LAB 3 – Well-being Across the Student Journey

Nexus 3.0 Input

1. Background

Students from crisis contexts frequently experience **trauma, prolonged stress, uncertainty, and social isolation**, which can significantly affect their capacity to succeed in higher education. Mental health support is, therefore, a **critical dimension of student inclusion and belonging**.

However, existing university support services often remain **insufficient or inaccessible for displaced students**, particularly due to:

- language barriers
- cultural differences in understanding mental health
- lack of trust in institutional services
- shortage of culturally competent professionals.

These barriers mean that many students experience **psychological distress without appropriate support**, which can negatively affect their academic progression and well-being.

The challenge is especially acute for certain communities. For example, studies show that **a large proportion of Afghan women and girls experience anxiety, depression, trauma, and isolation**, while access to culturally appropriate mental health care remains extremely limited.

2. Key Challenges

Several structural barriers limit access to effective mental health support:

- **limited culturally adapted services**
- **language barriers between students and providers**
- **high cost or limited availability of counselling services**
- **stigma surrounding mental health support**
- **lack of scalable support models within universities**.

These challenges suggest the need for **innovative and culturally sensitive approaches to well-being support** for students from crisis contexts.

3. Possible Direction: Digital Wellbeing Platforms

One possible approach is to develop digital mental health platforms tailored to **specific linguistic and cultural communities**.

Such platforms could combine:

- **online consultations with qualified professionals** from the same cultural background
- multilingual resources and wellbeing content
- peer support networks
- AI-supported tools and digital resources
- flexible access via mobile or web platforms.

Digital solutions can significantly increase **accessibility, flexibility, and scalability**, particularly for students who may not feel comfortable using traditional services.

4. Proposal for Discussion – The Lighthouse/Healing Hub Model

Nexus 3.0 is currently developing **LIGHTHOUSE – a digital mental health and wellbeing platform** designed initially to support Afghan women affected by conflict and displacement. The platform provides **online counselling by qualified Afghan psychologists**, delivered in native languages and in a culturally sensitive environment.

Building on this experience, the concept could evolve into a **"Healing Hub" model for higher education**, designed to support students from crisis contexts throughout their academic journey.

The Healing Hub could function as a **shared digital well-being service accessible across multiple higher education institutions and beyond**, offering:

- online counselling with culturally competent professionals
- multilingual mental health support
- peer-support communities
- workshops on resilience and wellbeing
- digital resources and AI-assisted tools.

A shared model would allow institutions to **pool expertise and resources**, ensuring access to culturally appropriate mental health services that individual universities may struggle to provide on their own.

An initial pilot could focus on **Afghan students supported by Afghan mental health professionals**, with the potential to expand to other linguistic communities, such as Arabic-speaking students or other displaced populations.

Such an approach could help build more inclusive and resilient higher education ecosystems, in which well-being support is integrated as a core component of student success.

Nexus 3.0 is exploring how culturally adapted digital mental health platforms can support student wellbeing, resilience, and inclusion across higher education systems. It has designed the Lighthouse – Healing Hub as an impact startup. It is now seeking a consortium of partners and seed money to develop the product and service.