



THE UNIVERSITY  
*of* EDINBURGH

# University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Initiative

An Introductory Report



With thanks to:

Enhancing the  
Student Experience



INSTITUTE FOR  
**ACADEMIC  
DEVELOPMENT**

Edinburgh  
University  
**Students'  
Association**



Moray House School of Education

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## Introduction:

'Mindfulness refers to **Kind-Awareness**. It is about living fully in the present moment and is an open accepting way of paying attention to what you are doing, as you do it, moment by moment.

Mindfulness and Compassion based living can really improve the quality of our life and transform the way we think, feel and relate to our experience of day to day living.' *(Dr Avinash Bansode, Honorary Mindfulness Chaplain)*

With the growing interest in mindfulness the University of Edinburgh Chaplaincy has expanded the opportunities for students and staff to have access to well qualified systematic teaching and training in the meditative practice and lived experience of mindfulness. It sits within the Chaplaincy's interest in experiential and academic approaches to well-being, compassion and spirituality, to what heals in body, mind and spirit.

Anyone at the University can benefit from mindfulness. In our student training sessions we have had students coming from every school and discipline. In our staff training sessions we have had professors and domestic staff sitting together.

## Meet the University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Team

### Dr Avinash Bansode - Honorary Mindfulness Chaplain



Avinash has a background and training in Medicine and Buddhism. He has been practising mindfulness since 1992 and has been involved with teaching Mindfulness through the Chaplaincy Centre for eight years. Avinash has a huge interest in mindfulness based approaches towards health and its application in the workplace environment to enhance wellbeing and human potential. Over twenty years, Avinash has practised and resided at various retreat centres in India and UK, and deepened his practice and understanding of Mindfulness and Buddhist Psychology.

In his teachings through, Mindfullybeing ([www.mindfullybeing.co.uk](http://www.mindfullybeing.co.uk)) he brings together both an eastern meditative approach, and western evidence based scientific approach. He calls this 'An Integrated Approach for Well-Being'.

Avinash holds a Postgraduate Certificate in Mindfulness Based Approaches (MBA's) from Bangor University, UK. He delivers and directs mindfulness training for the public and for a wide range of organisations including Scottish Mental Health, NHS Scotland, The University of Edinburgh, Queen Margaret University and various local Charities and Companies.

### Rev Alison Newell - Associate Chaplain



Alison started her tenure as Associate Chaplain at the university in 2011. She is a Church of Scotland minister and a trained counsellor. She is committed to Celtic and earth-centred spirituality and to dialogue with other faiths in seeking peace in the world and a sustainable way forward for our planet. She sits on the board of the Edinburgh Interfaith Association and is the co-founder of the foundation [Heartbeat](http://www.heartbeatjourney.org) [www.heartbeatjourney.org](http://www.heartbeatjourney.org), (a sacred journey towards earth's wellbeing)

Alison's interest in mindfulness began in 2005 in relation to offering spiritual care courses for healthcare practitioners and since then she has helped bring into being the Mindfulness Initiative at Edinburgh University, taught on mindfulness courses for staff and students and offered mindfulness drop ins.

### Dr Amanda Martindale – Lecturer in Sport & Performance Psychology



Amanda has been a lecturer at the University since 2006 having previously studied here as a doctoral student. She is a Chartered Psychologist (Division of Sport & Exercise) and a registered Practitioner Psychologist with expertise in enhancing human performance and creating the conditions for human flourishing. She teaches on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and is a member of the Human Performance Science research group in the Moray House School of Education.

Amanda has been practicing mindfulness since 2013 and has undertaken foundational and follow-on mindfulness training courses. She can facilitate mindfulness training courses, supervise student research projects on mindfulness, and has led the evaluative research on the effects of the University Chaplaincy mindfulness training for students and staff.

## Background to the Mindfulness Initiative:

We have offered Mindfulness at the Chaplaincy for over Eight years. During these years, mindfulness has been an integral feature of the Chaplaincy's service. We started with regular weekly Drop-in's (now offered on Thursdays) which gradually gained interest and popularity from both students and staff members.

As a result, the Chaplaincy began a **Mindfulness Initiative** across the University in 2014/5. We introduced further weekly mindfulness sessions across the vet school, medical school, and Kings Building and then offered a systematic Eight week mindfulness training course for staff.

In 2015, we made a Chaplaincy film called '**On Mindfulness**' [see our video on YouTube.](#)

In the current year 2016, the Chaplaincy offered four Eight week courses for students and staff, one with the support of **EUSA** with funding from the **EUSA Wellbeing Fund** and three others with the help of funding from the **Student Experience Project (SEP)**.

The **SEP** wanted to support the mindfulness initiative and build an evidence base for the future of mindfulness at the University. Evaluative research has been conducted on most of the courses over the last few years. The results are very favourable as can be seen below.

The Chaplaincy has also initiated an **Edinburgh Award in Mindfulness** for students who wish to take this as part of their mindfulness course. Students who have qualified for the award this year will become '**Mindfulness Ambassadors**' 2016/17. Their role is to expand the practice of mindfulness within the University supervised by the Chaplaincy.



## Mindfulness Training:

While there are many possible working definitions of mindfulness, the key aspects of any definition of mindfulness involve:

- Purposeful Action (**Intentions**),
- Focused **Attention**,
- Grounding in the current experience (Here and Now), and all these held with
- A sense of curiosity and openness (**Attitudes**).

Through cultivating mindful and accepting awareness, we discover, appreciate and engage more in our present moment experience. Mindfulness practice cultivates the ability to be in the 'here and now'.

This increased capacity for non-judgmental, present moment awareness offers practitioner choices to respond skilfully and responsibly rather than to react in an automatic fashion to external or internal pressures.

Over time and with regular practice, mindfulness significantly reduces stress and un-necessary suffering and this leads to enhanced human potential, performance, resilience and contentment.

The Chaplaincy Mindfulness Team, (CMT) believes that we all have the capacity for Mindful Awareness and Compassion

## The Case for Mindfulness Training for Students and Staff:

There is reasonably strong evidence for the positive impact of mindfulness on a wide range of mental and physical health conditions, on social and emotional skills and wellbeing, and on learning and cognition.

There is also good evidence from neuroscience and brain imaging that mindfulness meditation reliably and profoundly alters the structure and function of the brain to improve the quality of both thought and feeling (Weare, 2014).

As well as its impact on specific problems, mindfulness has been shown to be capable of having effects on very useful underlying emotional and social skills. These include the ability to feel in control, to make meaningful relationships, to accept experience without denying the facts, to manage difficult feelings, and to be calm, resilient, compassionate and empathic (Baer 2003; Salmon et al, 2004).

Mindfulness has been shown to have an impact too on intellectual skills, improving sustained attention, visuo-spatial memory, working memory, and concentration (Jha et al, 2007; Chambers et al, 2008; Zeidan et al, 2010).

## For Students:

Successful completion of a university degree inevitably involves periods of stress, such as in the run up to examinations that demand particularly high levels of cognitive control, emotional regulation, and self-awareness. The aim of mindfulness training for students is to give students tools to help them remain calm, sustain their attention and to focus more consistently and appropriately in the face of these demands (Weare, 2012). Mindfulness training can offer all students tools that help:

- Students who are performing well to perform even better as well as assisting those who are struggling,
- Minimise the negative effects of stress as and when they occur placing the goal of stress reduction within the normal teaching and learning curriculum,
- To manage low mood/depression and reduce anxiety,
- Maximise general well-being and flourishing, building tools for life such as empathy, self-compassion, emotional resilience and tolerance

## For Staff:

There are currently 13 studies published in peer reviewed journals of mindfulness with educational staff. They include 5 RCTs, 7 control studies, 3 before and after, and one qualitative study. They mostly use self-report methodology, but increasingly include tests of real world performance (Weare, 2014). The findings echo the wider adult and workplace literature on the impact of mindfulness, and show:

- **Reductions in stress**, burnout and anxiety, including a reduction in days off work and feelings of task and time pressure, improved ability to manage thoughts and behaviour, an increase in coping skills, motivation, planning and problem solving, and taking more time to relax.
- **Better mental health** including less distress, negative emotion, depression and anxiety.
- **Greater wellbeing**, including life satisfaction, self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-compassion and sense of personal growth.
- **Increased kindness and compassion** to others, including greater empathy, tolerance, forgiveness and patience, and less anger and hostility.
- **Better physical health**, including lower blood pressure, declines in cortisol (a stress hormone) and fewer reported physical health problems.
- **Increased cognitive performance**, including the ability to pay attention and focus, make decisions and respond flexibly to challenges.
- **Enhanced job performance**, including better classroom management and organisation, greater ability to prioritise, to see the whole picture, to be more self-motivated and autonomous, to show greater attunement to students' needs, and achieve more supportive relationships with them.

## University Chaplaincy Mindfulness-Based Training Programme:

**Overview:** Mindfulness Training is a psychoeducational experiential learning programme based on the core principles of Mindfulness and Compassion. Each session consists of a combination of mindfulness practices, group sharing of experience, and exploration of topics such as mindful awareness, life-work balance, application of practices-teachings in the workplace, and communication.

**Mindfulness for Students and Staff:** The programme is offered in a group setting and guided by a skilled mindfulness teacher as the curriculum unfolds over eight weeks and involves twenty five hours of class room training with teachers.

**Two main components:** Eight weekly sessions of two hours and an All-day session

**Structure and Themes:** The training is offered in a secular way. There are two parts to the training, week I–IV focuses on helping participants cultivate and establish calmness and stability with increased awareness. Week V-VIII focusses entirely on cultivating kindness and compassion for self and others and integrates this into their home and work/university life.

All participants are provided with a course manual and CD's to help guide them in the class and at home. The training unfolds progressively to deeper understanding and learning.

Part A: Cultivating Awareness and Calmness (first half focusses on increasing and establishing awareness, calmness, stability and groundedness)	Week I	Automatic pilot mind
	Week II	Working with challenges
	Week III	Mindfulness of the breath and the body in movement
	Week IV	Staying present
Part B: Cultivating Kindness and Compassion (second half focusses on establishing kindness, compassion, communication skills, and integrating these in everyday life and work situation )	Week V	Learning to respond with compassion
	Week VI	Working with negative thought patterns
	Week VII	How can I best take care of myself and others?
	Week VIII	Living life with mindfulness and compassion

## Practices:

### Formal Mindfulness Practices:

- **Body Awareness :** Developing concentration- connecting mind with the body
- **Sitting Meditation:** Awareness of the breath, restoring balance and clarity, working with thoughts and feelings, Accepting and letting be rather than avoiding and being overwhelmed by your experience.
- **Compassion Meditation:** Cultivating kindness and compassion for self and others.
- **Movement Meditation:** Awareness of your body in movement.
- **Breathing Space:** Short and effective awareness practice.
- **Walking Meditation:** Focusing on the sensations of movements.

### Informal Mindfulness Practices:

- Bringing awareness to something you do on a daily basis.
- Diary for pleasant events and one for unpleasant events – helping to exercise awareness.



## Evaluative Research Findings

### Rationale for Evaluative Research

As introduced above, mindfulness has the potential to help many people to better health and higher functioning; however, the current popularity of mindfulness is outstripping the research base.

The recent *Mindful Nation UK* report by the *Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group* (MAPPG; October, 2015) has outlined that mindfulness training warrants serious attention from policy makers, public services, universities, and researchers to develop the evidence base further see link: [http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/images/reports/Mindfulness-APPG-Report\\_Mindful-Nation-UK\\_Oct2015.pdf](http://www.themindfulnessinitiative.org.uk/images/reports/Mindfulness-APPG-Report_Mindful-Nation-UK_Oct2015.pdf)

The University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Team were interested to establish the effects of the 8-week mindfulness training courses (which were designed, developed, and delivered as part of the University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Initiative) for students and staff. This research was led by Dr Amanda Martindale (Lecturer in Sport & Performance Psychology).

### Research Findings for Students

#### Introduction

In Feb-March 2016 the University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Team (CMT) ran an 8-week mindfulness training course for Edinburgh University students which was subsidised by the **EUSA Mental Health and Well-Being Fund**. This course was organised and set-up by David Ryan and Sam Kellerhals (student representatives of the Mental Health & Well-Being Society) and was designed, developed, and delivered as part of the University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Initiative. This student mindfulness course was the *first of its kind* at the University of Edinburgh and went on to win the **EUSA Impact Award for Best Student-Staff Collaboration 2016**. This was followed in May-June 2016 by a second 8-week Mindfulness training course for Moray House School of Education postgraduate students which was subsidised by the **Student Experience Project**.

#### Research Ethics & Objectives

Following ethical approval from the Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee, course participants voluntarily completed measures of *mindfulness, perceived stress, resilience, self-compassion, and compassion for others* before and after the training course.

#### Results

The results of the Feb-March 2016 cohort revealed some very promising findings, including **significant improvement in mindfulness ( $p < .001$ ), resilience ( $p < .001$ ), and self-compassion ( $p < .001$ ), and a significant reduction in perceived stress ( $p < .001$ )**. There was no difference in *compassion for others* pre and post training; however, it should be noted that the mean score for this construct was already very high prior to the training course commencing (mean 4.02 on a 1-5 scale).

These results were supported by the data collected from the May-June 2016 Moray House postgraduate cohort, which again revealed some promising findings, including **significant improvement in mindfulness ( $p < .05$ ), and self-compassion ( $p = .008$ ), and a significant reduction in perceived stress ( $p = .014$ )**. The findings were approaching significance for an improvement in resilience ( $p = .057$ ). There was little change in *compassion for others* pre and post training; however, it should be noted that again the mean score for this construct was already very high prior to the training course commencing (mean 3.99 on a 1-5 scale).

## Summary

These findings suggest that systematic mindfulness training which was designed, developed, and delivered as part of the Mindfulness Initiative by the University CMT, can lead to very promising effects on University student health and functioning. The *Mindful Nation UK* report encourages the development and implementation of mindfulness programmes for students to **improve academic attainment and results, address the deepening anxiety around the mental health of students**, and to support the growing interest in **character-building and resilience** which cover a range of **non-academic skills and capabilities**, and which have been identified as a policy priority by all the major parties.

## Research Findings for Staff

### Introduction

In May-June 2015 the University Chaplaincy Mindfulness Team (CMT) ran an 8-week mindfulness training course for University academic and professional staff which was subsidised by the **Institute for Academic Development**. This staff mindfulness course was the *first of its kind* at the University of Edinburgh. This was followed in May-June 2016 by a second 8-week mindfulness training course for University academic and professional staff which was subsidised by the **Student Experience Project**.

### Research Ethics & Objectives

Following ethical approval from the Moray House School of Education Ethics Committee, course participants voluntarily completed measures of *mindfulness, perceived stress, resilience* (plus *self-compassion* and *compassion for others* for the 2016 cohort) before and after the training course. Seedcorn funding from the **Moray House School of Education** was awarded to obtain qualitative data as a 1-year follow-up to the 2015 cohort, and these participants voluntarily completed a social validation interview.

### Results

The quantitative results revealed some very promising findings from the 2015 cohort, including **significant improvement in mindfulness ( $p < .001$ ) and resilience ( $p = .016$ )**, and a **significant reduction in perceived stress ( $p = .001$ )**. Qualitative analysis indicated that **increased awareness, increased resilience, and an increased ability to take care of oneself** has led staff to **enhanced wellbeing, enhanced self-regulation, enhanced relationships with others, and enhanced professional development**.

These results were supported by the data collected from the 2016 cohort, which again revealed some promising findings, including **significant improvement in mindfulness ( $p < .02$ ), resilience ( $p = .013$ ), and self-compassion ( $p = .012$ )** and a **significant reduction in perceived stress ( $p = .005$ )**. There were no differences in *compassion for others*; however, this construct was already high prior to the course commencing (mean 4.04 on a 1-5 scale).

### Summary

These findings suggest that the systematic mindfulness training which was designed, developed, and delivered as part of the Mindfulness Initiative by the University CMT can lead to very promising effects on University staff health and functioning. The *Mindful Nation UK* report encourages the development and implementation of mindfulness programmes for staff in the public sector to **combat stress and improve organisational effectiveness**. This is especially true in the University workplace where there is a need to **tackle the rising cost of absenteeism due to stress**, alongside the need to **boost productivity**. It is also likely that increasing staff mindfulness levels would have a positive impact on **increasing the quality of the student experience**.

## Current Activities

During the academic year 2016/17, the Chaplaincy is delivering;

- Regular mindfulness drop-in sessions,
- Three mindfulness courses for students (funded by the Student Experience in partnership with EUSA)
- One mindfulness staff course
- Expansion of the existing mindfulness ambassador programme.

**Detailed Programme: All Sessions take place in Room 1, Chaplaincy Centre EH8 9AL**

- Drop-In Sessions: Every Thursday, 1.10 – 1.50 pm
- Drop-In Sessions: Every Tuesday 1.10 -1.50 pm Mindful movement (Capacitar Tai Chi)
- Student 8 week Mindfulness and Compassion course: 3rd Nov to 15th Dec and final session 19th Jan (10.30am -12.30pm)
- Student 8 week Mindfulness Course: Jan 26th to 16th March (10.30am -12.30pm)
- Staff mindfulness course: May 4th to 22nd June (12-2pm)

In our work we are collaborating with EUSA, including hosting lectures, participating in mental health week, offering wellbeing programmes and supporting the Wellbeing Society.

We are also engaging with IAD and the Compassion Initiative at the University.

## What We Offer

### A. Taster Session:

This includes an interactive hour and a half presentation on Mindfulness, offering an insight into what it is and how it works. We explore the potential benefits for staff/ students and applications of mindfulness. It gives you direct experience of meditation practice and knowledge of its integration at work and home.

### B. Courses:

- **Basic Foundation Mindfulness Eight Week Training:**
- **Basic Mindfulness and Compassion Eight Week Training:**

Foundation Training helps you to systematically develop the skill of being present with your experience. It helps you to take better care of yourself and get the most out of your life.

The training is offered in a group setting and guided by skilled mindfulness teachers. The class meets once a week for two hours and is a combination of mindfulness and compassion practices, group sharing and exploration of topics such as mindful awareness, life-work balance, application of practices in the workplace and at home. Each participant engages in 20-30 minutes of mindfulness practice daily between classes to foster the development of the new habit of mindfulness and compassionate living. In addition, there is an All Day Session of practice.

## Contact Details:

For more information/ enquiries/ details of costs please contact: Rev Alison Newell, Associate Chaplain

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Please note that Alison works Tuesdays to Fridays 09:00-17:00.