcastle, but I keep forgetting it's here'*.

Cultural venue	Had you visited this venue before you took part in the workshop?	
	Yes	No
Farrell Centre	12.5%	87.5%
Great North Museum: Hancock	50%	50%
Hatton Gallery	29%	71%

The fact that the workshops took place in a venue and were followed by a post-workshop tour appears to have had a positive impact on the students. The tour take-up rate was high, with frequently all of the participants attending the tour. As a result of this, when asked if they would visit again, 89% of students stated that they would with 11% stating 'maybe' (see Appendix 4 for question responses by venue).

The open comments highlight that the tours in particular had a positive impact on students wanting to visit again as it made them aware of what was on offer:

- [Hatton Gallery](#)

'The building looks beautiful...I want to know more about here' (PG International Student, Year 2)

- [GNM](#)

'The exhibitions look beautiful and I would love to see the planetarium' (UG Home student, Stage 1)

- [Farrell Centre](#)

'It looks very cool, very different to the city centre. Full of colours.' (UG International Student, Stage 3)

Of the three students interviewed, two had already returned to the venues after taking part in a workshop and tour. One had been with friends to the GNM: *'I didn't know the museum existed [...].I went again after that with some friends'* (UG Home student, Stage 2). A second student had been to visit the Hatton Gallery since the workshop and described how previously they had just gone in *'to have a little walk around to kill time'* and never *'to fully experience it'*, but that after the workshop and tour they had been in *'successive times'* and felt *'more compelled to actually look round'* (PG Home Student,

Year 2). The student also explained that they told the students they teach on a Contemporary British History module about the existence of the Hatton Gallery.

Interestingly, this student also talked of the impact that the tour had on their visit, what they described as the '*curating*' of the artworks by the person doing the tour. They described how if they were to look at modern art they would think it was '*pointless*', but '*the fact that someone curated why the person painted what they did, was quite revealing.*' The student stated that the University was '*missing out*' by not doing this more often and said that as their subsequent visits to the Gallery (which were not curated) '*did not feel the same.*'

Several students mentioned how being introduced to the venues enabled them to '*explore more of the history of the North-East*' and '*learn about heritage especially of places where I live*'. This would suggest that the opportunity to experience the cultural venues could have a positive impact on developing a sense of place. This may be particularly important for international students.

8 Findings: Challenges faced by the project team

A variety of challenges were faced during the planning and delivery of the different project strands.

One of the key issues was the difference between the sign-ups for some of the workshops versus attendance on the day. While the sign-up process itself was very successful, particularly in terms of reach, the waiting list system relied on students who did have a place sending an email if they were then unable to attend. This happened very rarely meaning that several of the workshops did not actually have the total number of possible participants in attendance. Assignment deadlines and the effect of strike action may have influenced this, however, had the waiting list system worked effectively this would probably have mitigated against lower numbers of participants. From a cost (resources and the time of the creative practitioners) as well as from an organisational perspective, this was frustrating for the project team.

As the attendance was monitored by a staff member from Student Health and Wellbeing who was not present during the actual workshops and there was not always a register available, project team members found it challenging to confirm whether those students arriving at the workshops had signed up and confirmed their place.

The workload associated with organising the Get Creative Anatomy workshops was found to be particularly challenging at times for those academics in the School of Medicine for whom this was an additional activity over and above their teaching and research commitments.

9 Conclusion

The findings from across all of the project strands have identified a need for creative activities to be provided to students that enable them to come together in a relaxed and informal environment. The students who attended the workshops and drop-ins all stated that they enjoyed taking part and that the workshops positively impacted on their wellbeing. The evaluation highlighted that there are currently few opportunities to participate in such activities that students know of, despite the fact that many students come to university having a creative background/hobbies even if they are not studying what they consider '*creative subjects*' now. Creative activities that are offered by outside organisations are typically cost-prohibitive for many students.

Attendance at the opt-in workshops and drop-ins by a high percentage of international students evidenced a clear need to provide activities for this demographic, particularly activities that do not involve alcohol. Research has highlighted that 'international students can face unique challenges relating to isolation, integration, cultural expectations, and concerns about funding' (Lewis and Stiebahl p.14). The findings from the evaluation would suggest that the workshops provided opportunities for the international students to be sociable, make friends and develop a sense of place. They also have the potential to act as a gateway to participation in other activities. This exceeded the project team's expectations, as the workshops were originally designed for Stage 1 and 2 undergraduate students.

The make-up of the groups in Strands 1 and 2 (i.e. the mix of UG and PG students, home and international students, and subject areas) was enjoyed by the participants and was particularly appreciated by the international and PG students:

- *'I think the mix is good because normally you do end up speaking to kind of people in your course or like friends you already know. So it's good to like talk different people, see what's going on'* [UG international student, Stage 2]
- *'It kind of worked to bring people together, which I think should be the main aim of it'* [PG Home Student, Year 2]

However, during the interviews the potential for more subject-specific creative activities (like Strand 4: Get Creative Anatomy) was also considered a positive idea: *'I quite enjoyed meeting new people, but it would also be nice to do some things with your friends and your course and do something as part of that'* [UG home student, Stage 2]. Observation of an Anatomy-themed workshop would suggest that having such a focus has positive social and study-related impacts. The academics also acted as role models, demonstrating the importance they placed on taking time out from work and focusing on their own wellbeing.

The students identified a need for activities that enable them to address the stresses related to workload and deadlines. They were aware of the importance of doing things

that impact on their wellbeing and had a good knowledge of the existence of the Student Health and Wellbeing Service and particularly their School-based Student Wellbeing Advisors. Although few students approached the representatives during the workshops or drop-ins, having them present was effective as it raised awareness and personalised the service.

Attendance at the workshops had a positive impact on wellbeing, with students feeling relaxed and happy and some describing later impacts on their motivation. The social aspect of the workshops in terms of talk was influenced by a range of factors:

- The amount of demonstration required (i.e. the need to concentrate)
- The size of the group
- The table layout
- Any pre-established relationships and/or similar course experiences.

Students were generally happy with the balance of quiet and chat.

The cultural/heritage organisations that participated in the project (the Farrell Centre, Great North Museum: Hancock, the Hatton Gallery) all identified a desire to engage with more university students than they currently do in order to create a greater awareness of the cultural offer across the University. The evaluation demonstrated that whilst many students know of the venues, few have visited. A positive impact of the project therefore was that as a result of attending the workshops and tours, the students stated they are more likely to visit in future. Two of the three students interviewed had already done so after the workshops, with one taking friends. Students highlighted the positive impact of the tours and the 'curation' of the spaces, with one student stating that *'I think the university's actually quite missing something, as I've gone in there [Hatton Gallery] successive times after the workshop and it doesn't feel the same when it's not curated'*.

The inclusion of resources from the University's Special Collections as a stimulus for the creative activities was not typically the main attraction for those attending (Strands 1 and 2), although it did add significantly to the students' overall positive experience.



A student uses a photo taken of an archival resource as inspiration for their mosaic tile.

There were also some examples of students directly using the resources as inspiration for their artwork.

For the Medical students (Strand 4), the resources (which related to their subject) were a key attraction, providing a familiar stimulus and the opportunity for '*gentle revision*'. For several of these students, the anatomy focus was the main reason for attending.

The drop-in model of delivery (Strand 3) was the least effective in terms of numbers and therefore its cost-effectiveness, although one student was directed to a Student Wellbeing Advisor and did receive necessary support. It also attracted students from a wide range of stages and subject areas.

Least effective was the direct referral route by counsellors from the Student Health and Wellbeing Service (Strand 2). This was due to a range of factors, including the timing of the workshops in the academic year being so early. This referral route was reviewed by SHWS at the end of the pilot, and it was concluded that Get Creative is more appropriate as a prevention strategy, supported by the SWAs. Students seeking help from counsellors typically require more targeted support.

Some challenges were faced by the project organisers which included the workload associated with the project. The most significant, however, was the drop-out rate at some workshops, which was frustrating in light of the long waiting lists. The sign-up systems for the workshops (Strands 1, 2 and 4) relied on attendees emailing their non-attendance in advance to either SHWS or academics in the School of Medicine, and this rarely happened. A new system for sign-ups for the extension of Get Creative Anatomy using Eventbrite is being trialled in the next academic year. It is hoped that this will have a positive impact on total attendance.

The Get Creative project has been very successful in terms of its original aims. This has been largely due to the collaborative working of the project team, led by Education Outreach. They arranged regular meetings with the representatives from all of the organisations, ensuring that what was planned and delivered drew on the knowledge of all present and met everyone's needs. Any issues were addressed in a timely manner thereby influencing each iteration of the workshops. Although it reached a broader student demographic than originally intended, it has highlighted an even greater need for creative wellbeing activities university-wide.

10 Ways forward

Having established during the evaluation that there is a need for creative activities to be offered to students and that when they take place there is a positive impact on wellbeing; the following section offers some potential ways forward drawing on the findings. The proposals are designed to align with the Newcastle University Education

for life 2030+ strategy,² which has recognised that 'every student arrives at university from a different starting point and takes a different journey through their educational experience' and that there is a need for the University to 'celebrate the wealth of opportunities for students to engage beyond the curriculum' and that more needs to be done 'to articulate this offer'.

The following model is proposed, that outlines activity at different levels with respect to resource/staffing demands and cost. In this model, Newcastle University's Special Collections and Archives joins The Great North Museum: Hancock, The Farrell Centre and the Hatton Gallery as one of the venues. As the pilot evidenced the support provided through Get Creative is not solely relevant for new Stage 1 undergraduates at the University, the Library's Education Outreach team would therefore no longer be involved as this sits outside of their remit.

Intervention	Marketing	Resource / staffing demand	Cost (£)
Cultural/heritage venues (routine offer) Student attends a venue independently. Some resources are provided by the venue that 'curate' the visit.	Emails from SWAs, venues and Personal Tutors	Low	£
Cultural/heritage venues (routine offer) Student attends a pre-scheduled event/takes part in existing volunteering opportunities at a venue.	Emails from SWAs, venues and Personal Tutors.	Low	£
Cultural/heritage venues (curated offer) Student attends a tour of a venue curated by a member of staff. This tour is supported by a Student Wellbeing Advisor/counsellor.	Emails from SWAs, venues, and Personal Tutors, advertising on Canvas, campus messaging screens, personal recommendation by Personal Tutors, SWAs or SHWS counsellors.	Medium	££
Get Creative workshops Student attends one or more Get Creative workshops, working with creative practitioners and venue/School staff. These take place in the venues, or if subject-specific in a subject-relevant space.	Emails from SWAs, venues, and Personal Tutors, advertising on Canvas, campus messaging screens, personal recommendation by Personal Tutors, SWAs or SHWS counsellors.	High	£££

² ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/education/strategy

10.1 The Get Creative model

1. Interventions based on the cultural/heritage venues' routine offer

The cultural/heritage venues develop a collective offer based on activities that they each routinely provide (e.g. workshops, exhibitions, volunteering opportunities etc.). This level of intervention will involve better articulating and advertising the offer to students at Newcastle University and may involve some initial resource creation (e.g. the development of materials for self-led tours that 'curate' the visit). Personal Tutors and Student Wellbeing Advisors would need to be made aware of the activities every year in order to signpost students appropriately.

2. Curated interventions

The cultural/heritage venues develop a collective offer that involves curated tours of the venues for Newcastle University students. These are led by members of staff and are supported by a Student Wellbeing Advisor. The curated tours will introduce students to the venues, their collections and opportunities to further engage. Through the attendance of a SWA, students will be able to meet the people behind the University's Student Health and Wellbeing Services in an informal, relaxed setting.

3. Get Creative – all students

The cultural/heritage venues provide Get Creative workshops that are advertised to all students. These are delivered at key points in the academic year and could include the summer in order to support postgraduate and international students. The stimulus for the creative activity will be collections/exhibitions/archival resources within the venues. The creative activity will be led by a freelance creative practitioner or, if the expertise exists within the venue, by a member of staff. Each workshop will also be attended by a SWA who will introduce the SHWS.

4. Get Creative – subject-specific

The school-based Student Wellbeing Advisors work with academics and representatives from the venues to create subject-specific Get Creative workshops where the stimulus for the creative wellbeing activity links specifically to the subject being studied. The stimulus for the creative activity will be collections/exhibitions/archival resources within the venues. As the School of Medicine workshops evidenced, students attending these have a shared common experience with their peers, which when coupled with the presence of familiar academics and the school's specific Student Wellbeing Advisor helps to build relationships. It is proposed that in the 2025-2026 academic year, two further subject-specific Get Creative projects are planned and delivered, drawing on interest expressed by academics who join the Get Creative Community of Practice (see section 10.3).

10.2 Considerations

It is important to recognise that there will be workload implications for the organisers of the Get Creative collective offer and these need to be formally acknowledged and funded.

The Get Creative workshops have cost implications. At a minimum this includes project team time and the art resources; at its most effective it also includes the cost of the freelance creative artists. Funding for these interventions is therefore required.

The advertising of the Get Creative activities proved to be very successful with all workshops fully booked and with waiting lists. The various methods therefore should continue to be adopted. The sign-up process should be managed via Eventbrite in order to mitigate against non-attendance and ensuring that students on the waiting lists are contacted. This should include reminders being sent to students at regular intervals. Several people across the Get Creative team should have access to the sign-up system.

10.3 Putting the Get Creative model into practice

The collaborative planning of Get Creative has been critical to its success. It is proposed that this continues, with the co-ordination managed by the Student Health and Wellbeing Service. This will involve:

1. Meetings that take place quarterly, chaired by the Student Wellbeing Advisory Team Manager. Representatives from the different cultural venues (Special Collections and Archives, The Great North Museum: Hancock, the Farrell Centre and the Hatton Gallery) and academics from interested Schools within the University (see point 2) will also attend.
2. The team will be extended via the creation of a Get Creative Community of Practice (CoP) and accompanying Get Creative Teams channel where information and ideas can be shared and funding applied for. Initial recruitment to the CoP will take place at the Learning and Teaching Conference in Spring 2026 where the Get Creative model and evaluation findings will be presented.

Ultimately, the priority should be that students have access to cultural venues and creative activities, even if this is just at the minimum intervention level. As this evaluation has shown, it has the capacity to reduce student stress levels, foster positive relationships between students, instil a sense of belonging at Newcastle, and could ultimately prevent students requiring wellbeing support in the future.

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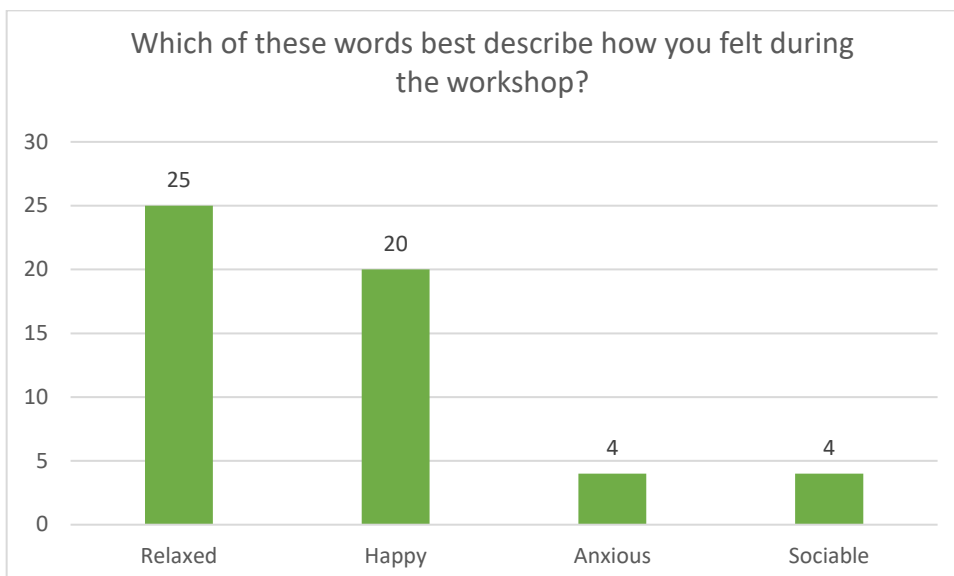
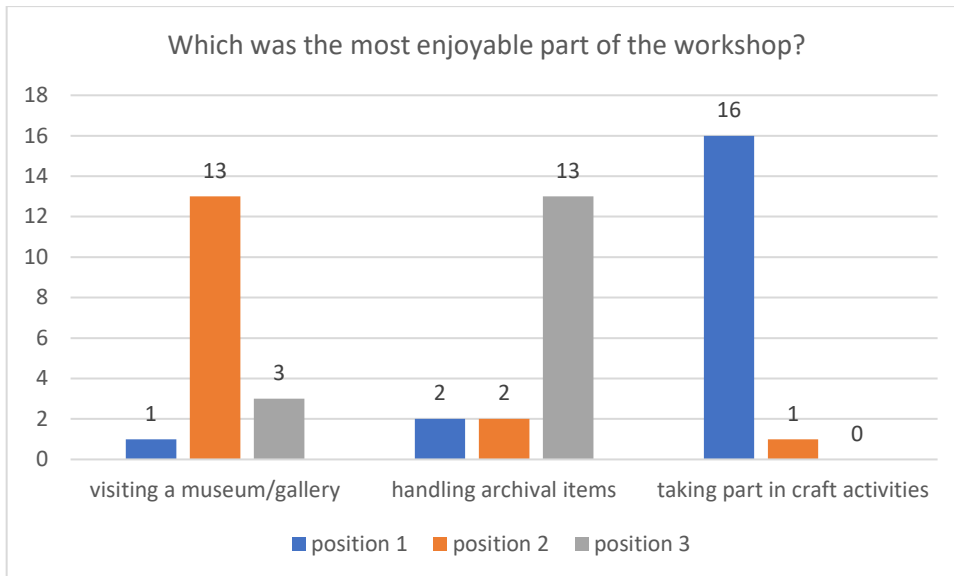
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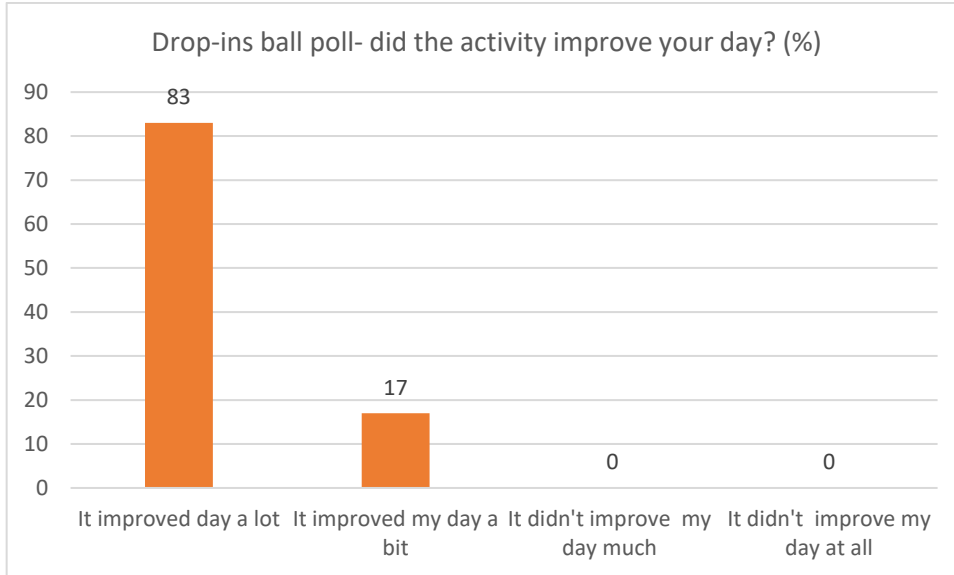
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Appendix

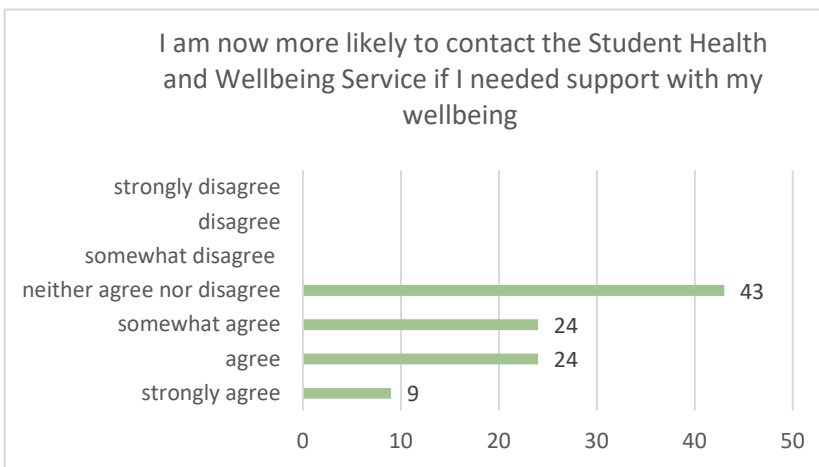
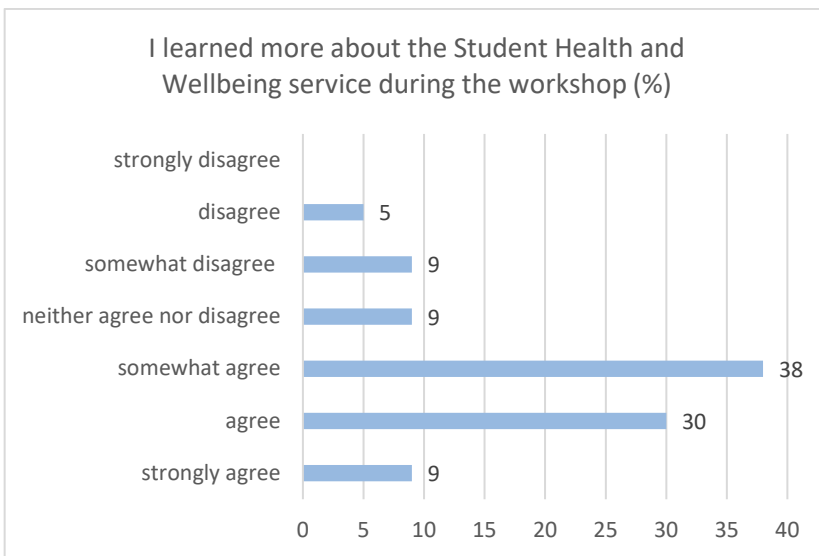
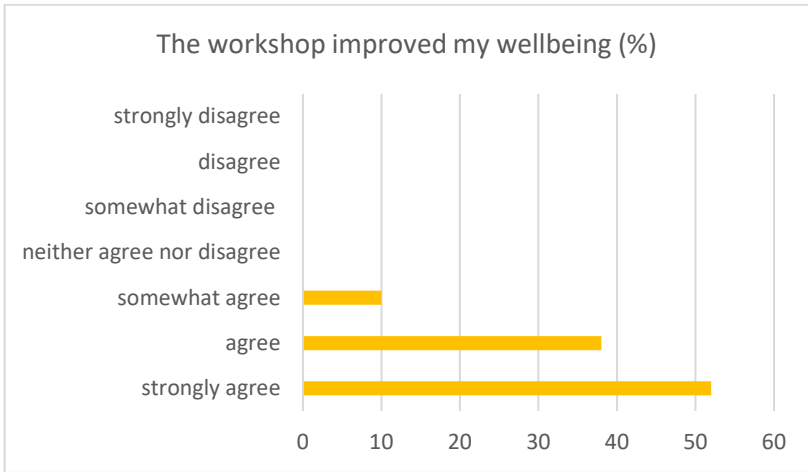
Appendix 1: Wellbeing data (Get creative workshops Strands 1 and 2)



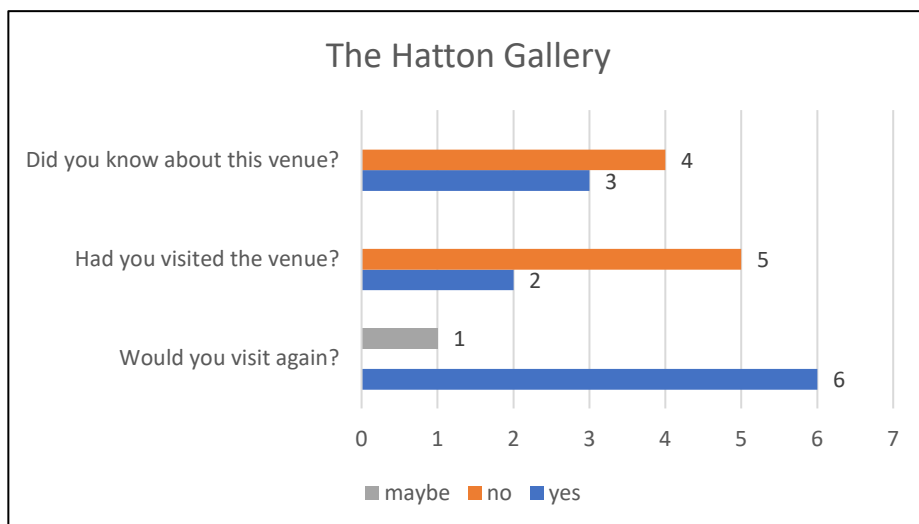
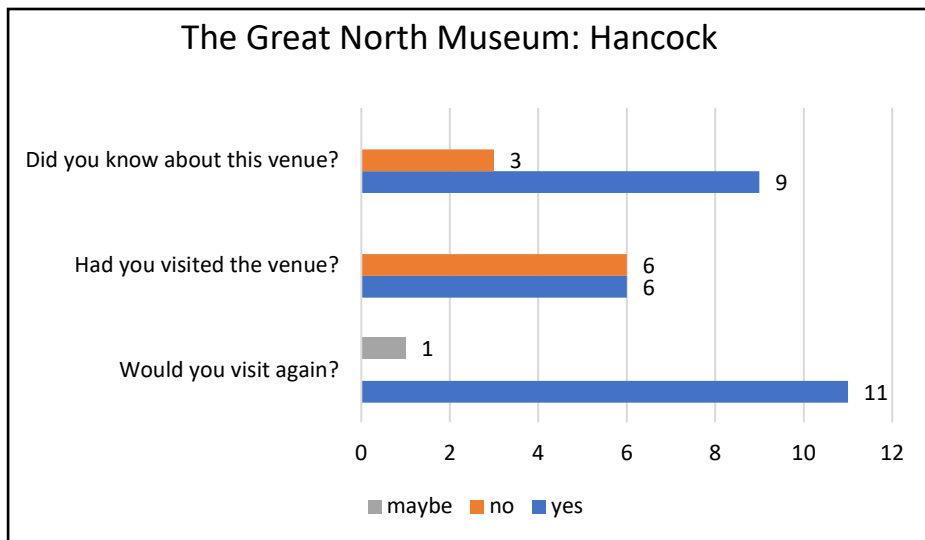
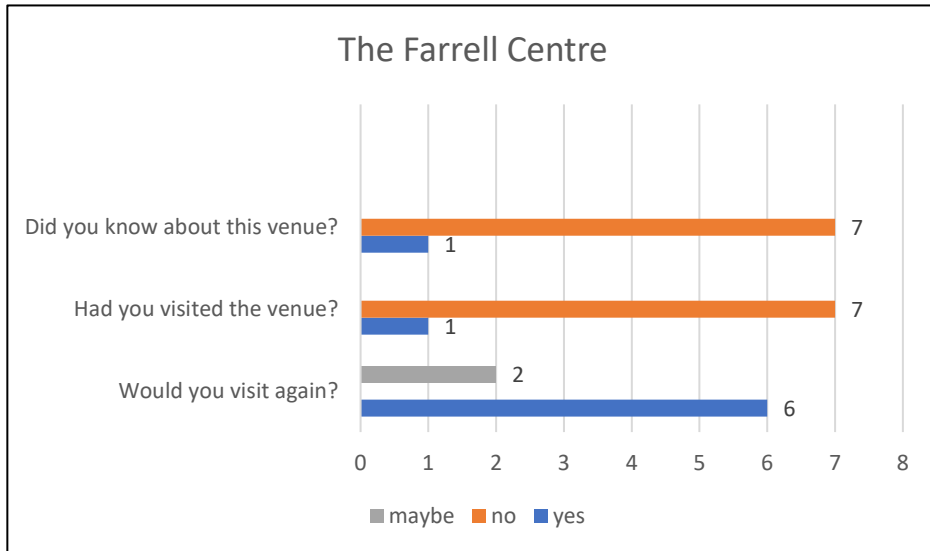
Appendix 2: Wellbeing data- Drop-ins



Appendix 3: Wellbeing survey data (Get Creative: Anatomy)



Appendix 4: Venue visits data



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