



# The Essentials

CULTIVATING AND  
CONVEYING MINDFULNESS

## Putting out the welcome mat for mindfulness

**Mindfulness has captured the public imagination.** From colouring books to apps to mindfulness meditation courses and retreats, more and more people are taking an interest and engaging in some form of mindfulness practice. Businesses are fostering mindfulness for their employees. The NHS is using mindfulness-based therapies. It is even used in sport as a way of enhancing performance. Schools use it effectively to improve wellbeing of staff and pupils. **There is a growing appetite for mindfulness and a growing need to find more authentic ways of offering mindfulness.**

There is little doubt now that mindfulness has a valuable role to play for individuals, and a growing realisation that mindfulness can aid in wider societal and environmental problems. The essence of mindfulness practices is to come into a fuller awareness of how things are right now, and then letting natural wisdom have the space to work. Only when we realise how over-stretched we are in life can we begin to take action to ease off and make changes. Only when we realise how we impact those around us and the environment can we take steps to improve our place in the world. **Mindfulness can be the first stage in personal or social change.**

Despite its intrinsic value, not as a magic bullet but as an important aid to improving well-being, the popularity of mindfulness and the community of practitioners is not very diverse. In areas of greatest need there are few examples of widespread adoption. **Perhaps the most significant use of mindfulness is in the treatment of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety.** In other areas of need, mindfulness is at best patchy, and the mindfulness teachers are predominantly white middle-class. A contributor to this is the way mindfulness has traditionally been taught, and the curriculum used to train mindfulness teachers.

### How did we get here?

Modern approaches to mindfulness largely stem from the work of **Jon Kabat-Zinn** in the 1970's, when he blended Buddhist and Yoga practices with modern psychology and physiology. He produced a training programme that consisted of 8 weekly group sessions of 2 to 3 hours each that is called **Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)**. There then followed some controlled scientific studies that showed significant effect in helping individuals with a range of conditions – it did not cure, but it consistently showed positive effects for people with chronic illnesses, often alleviating physical conditions but equally important improving their psychological well-being.

That original 8 week course has been adapted for a variety of purposes. **Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)**, adopted by the NHS in 2007 and now widely used, has significant scientific evidence for effectiveness in the treatment of depression. MBSR has been shown to be effective in the long term treatment of anxiety. Other adaptations include pain management, childbirth and parenting, addiction relapse prevention, schools, and more general forms that are used to aid with the general stresses of life.

The scientific evidence is hugely important, but not the only evidence. The popularity of mindfulness says something about its utility, and the growing number of people who take an interest in mindfulness and have some regular practice cannot be ignored, and cannot be dismissed as a fad.

**There is a shift happening where mindfulness is not seen purely as a therapeutic intervention but as a lifestyle choice that aids in general well-being and even as an agent for societal and environmental change.**

### What is changing?

Mindfulness is usually offered as an 8 week course in the style of the original MBSR, but for many reasons this limits the reach of mindfulness. **The 8 week format does not suit everyone**, and it is often hard to organise and recruit into courses. For those who can do an 8 week course, it is usually an inspiring and valuable experience, but there are many more who could benefit from mindfulness practice if it is introduced in more diverse ways. The demand for 8 week courses has passed its peak in the UK, but there are more and more mindfulness teachers available. **Most mindfulness teachers are now finding that they need to adapt to different needs**, and so they are adapting their learning from the standard training and producing new and innovative ways of introducing mindfulness in different contexts.

One example is the use of mindfulness as an element of psychological therapies. Therapists often train in mindfulness teaching, but do not use the 8 week curriculum with their clients, rather they take elements of it to fit around an individual's needs. There is a clear need for a training that is more focused on this **one-to-one form of teaching mindfulness**, so that therapists can apply mindfulness without having to abstract it themselves from an 8 week course training.

Another example is in the workplace. Organisations will want to incorporate mindfulness in different ways, from arranging regular drop-in mindfulness sessions, through to more formal training perhaps through an 8 week course. **Workplace facilitation of mindfulness** presents particular challenges in terms of workplace relationships and culture. Again individuals are adapting their learning from 8 week course trainings to their particular circumstances, and a more specific training for workplace mindfulness is much needed.

It is time, therefore, to recognise this in the training programmes for mindfulness teachers. **How do we build on the success of the 8 week course?** How do we adapt training of teachers to the needs of different populations, different contexts, different individual needs? The standard 8 week course has all the elements, but how can we reconstruct that into courses and programmes that are more specific, that appeal to and have greater relevance for a wider audience?

## What is the solution?

Bangor University has been developing a framework to support the training of mindfulness teachers known as the **Mindfulness Based Intervention Teaching and Assessment Criteria (MBI-TAC)**. It deconstructs the teaching process and provides a framework for training and for assessing mindfulness teaching. It looks at six key competency areas of teaching mindfulness:

- curriculum delivery,
- relational skills,
- embodiment of mindfulness,
- guiding mindfulness practices,
- conveying course themes,
- and group facilitation.

A version of this has been adapted to aid teachers and practitioners in their personal development – the **Mindfulness Based Intervention Teaching and Learning Criteria (MBI-TLC)**.

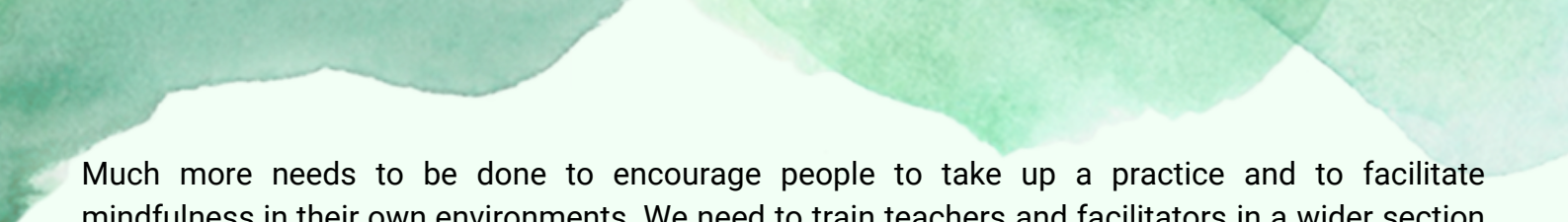
**Using the MBI-TAC, Bangor University and the Mindfulness Network are extending the teacher training curriculum to make it more accessible for trainees and to widen its applicability.**

Our entry point to training is now open to anyone with a regular mindfulness practice, making it accessible to a much wider number of people keen to train to teach or facilitate mindfulness. The training routes will also include specific specialisms focused on areas of need, including the traditional 8 week course route, but adding new specialisms for 1-1 work, workplace, youth work, and many more.

The entry point, which is called **The Essentials - Cultivating and Conveying Mindfulness**, will be based on trainees developing the competencies that any teacher or facilitator of mindfulness require. It is a five day course, and from this a trainee should be able to lead mindfulness practices and communicate the principles of mindfulness. Follow up **Specialist Training** will build on this with a focus on particular curricula for teaching mindfulness and for particular populations, including the traditional 8 week courses MBSR and MBCT, giving trainees the flexibility to choose the path that is right for them.

Our experience of teacher training that is focussed on the 8 week course structure *initially* is that it can feel over-full and quite a stretch. **The Essentials** course will have more space to explore the fundamentals of mindfulness practice and leading mindfulness practices, leaving the specific details of particular forms of teaching to later training. As well as being a preparation from some form of mindfulness teaching or facilitation, the course will also be an effective way that practitioners can deepen their personal practice without necessarily going on to teach or facilitate.

**By making the entry training more accessible, and by offering multiple options for training on how to deliver mindfulness-based approaches, we can start on the journey to make mindfulness more widely available and more applicable.**



Much more needs to be done to encourage people to take up a practice and to facilitate mindfulness in their own environments. We need to train teachers and facilitators in a wider section of society. We need to reduce the financial barriers to high quality training. We need to demystify mindfulness practice and create a more informed awareness of its value.

## What happens next?

Mindfulness is now established as a valuable contributor to health and wellbeing, underpinned by sound academic research, a growing network of mindfulness teachers and practitioners, a greater acceptance in a number of environments, and a general perception of its value. The training vehicles, largely based on the 8 week course model, have served well and need to be preserved to maintain quality and effectiveness. **These proven approaches need to be built upon to improve accessibility and increase diversity in the community of teachers and practitioners.**

That development needs to be based on sound research and practical experience. The **MBI-TAC** model is a powerful way of redesigning the training curriculum with rigour and deep insight into mindfulness practice and training. **Over the next decade we should see mindfulness moving from its strong base of practice into a wider area of need.** We have the welcome mat out for mindfulness practice, inviting a wider audience in. We are developing the training programmes to meet a wider range of applicability. We now need to find ways of encouraging more people through the door, to deepen and develop their personal mindfulness practice, and to offer mindfulness to those who can benefit. In these challenging times mindfulness has much to offer, at a personal and social level, and we now need to build on a growing understanding and acceptance of it. The next decade promises to be challenging and rewarding.

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