Exploring halls as wellbeing resources

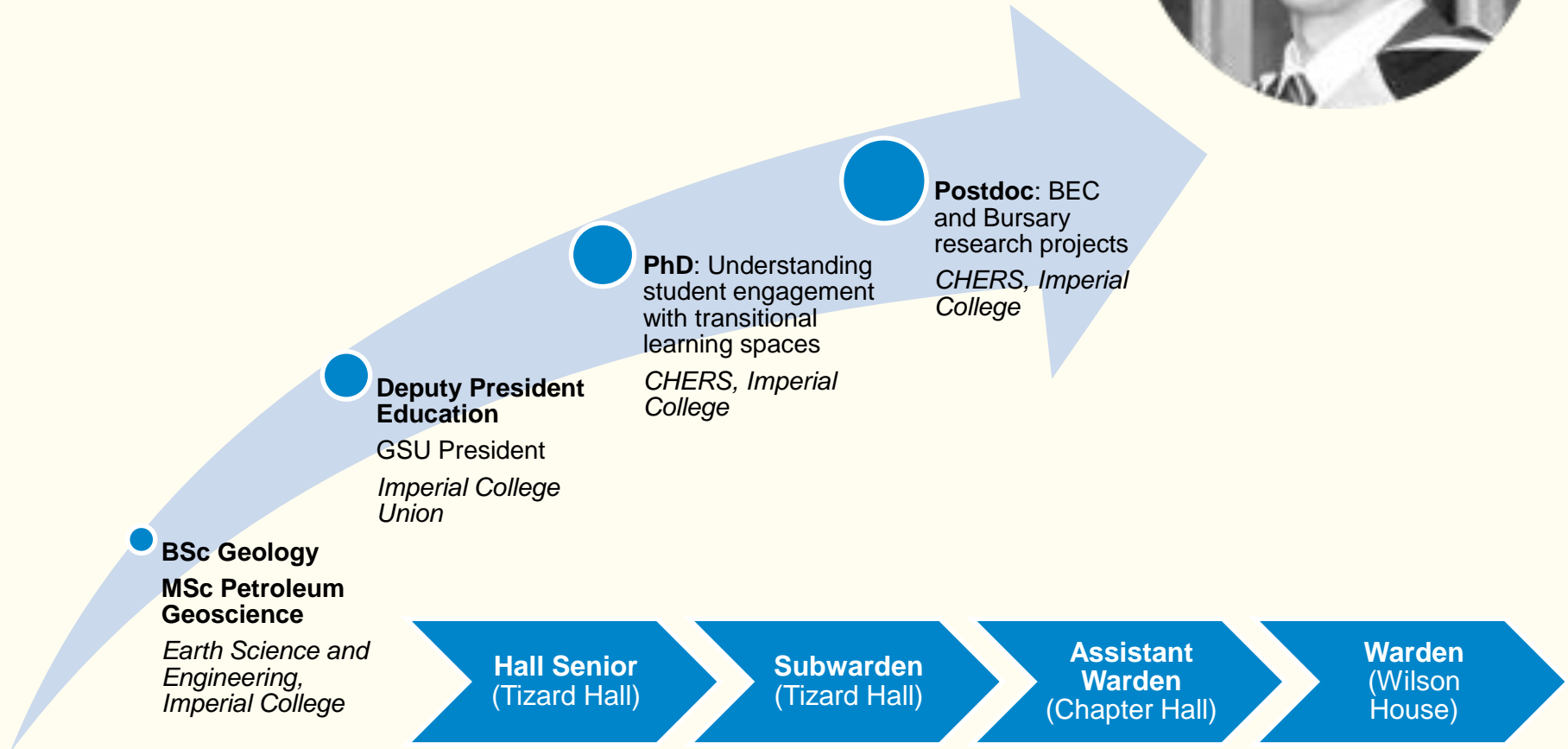## Festival of Learning and Teaching 2023

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Background: Luke

Postdoc: BEC and Bursary research projects
CHERS, Imperial College

PhD: Understanding student engagement with transitional learning spaces
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Deputy President Education
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BSc Geology
MSc Petroleum Geoscience
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Hall Senior
(Tizard Hall)

Subwarden
(Tizard Hall)

Assistant Warden
(Chapter Hall)

Warden
(Wilson House)

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Belonging, Engagement, and Community (BEC) Project

- Project running since 2019
- Invitation to students from all levels of study to participate in a:
  - Questionnaire (open November – December each academic year)
 - Interview (November – April each year)

*To date, we have received **852 questionnaire responses**, and have interviewed **51 students.***

Why belonging?

- Belonging is linked to positive academic outcomes (Osterman, 2000):
  - higher grades & higher student engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003)
  - self-confidence (Pittman & Richmond, 2007)
  - and wellbeing (Allen *et al.*, 2018)

- '…all universities adopting mental health as a strategic priority and implementing a **whole university approach**' (UUK, 2020)

Belonging refers to a feeling of acceptance, inclusion, and connection to a particular group or community. It is a sense of feeling like you are an important part of a larger whole and that you share common values, experiences, or goals with others in the group. The concept of belonging is often associated with feelings of comfort, security, and support, and it is essential for personal well-being and social integration.
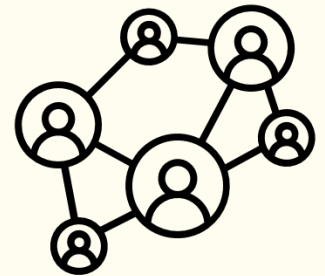
Why halls?

- Learning less predominantly happening in traditional 'teaching spaces'

- Our research has highlighted:
    - Where students are learning
    - How their meaning-making of 'space' influences their sense of belonging

- Anecdotal hall experience has highlighted:
    - The challenges students face at Imperial
    - How students colonize residential spaces (via events, duty rounds etc.)

Hall belonging/wellbeing themes

- **Diverse communities**

- **Hall Wardens**

- **Building community**

- **Hall spaces**

- Halls WonkHE article: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/spaces-of-belonging-lessons-from-halls-of-residence/

WONKHE

ABOUT US▾   EVENTS   LATEST▾   JOBS▾   SUBSCRIPTION▾   SUs▾

Spaces of belonging: lessons from halls of residence

Luke McCrone and Julianne K. Viola explain what we can learn about student belonging from hall wardens and student accommodation

COMMENT | 24/01/23

Image: Shutterstock

Diverse communities

- **Diverse communities living together:**
  - Students from all over the world
  - Students with varied personal characteristics
  - Students from all levels of study (Freshers, Hall Seniors, Subwardens)
  - Disciplinary diversity

"…in my first year I was in a small hall and I made some great friends. Some from similar backgrounds to me, but others from completely different backgrounds from different parts of the world…these guys were easy to get along with, lived with them in my second and third year, and got to meet a range of other people."

3rd year Imperial student

Differential experiences

- **There can be differential experiences between**:
  - Students from different countries and cultures
  - Students from different levels of study (first-years vs. returning students)
  - Students in different halls / accommodation
 - During vs. after COVID-19 restrictions

"*I would have nights where I'd fall asleep, and I'd forget which place I was in, it would be really disorienting…I mean there were other things going on last year that might contribute to that but yeah, that's probably a time I felt not particularly at home.*"

2nd year Imperial student

Hall Wardens

- **Wardening roles**:
  - Subwardens (PG students)
  - Assistant-Wardens / Wardens (Post-doc and above)

- **Key responsibilities**:
  - Welfare and pastoral care
  - Discipline and rules
  - Events and community

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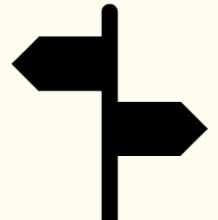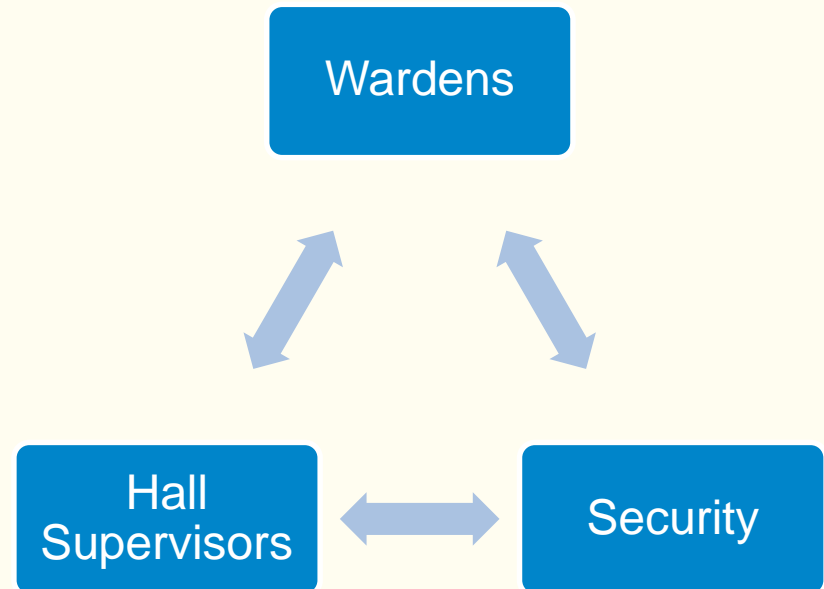
Responding to needs

Bereavement and loss

If you've experienced a bereavement or the loss of someone close to you, read our information on the support that's available to you.

Exercise

Exercise is a great way of supporting your physical and mental wellbeing. Find out more about staying active alongside your studies.

Food and nutrition

It can be tricky to maintain a healthy diet when you're busy, read our top tips for staying healthy on a budget.

Identity

Are you reflecting on aspects of your identity such as your sexuality, faith or culture? If you would like to talk to someone about how you're feeling, check out the support available to you.

Mindfulness

Practicing Mindfulness can be a useful tool to help manage stress and anxiety, read our information about Mindfulness at Imperial.

Sleep

We know that sleep is essential to allow our bodies to rest and recover. Read our advice on getting a good nights sleep.

Work/life balance

Ensuring you maintain a healthy work/life balance is an important part of a healthy lifestyle. Read our top tips on how to keep up with the things you love whilst studying.

- **Goal 1:** Ensure students are equipped to manage their mental health and thrive at university.
- **Goal 2:** Ensure students have the knowledge and tools to manage their mental health and wellbeing.
- **Goal 3:** Ensure students are prepared to manage their mental health in future employment.
- **Goal 4:** Reduce stigma and improve peer support for university staff.
- **Goal 5:** Make positive changes to the way universities think and act about mental health.

Mind, 2021

From: https://www.imperial.ac.uk/student-support-zone/your-wellbeing/

Building community

- **Hall teams focus on community building:**
  - Hall Amenity Fund (£2 per student per week)
  - Hall Committee Meetings (HCMs)
  - Event examples: movie nights, cultural events (e.g., Chinese New Year), BBQs, party-based events, board game nights etc.
  - 'Happy team, happy students'

"*I mean when I first joined the university, I really struggled in the first couple of weeks and like the Wardens, for example, were very helpful and they looked out for me, which I appreciated, but yeah, the people in my halls and the people I met through hall events, that was really good, I'd say definitely my main community would be here at halls.*"

British 1st year Imperial student

Hall spaces

Community develops from events, but also in informal places:

- House kitchens
- Places to cook and eat together
- Communal spaces
- Personal spaces
- Outdoor spaces

Photograph of Beit Quad by Tom Whipps, Imperial College London

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Further 'reading'

- Halls WonkHE article: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/spaces-of-belonging-lessons-from-halls-of-residence/

- Accommodation matters podcast: https://unitestudents.podbean.com/e/s06e01-student-belonging-behind-the-buzzword/

Photograph of Wilson House team by Luke McCrone, Imperial College London

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Q&A discussion

- What aspect(s) of the Hall Warden role do we feel is most important for students' overall wellbeing?

- Which other informal learning spaces do we feel to be important for students' overall wellbeing?

- Any other concluding questions / thoughts from the audience?

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Thank you!

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- Imperial College London Learning and Teaching Strategy
- Professor Martyn Kingsbury and colleagues at the Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship (CHERS)
- CHERS Festival of Learning and Teaching team
- Our participants!

References

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