# Submission form

# HEA STEM Conference 2017: Achieving Excellence in Teaching and Learning

### 1–2 February 2017

### Title of session

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| Mental Toughness and Moods as Predictors of Academic Success |

**Theme:** Please indicate the conference theme to which your submission relates:

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| --- | --- |
| Engaging students as learners: How can we engage students with their disciplines and orient them for success in their studies? | X |
| The learning environment: How can we create learning environments that inspire and support students to achieve their best? |  |
| Graduate success: How can we ensure the development of the individual, beyond the acquisition of knowledge and skills, for success as graduates once they leave university? |  |

NB: Please select **ONE** box

**Session type:** Please indicate the type of session you wish to contribute to:

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| Poster  |  |
| How to…’ presentation (30 minutes) |  |
| Paper presentation (30 minutes) | **X** |
| Interactive Workshop (45 or 60 minutes) |  |

NB: Please select **ONE** box

**Abstract** (up to 100 words): The abstract should set out the aims and objectives of the session and will be used in the online conference programme:

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| This paper presents results from a survey examining the relationship between mental toughness and academic success, as measured by grade, in undergraduate students. One of the subscales of Mental Toughness (MT), Control of Life, significantly predicts grades for both male and female students, while other subscales reveal gender differences in the importance of the MT construct within this context. The aim in presenting these results at the HEA STEM conference is to open up the debate about Mental Toughness and Control of Life, and to invite discussion of possible interventions to improve students’ Control of Life, and therefore their grades.  |

### Outline (up to 500 words):

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| Previous research within HE suggests that Mental Toughness improves students’ ability to deal with negative feedback, and to progress and succeed academically. However, the bulk of such research has been conducted with students in courses such as Sports Science (e.g. Clough et al. 2002). The current study collected data from 161 students from Levels 3 to 6 of the University of West London’s undergraduate psychology programmes. There were 120 females, with an age range of 18 to 48, and 41 males, with an age range from 18 to 28. The current study investigates whether academic success can be predicted from MT and affect (mood – both positive and negative, as measured by the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS, Watson et al. 1988). The Mental Toughness scale, devised by Clough et al. (2002), contains a number of subscales:Confidence in abilitiesConfidence in interpersonal relationshipsControl of emotionsControl of lifeCommitmentChallenge For all students, Control of Life is a positive predictor of grade, which leads to the question of what it is that may lead to a feeling of lack of control for our students and what, if anything, can we as educators do about this?More nuanced results were found when the sample was split by gender. Here the findings show that for females, there is a negative relationship between Control of Emotion and grades, as well as a negative relationship between Confidence in Abilities and grades. The latter here may suggest that over confidence can be a problem – perhaps confidence in abilities leads to lower attendance/engagement with advice and feedback. Coupled with the link with control of emotion, can we infer that students might benefit from greater emotional engagement with their studies?For males, there is a positive relationship between grade and commitment, and between grades and positive affect. The latter suggests that, when it comes to students’ achievement, males are more influenced by their moods than females (for whom this correlation was absent). As was found in previous studies, there is a positive correlation between MT and age, particularly in the Control of Life subscale, suggesting that this is a quality that is either learnt, or simply a benefit of maturation. The target audience for this presentation is both psychologists and non-psychologists, as all educators can benefit from greater understanding of student resilience and predictors of success. In addition, a wide audience will benefit the researchers as it is hoped that this paper can open up discussion of additional factors that may be involved in further research. After the presentation it is intended that a question and answer session will focus on how these findings can be implemented in our practice – how can we talk to students about the challenges they face and encourage their developing Mental Toughness?References:* Clough, P., Earle, K., & Sewell, D. (2002). Mental toughness: the concept and its measurement. In I. Cockerill (ed.), *Solutions in Sport Psychology* (pp. 32-43). London: Thomson.
* Watson, D., Clark, L. A., & Tellegen, A. (1988). Development and validation of brief measures of positive and negative affect: The PANAS scales. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 54,* 1063-1070.
 |

### Keywords (up to ten):

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| Academic SuccessMental toughnessChallenge ControlCommitmentConfidenceGender differencesEmotion Student Engagement |

### Key messages (between three and five messages that delegates will take from your session):

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| * Issue of control of life – the need for empowerment
* Overconfidence and a lack of responsiveness to emotions may be an issue – especially in females.
* Gender differences need exploring. What is the source of these differences?
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