

## 4. Human health and wellbeing, and emerging technologies •

Time: Wednesday 11 June at 13.00–14.30  
 Room: KINO  
 Chair: Martyn Richards

### Enhancing Social Integration and Well-Being of International Students through Social Networking •

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International students often face social isolation and cultural challenges when they move away from their home country and go abroad to pursue educational opportunities. Even though universities promote social integration, put effort into welcoming and integrating international students into the university environment, often some students struggle to 'fit-in', while others feel a sense of isolation in the absence of a like-minded social group to interact with. This often leading to student drop-outs, lower grades, and mental well-being-related issues.

In this study, we inquire about the larger question of how online social technologies enhance the futures of international Students' integration and well-being. To achieve the purpose of the study, we aim to identify patterns of effective social engagement and analyse barriers to integration. Further, using the interdisciplinary field of futures studies, we aim to explore how futures images reflect their future wellbeing needs and integrational experiences.

We posit that specific social networking strategies, including structured online communities and platforms dedicated to student interaction, can improve social integration and reduce the psychological stress associated with living abroad. By drawing on social network theory, cross-cultural psychology, and digital sociology, the project will map the intersections between face-to-face interactions vs digital interactions, digital connectivity and online social support systems for improving integration and student well-being.

This research will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys across two European higher education institutions (From Finland and the UK). An online survey will be designed using validated scales such as the Experiences of Social Inclusion Scale, Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. The survey will be distributed to a sample of 300+ international students from UK and Finland, to measure levels of social inclusion, psychological well-being, and the usage patterns of social networking platforms. The qualitative part of the study will consist of in-depth, semi-structured interviews, conducted using 30 international students. The Futures images will be constructed based on the data collected through semi structured interviews and will be analysed using Causal Layered Analysis.

The findings will provide insights into how online social technologies can contribute towards enhancing social belonging and emotional resilience. By bridging the gaps between education, technology, and social policy, this research will generate valuable knowledge, provide recommendations for policy-makers and educators that aids in fostering a more inclusive academic environment. The project will benefit international students and also enhance broader multicultural understanding within academic communities.

*Keywords: Social Integration, Student Wellbeing, UK, Finland, International Students, Online social technologies, Mixed-methods*

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