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YORK  
ST JOHN  
UNIVERSITY

Working creatively to enhance  
student engagement,  
attendance, and wellbeing

**Presented by**  
**Dr Penn Smith and Jenny Collyer**



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# BA (Hons) in Counselling and Mental Health

## Our overall purpose:

Facilitating development and change in others, health, social care, schools, businesses, voluntary organisations, human resources and many other settings.

## Our programme:

1. Theory
2. Practical skills work
3. Placement experience
4. Research

***\*The BA is NOT Professional Counselling Training***

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# Coronavirus (COVID-19) Update



# Hopes

- To feel more confident engaging with people online.
- To become more comfortable with online helping skills.
- To become confident and competent helpers.
- To learn new skills and gain experience putting them into practice.
- To learn new knowledge and apply that to skills practice.

# Fears

- It will be difficult to engage with others online.
- Online live assessment.
- Not feeling as confident using skills online - feels scary.
- Worried about being triggered by others' material.
- Dealing with uncomfortable silences.
- It will be difficult to build relationships online.
- Managing your own environment and the challenges that brings.
- Missing 'being' with people.
- Online work affecting concentration.
- Managing confidentiality.
- No space to step away from helping sessions.

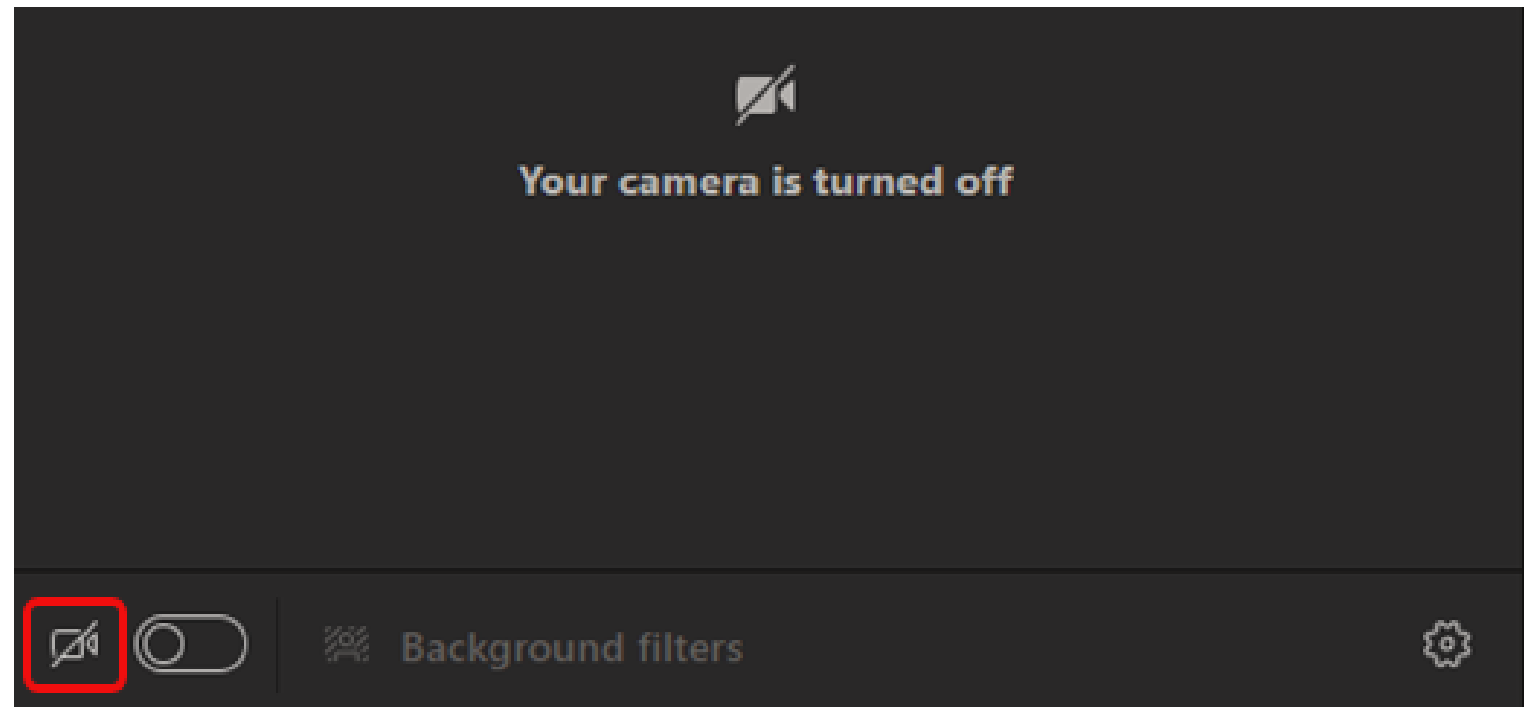


## Challenges students faced during Covid-19

- Relationship building
- Confidence (screens on/off)
- Communication challenges
- Loneliness/Isolation
- Privacy
- Motivation
- Fear
- IT issues/knowledge

## Challenges staff faced during Covid-19

- Speaking into the void
- IT issues/knowledge
- Privacy
- Motivation
- Loss of connection
- Fear







## 2021/22

- Skills sessions lasted 2 hrs
- 4-5 students per group
- Low attendance impacted group dynamic and confidence
- 5 Students left across the year



## 2022/23

- Moved into specialised space
- Restructured skills sessions to include:
  - 30min initial briefing
  - 1 hr skills practice
  - 30min debrief
- Interchangeable skills groups to begin with, moving to fixed groups
- Reinforced the narrative that this is a learning space NOT personal counselling



## Student and Tutor Feedback

*"It feels more contained.  
The small steps feel more  
enabling."*

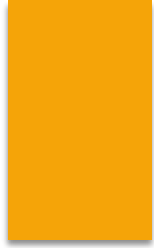
**Tutor Feedback**

*"It feels like we're  
a little family."*

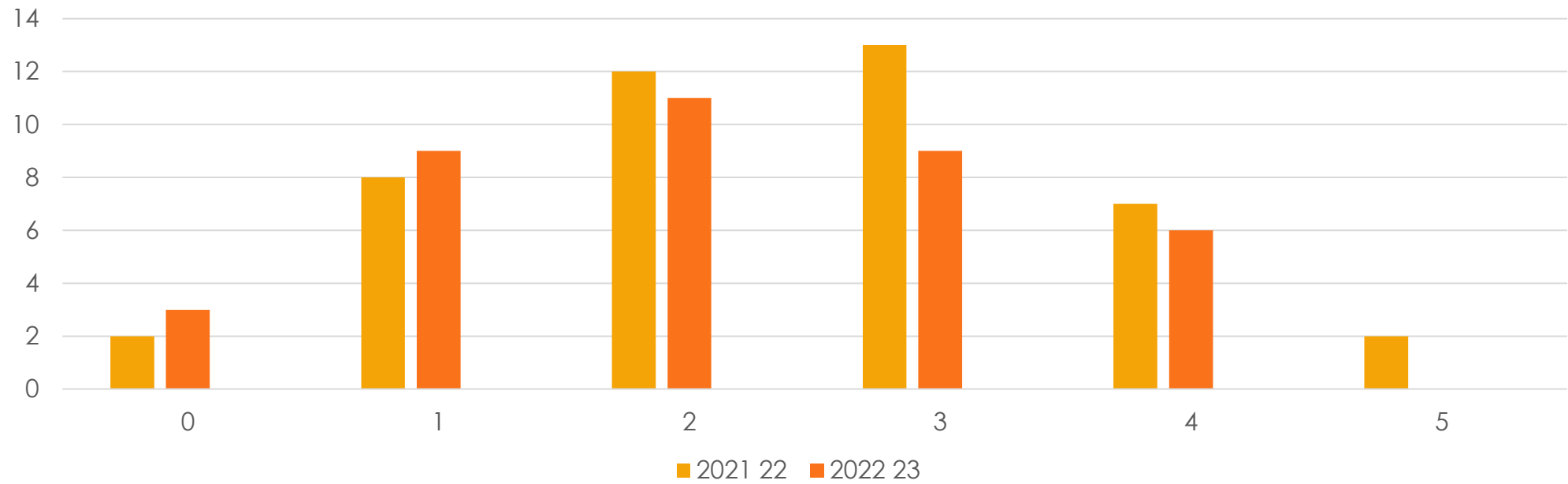
**Student Feedback**

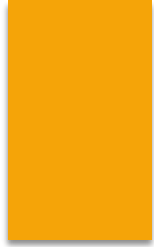
*"The skills sessions are incredibly  
useful as we get to practically try  
out the skills we have been  
taught about."*

**Student Feedback**

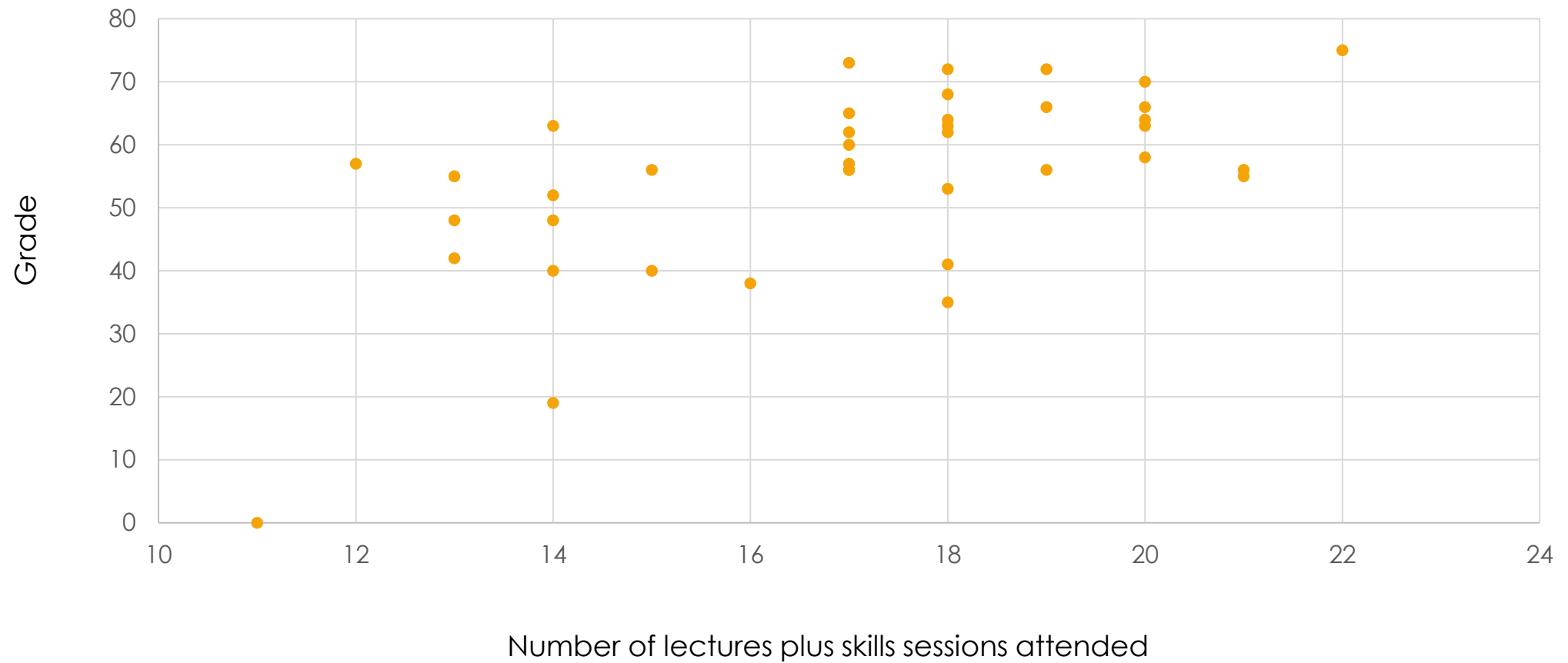


## Number of missed skills sessions





## Reflective evaluation of skills assignment ( 2500 words)





## Ongoing Issues

- Manging student numbers
- Low attendance is still an issue for certain groups of students across modules
- Anxiety and low confidence appears more common in students since the pandemic
- Skill attendance is now privileged over lectures

## The Wider Issue

- Students have found a new way to socialise & communicate
- Challenges faced by young people have many layers of complexity
- Access to information feeds mental health concerns and anxiety
- The pandemic has reinforced the concept of seeking help online





## Ongoing changes since 2021

- Development of 4 strands: Theory/Practical skills work/Placement experience/Research
- Taking a creative approach to module delivery
- Changes to assessment and feedback practices
- Introduction of year leads to work alongside year Reps
- Experienced practitioners from mental health organisations co-presenting on mental health modules

## Ideas moving forward 2023 and beyond

- Build on community partnerships to develop meaningful placement opportunities
- Link research projects to community organisations
- Develop career pathways within MOU partnership
- Overhaul of assessment design across all three years

***Develop the 'student' journey' across the degree...***





Contact us 

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