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PROMOTING WELLBEING THROUGH THE UNIVERSITY PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT



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INTRODUCTION



- The University Mental Health Charter (UMHC; Student Minds, 2024) highlights the physical environment as integral to staff and student wellbeing
- Post-COVID, universities have seen shifts in estate use (e.g., hybrid working, open-plan offices, reduced investment)
- The impact of these changes on wellbeing is not yet fully understood

AIM



- To explore how the design, use, and management of university spaces influences wellbeing, in order to support universities to meet the Charter principles

METHODS



- Qualitative online survey (n = 129 staff)
- Focus groups (n = 17 staff across four groups)
- Thematic analysis

RESULTS



- 1** The university's physical environment must be **practically fit for purpose**
- 2** **Sensory experiences** impact interactions with the physical environment
- 3** Access to **natural and green/blue space** is highly valued by staff
- 4** The **temporality** of the university environment affects wellbeing

"Being able to see nature (trees, blue sky, etc), bright natural light, quiet, odourless/nice scents, clean facilities (particularly toilets), access to a shower (makes it more likely I'll cycle), artwork"

5

The physical environment has **relational and pedagogical consequences**

6

The physical environment can foster or impede a **sense of belonging**

7

Accessibility and inclusivity must be prioritised to accommodate diverse needs

8

Universities must navigate and **balance conflicting needs** in shared environments

"Buildings are run down, office accommodation is poor (rubbish lighting, low natural light, cramped) and cold in winter, hot in summer. All makes me feel like I am not valued."

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