

IMPERIAL

Learning Well Project: Town Hall Meeting

Project Team:

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Centre for Higher Education Research & Scholarship (CHERS) & Student Services

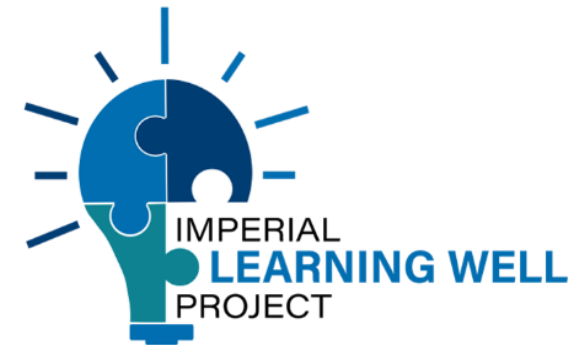
Funded by the President's Excellence Fund for Learning & Teaching Innovation

*'...it's not how smart you are.
It's not how hard you work.
It's about the strategy you use.'*

- Diu, Y4 Maths, FG9

*'I'm not sure if you could be the best in what
you're doing, like number one in your course or
something. I think that takes a certain amount
of giving up your mind. There's a price to pay
for that.'*

- Johan, Y2 Engineering, FG18



Key Issues

Students often do not utilise support resources unless they perceive a clear problem.

Fearing being labelled as struggling.

They can sometimes wait too long to get support.

Reframe our approach so that the 'Learning Well Programme' not seen as remedial intervention.

Provide evidence-based resources and empower agency and choice.

Develop personalised study strategies and a balanced approach to studying, wellbeing and lifestyle.

“ Develop imagination and extend minds

“ Attract, nurture and support talent from across the world AND celebrate, champion and harness diversity -- inclusive environment

“ Inspire a spirit a spirit of discovery – share scientific imagination

Why create a learning well programme for students?



Bridging the gap: Many students are unaware of the critical link between study strategies/learning behaviours, wellbeing and academic success.



Key barriers identified (Dembo & Seli, 2004): Students are less open to try out new methods of study strategies and shy away from unfamiliarity.



Moving beyond deficit-based models (Walker, 2022): Aiming to shift away from models that only address issues post-emergence ('something goes wrong'), and towards preventative and awareness-building approaches.



Knowledge vs. Action: Recognising that mere knowledge of work/life balance is insufficient without proactive behaviour changes and cultural shifts within the institution.



Engagement through evidence: The programme focuses on engaging students with evidence-based strategies for learning and wellbeing, helping them reevaluate their study methods and behaviours linked to improved wellbeing.



Where did we start?

Student scoping project (summer 2022)

Student partners:

Nattalyn Teng (Chemistry)

Sarah Choi (Medicine)

Anthony Awoyomi (Medicine)

Amy Lovejoy (Medicine)

- **Mental/emotional wellbeing/study resources (college-wide):** Mental Health Awareness Week, Counselling services, Student Support Zone, Success Guide, Wellbeing Representation Network, Imperial College Union Advice Centre, Chaplaincy, Library Resources
- **Faculty-based resources:** Medlearn (FoM), ICSMSU (FoM), Student support overview (FoNS), Bioengineering, Wellbeing advisors, Natural Sciences, Aeronautics, Chemical, Computing



THINK
ABOUT
THINGS
DIFFERENTLY

To take a more **proactive approach** to engaging students with **evidence-based learning & wellbeing strategies** to consider their study approaches and scaffold students to **recognise learning behaviours linked to improved wellbeing.**

Why are we here?

Foster collaboration & Build a synergised approach

- Engage with colleagues across the University to share **insights and experience in different support areas**.
- Harness **collective expertise** to enhance student experience at Imperial.

Share research findings from the Learning Well Project

- Share **key research findings** from Imperial UG student focus groups.
- Discuss **empirical evidence** and how it can **inform our practice and support** offered to students.

Identify and address gaps

- Map existing study and wellbeing resources.
- **Identify gaps** and areas needing attention to improve student support.

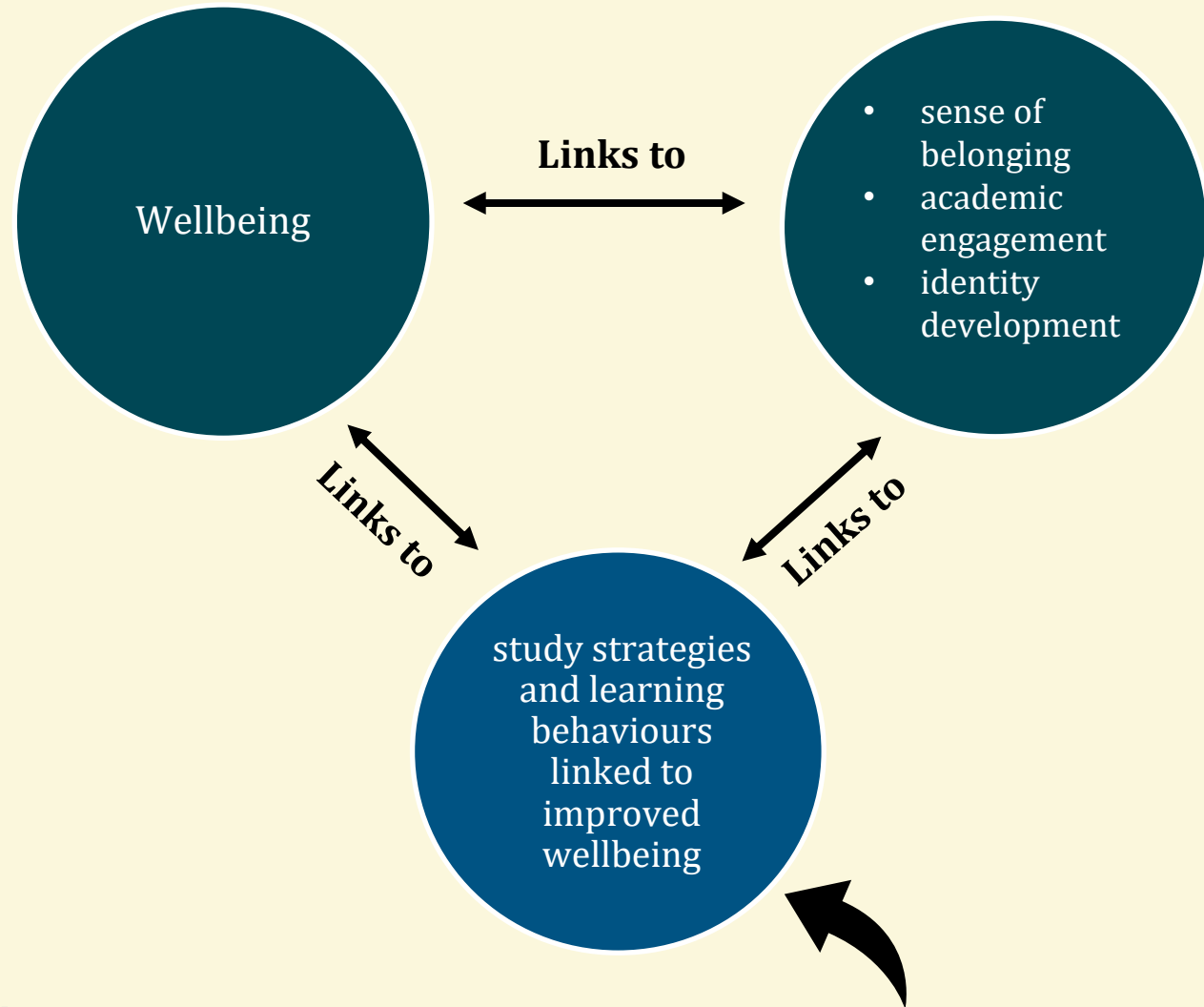
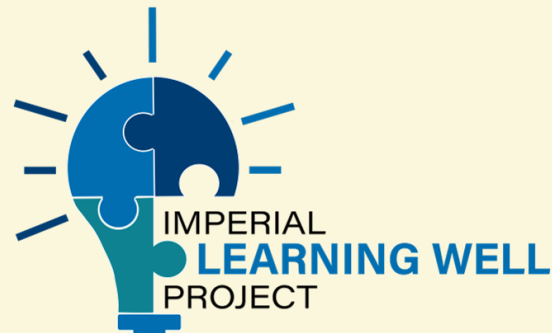
Contribute to the development of the Learning Well Programme

- Work together to create a flexible programme that **supports proactive learning strategies**.
- Scaffold students to **recognise learning behaviours** linked to improved **wellbeing**.

Meeting agenda

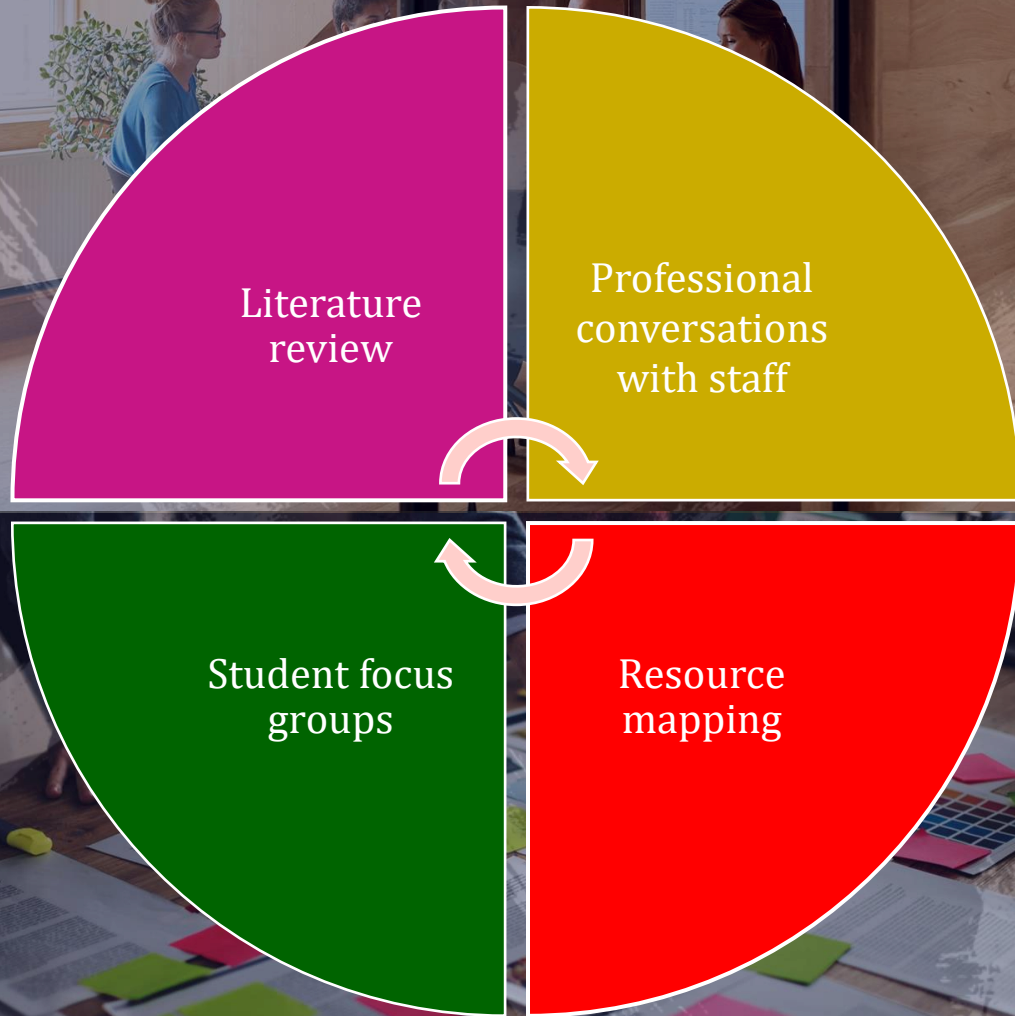


Learning Well Project overview

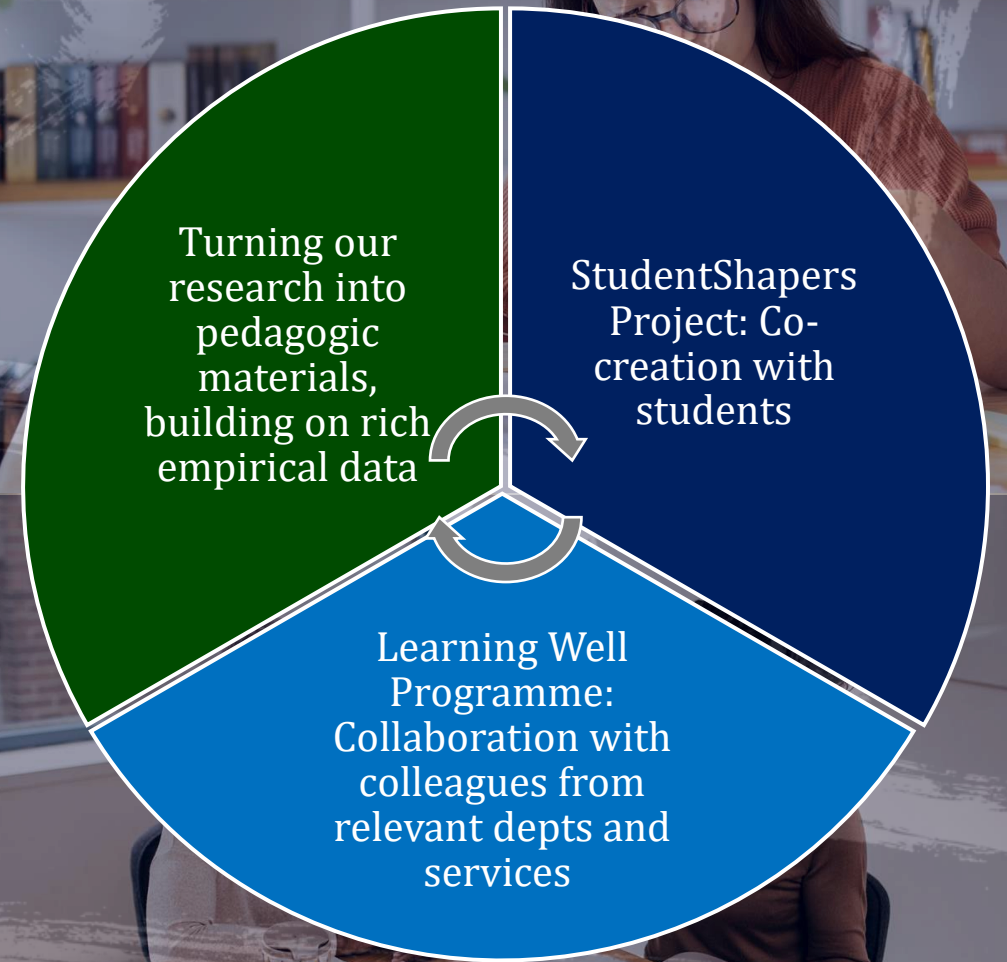


Our primary focus: to strengthen the link between study strategies and wellbeing; a more proactive approach by creating opportunities for students to explore and discuss different study strategies and wellbeing-related issues.

PHASE 1 Research & Data collection

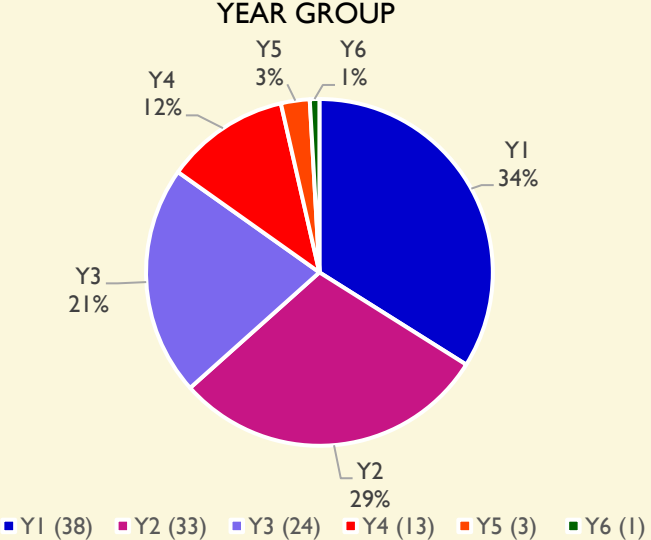
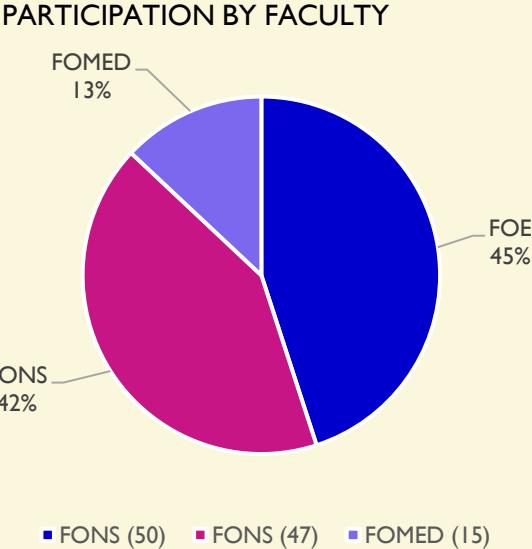
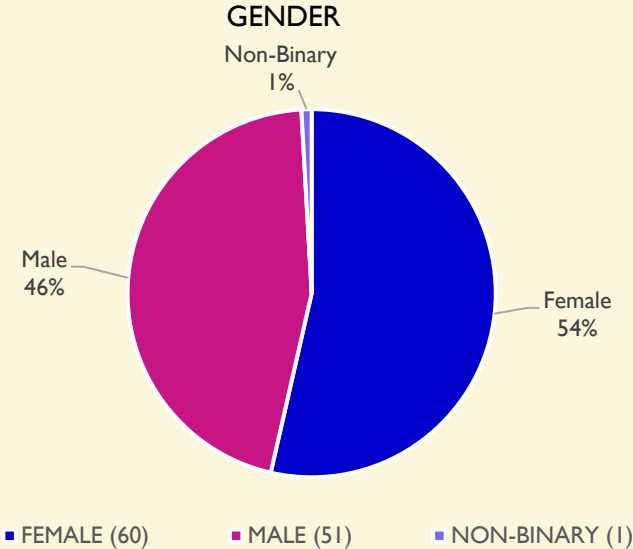


PHASE 2 Resource development & implementation



Learning Well Project – empirical data

- Data collection: late May – early-Aug 2023
- 33 focus groups
- 112 UG students across 3 faculties (FoE, FoNS, FoMED)



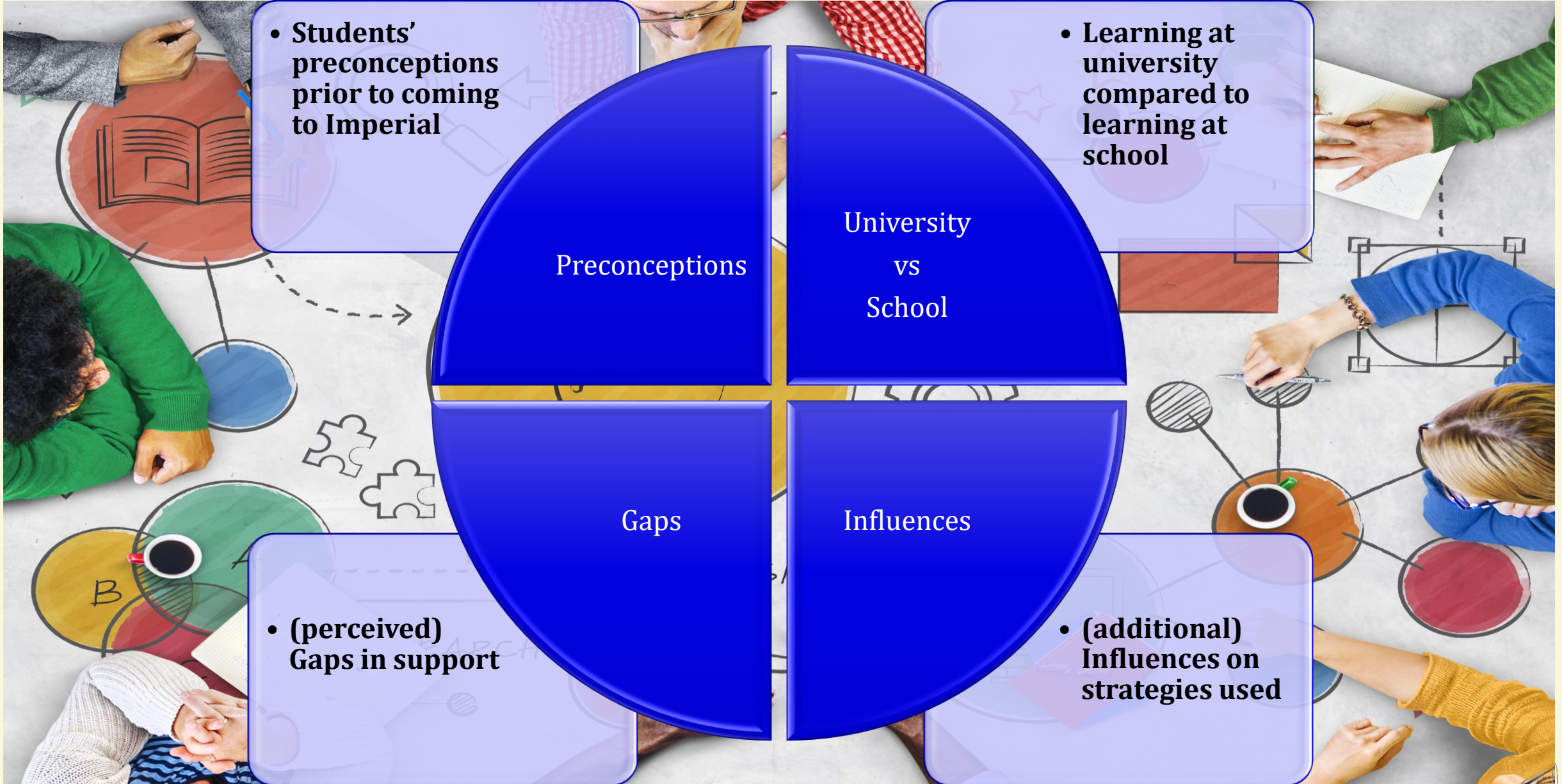
Focus groups - Students' lived experiences

Project research question: How do different study strategies and learning behaviours impact the wellbeing of Imperial undergraduate students?

- **Topics covered:**
 - ✓ Preconceptions prior to coming to Imperial
 - ✓ Study strategies and approaches to learning
 - ✓ Influences on study strategies used
 - ✓ Perceptions and definition of learning
 - ✓ The role of emotion in learning
 - ✓ Mental wellbeing in a higher education setting



Sharing selected findings from our empirical data:





Preconceptions prior to coming to Imperial

Q: Before you came to Imperial, what did you think being 'an Imperial student' would be like?

Preconceptions mainly related to:

- workload
- social life
- level of academic challenge
- teaching, learning & assessment methods

...There is the stereotype,...Imperial students, they're like overworked. And, you know, it's a very intense university and the social aspect is not there. And you're not gonna have a life...

(Nasir, Y1 Engineering, FG20)

Workload
Social life

...world-class institution, STEM subjects, everybody is going to be studying all the time, and I'm going to have no friends... I came to Imperial just to see it and I couldn't really see people doing anything. I could only see the library, so that was a bit scary for me before coming here.

(Lola, Y3 Engineering, FG4)

Match vs mismatch

- Extent to which expectations match students' experiences (match)

I expected to be worked pretty hard, you know. Imperial Physics is good. I was very much looking forward to the kind of harder workload which has definitely been met.

(Andrea, Y2 Physics, FG13)

Match - as expected
(positive)

I knew I'd have a big schedule...I just thought I'd always be doing work...I imagined not really having time for myself, and that essentially is what's been happening the last two years.

(Jesmin, Y2 Engineering, FG2)

Match - as expected
(negative)

Match vs mismatch

- Extent to which expectations match students' experiences (mismatch)

So I did hear about the stigma around Imperial being more academic and everyone's just got their noses in books all the time and no one's got that that much time for free time ...But after being at Imperial, I realised that, you know, everyone does have time to do something extra.
(Golapi, Y2 Medicine, FG29)

Mismatch - better than expected

I didn't expect to find it as hard as I did to begin with. It was quite a real step up, not even a step up, like a completely different way of learning to what I've always been used to.

(Debbie, Y1 Maths, FG11)

Mismatch - different to expected

*I personally feel like I **didn't really like use my brain** or something like the math was like quite easy to A-level. But then like when I go to university like the math was like actually need a lot of like interpretation and like it requires a lot of time to understand it.*

(Sook, Y3 Engineering, FG8)

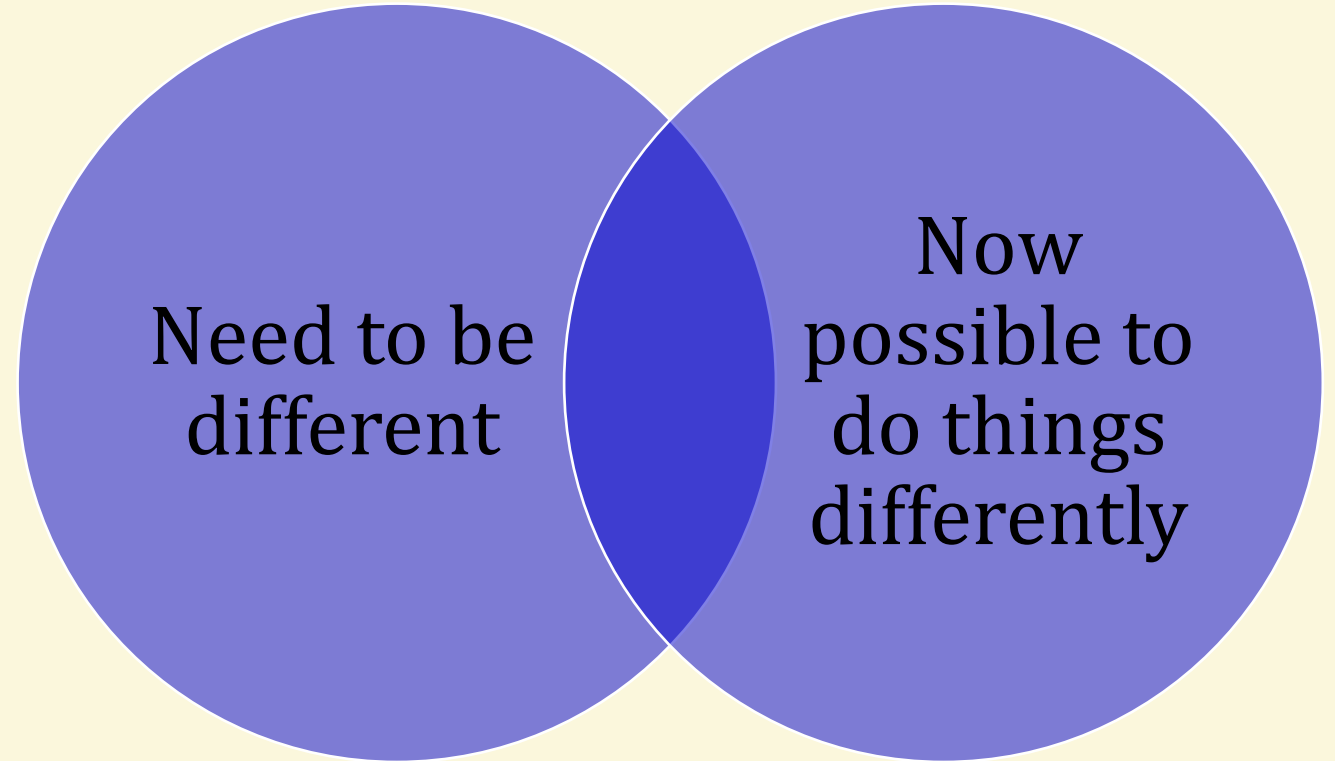
Mismatch - different to expected



**Learning at university compared
to learning at school - *the same but
different...***

**Q: Are the strategies you use now
the same or different to those you used
when you were at school?**

Most common responses →



Why different strategies are now needed, or are possible:

Different volume/pace
of content being covered

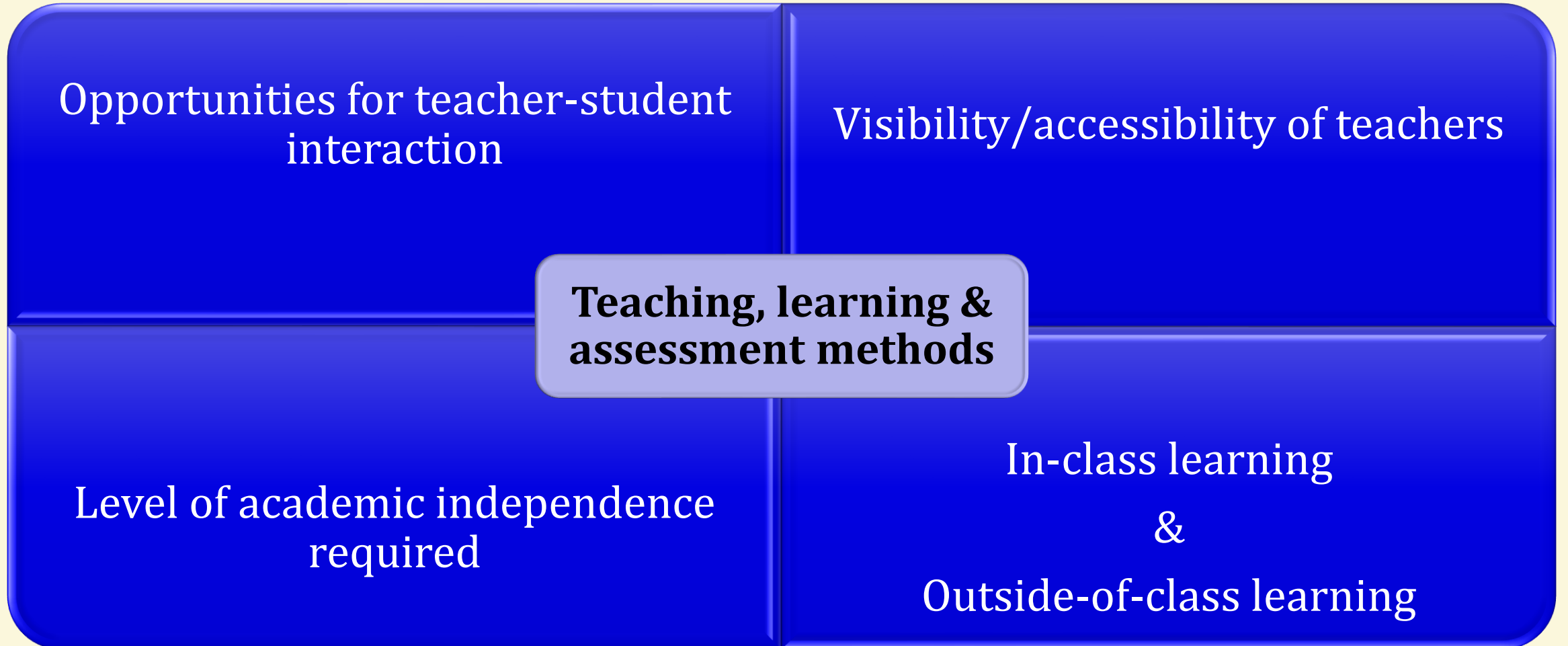
Different teaching,
learning & assessment
methods, including
levels of scaffolding

Level of academic
independence required

Different level of content
difficulty

Differences in resources
used in teaching and
learning

Difference: Teaching, learning & assessment methods



Difference: Teaching, learning & assessment methods

*...that was kind of a hard thing that I realised at university, you're really independent ...because **you're in a lecture room with 250 other students and one lecturer.** So it's really hard to benefit from this student-teacher interaction...*

(Ivantie, Y1 Physics, FG22)

Opportunities for teacher-student interaction

...[school teachers] they'll see you every single day...you can go up to them after school or at the end of class. Just be like, hey, Miss, can you just help me with this? Whereas in a lecture theatre full of 100 people, it's very hard to do that ...

(Sachith, Y3 Medicine, FG26)

Accessibility of teachers

Teaching, learning & assessment approaches

Academic independence

*...at A levels and GCSE **you're told places to look and you're told most of the content** just from textbooks or by the teacher, whereas **a degree it's more like you have to fend for yourself.***

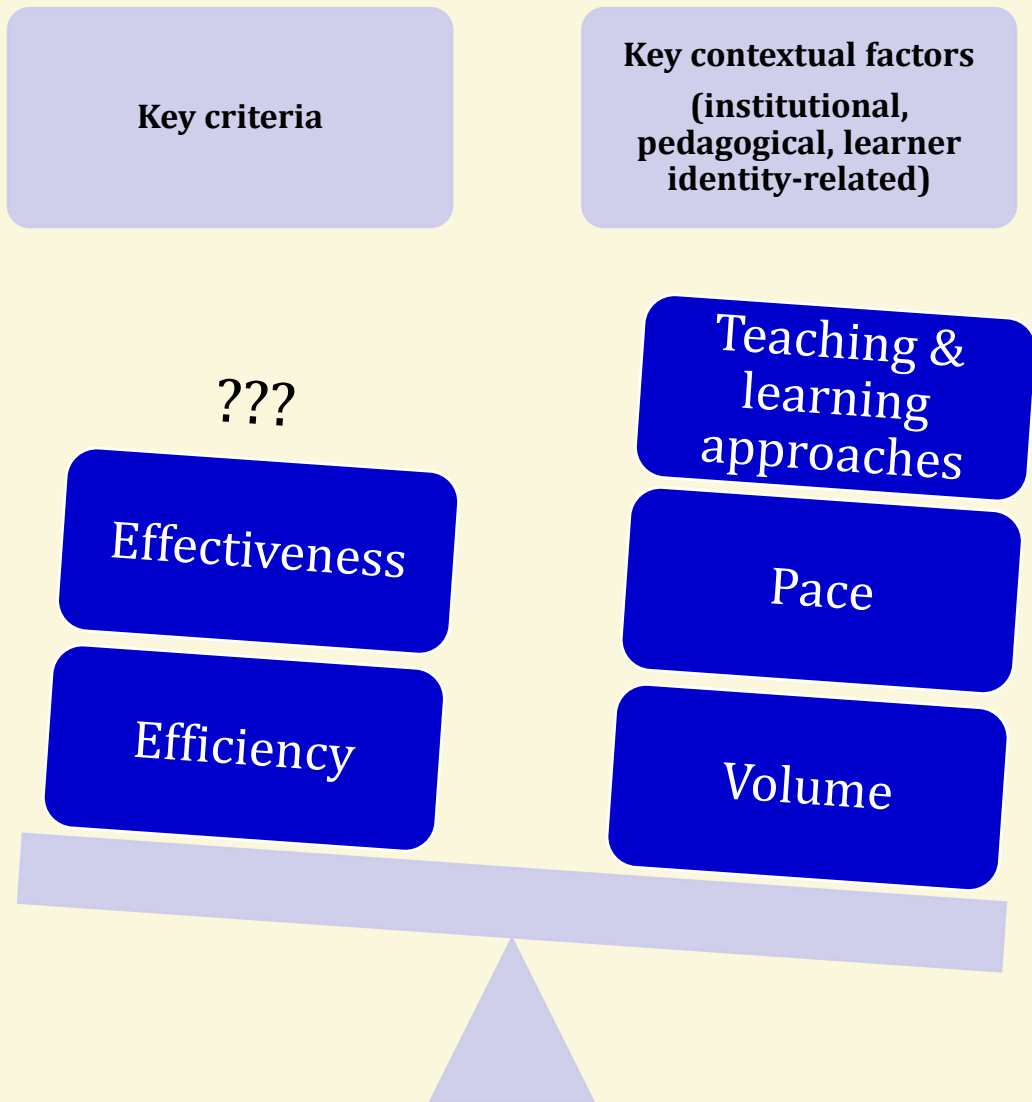
(Harriet, Y1 Chemistry, FG32)

Self-discipline in out-of-class learning

*...in school, teachers chase you for your homework so you don't wanna be in a position to not have it. Whereas in university...**when you don't do your tutorial sheets, no one's gonna chase you.** So I guess I take a lot of liberty in that area. So **I lag behind way more than I ever did in in secondary school...***

(Puja, Y4 Engineering, FG7)

Ineffective (or challenges to) study strategies – a complex business



How to decide?

- Reflecting on experiences
- Based on emotion
- Why it may not always be easy to walk away/try new strategies...
 - ✓ Reluctance to change
 - ✓ Overconfidence
 - ✓ Inability to change
 - ✓ Uncertain what to change
 - ✓ Uncertain how to change

Surface-learning strategies - memorisation

- May be used for strategic reasons, e.g. in different contexts, at different times
 - e.g. based on a **student's learning goal** - to prepare for disliked exam topic (Jesmin)
 - e.g. based on **necessity** and **circumstance** (Noah)
- Limitations of surface learning strategies & implications for students' learning & wellbeing



*...the day before an exam...there's still things that I'm learning that I've seen for the first, the second, the third time. **And I'm cramming all this in my brain and it kind of works...but I don't think it's like I'm learning...** I'll learn all these crazy theorems. **And then like a week after, it's just gone from my brain, I haven't learnt that. I've not absorbed it.** I've looked at it for a day and managed to write it on some paper in the exam. **But I haven't learnt anything.***

(Noah, Y2 Maths, FG16)

Learning from recorded lectures or other visual-based resources



- Can be useful but is not without its limitations

...the problem with like the recorded lectures are if you have questions you can't just ask the lecturer...and some lecturers they point, they have a cursor but it's not shown to us so [in the recording] it will just be them saying this goes to that...I've no idea what's going on and some lecturers I can't hear them properly or sometimes they're not clear enough...

(Ping, Y2 Chemistry, FG31)

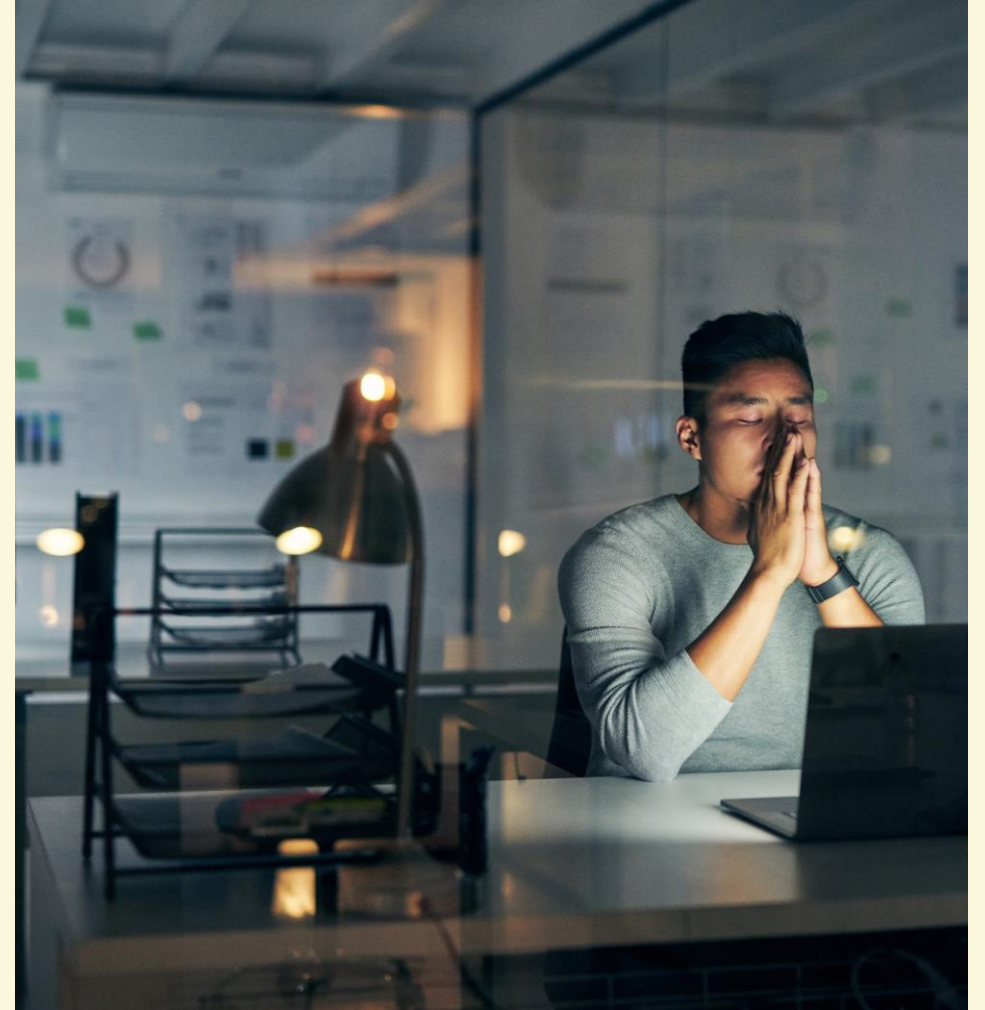
Additional consideration: sustainability of strategies used

- The extent to which it feels possible to work intensely & implications for wellbeing

E: ...the closer you get to exam season, the more hours [you're] just gonna have to pull...I mean, **it's effective, but it's not really feasible long-term**, like beyond one or two months. You can't really keep doing it, like you're putting **12 or 14 hour days constantly and just having breaks for food and sleeping or travel...you can't keep maintaining that.**

P: ...putting that amount of work **makes you feel more confident**. And is that feeling of going to exam not only, like **intellectually knowing that you've covered everything**, but **feeling that emotionally, it's what really helps...you do it really intensely because you know it matters in the short-term. But if you want to do it long-term for all the entire year, you'd burn out too quickly.**

(Eshaq (Y2) & Patricia (Y3) Engineering, FG6)





School (prior experiences)

...obviously, it's a different environment, sixth form. So I didn't have those strategies that I have now. It's really taken me so 6-7 months to actually develop the most efficient way to study.

(Nasir, Y1 Engineering, FG20)

Influences on strategies used



Peer support
(positive influence)



Trial-and-error



Reflecting on
experiences

- Peer support - positive influence

*...with new things that we learn in the course, like coding, you can find that your approach is kind of flawed and not working for you...**instead of like starting from scratch all over again without much new input that would influence the way you'd approach it differently, it's easier just to ask a friend for help...it just frames everything differently.***

(Peter Parker, Y3 Chemistry, FG21)

Trial-and-error

- Working out what works

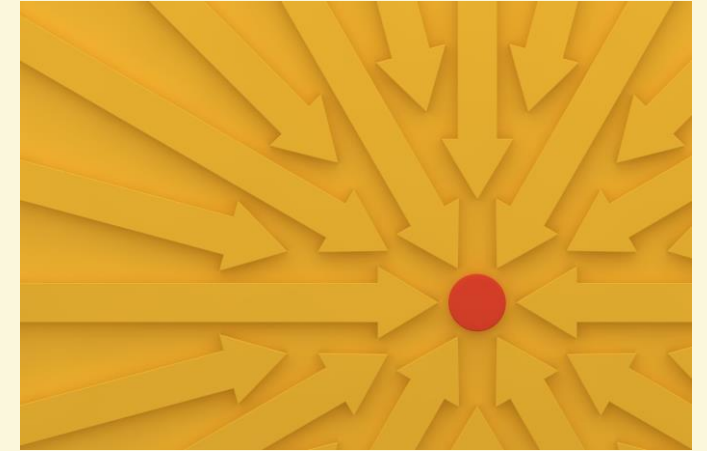
*...in my first term of Imperial I did a sort of trial and error and **one module I did written notes, one module I did Notability notes, and one module I used the notes app through Apple** and I thought that would be my sort of starting point of what I find the best, and **I found that just the Notes app trumped it all.** It was so simple. If I had to copy and paste anything in, I could do that and I can search for keywords if I need to.*

(Elenore, Y2 Medicine, FG29)

- Working out what works - takes time; an ongoing activity...

I feel like every year I have some new strategies...I'm still learning how to study, to be honest. I still see that some of the strategies are not working...I know that for some modules and for some periods, those strategies work, for some they don't. So, I try to be quite flexible in that, and just not feel like, oh, so you haven't figured it out in first year. Then, there's still time to develop that..

(Beatris, Y4 Engineering, FG5)



L: *I do feel like they **keep you in the dark for a long time on some things**. You're just told to memorise.*

TB: *Exactly. Keep you in the dark and then they open the curtains and then you say, oh, okay, that makes so much sense now.*

L: *Which is confusing at the start because it does, I'd say hamper my learning. **Because I just sit there and I'm just like, why are we learning this? What's the purpose? And then it becomes clear, I'd say a lot later than you want it to.** Because when I'm learning something I want to know why I'm learning it and not just being taught to understand what it is. Because I'm not going to have a full understanding of what it is without knowing its purposes or why.*

- Leo (Y2) & Ted Bunny (Y2) Engineering, FG17

G _ A _ P _ S

Q: Do you perceive any gaps in how the university/your department supports your studies?

Gaps predominantly related to:



Types of
learning
opportunities
being sought



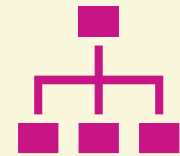
Assessment



Feedback



Teacher-
driven
support



Administration

A closer look – students often spoke about:



Learning opportunities

- * Wanting more past papers & question sheets
- * Wanting (more) Active/interactive learning



Assessment

- * Wanting more formative assessment
- * Wanting broader range of assessments
- * Impact of bunching of deadlines



Feedback

- * Type/amount of feedback
- * Timeliness of feedback given

Students' views



...there's the level of intimidation that you don't ask a stupid question ...so you just sit there and say nothing...I don't know how you do it, but create an environment in which that's not the case, in which you can ask a stupid question and you can really delve into the intuition behind certain things ...

(Carl, Y3 Maths, FG12)



...more frequent assessments ... even if they're formative, might help you revise little by little instead of ohh I only have a big exam at the end of the term, so I might just well just cram for that exam and not learn throughout the way.

(Sofia, Y1 Life Sciences, FG10)



Just having a better feedback system would really, really help a lot of us...I feel like if you know how well you're doing, you can localise the problem.... Instead of not knowing what you did wrong and then just doing everything to fix everything again, even though you're already good in some of the modules.

(Amisha, Y2 Engineering, FG1)



Activity: Discussion on existing resources and support

- What **resources does our university currently offer** that support both student **studies** and **wellbeing**? Which of these work particularly well and why?
- What **improvements** could be made to our **existing resources** to better support students? Are there any resources that are not being fully utilised?
- What are the **gaps in our current support offerings**?

Developing the Learning Well Programme

Learning Well Programme

- A week-long programme of workshops, events, talks, and activities.
- Clear links to learning, study strategies, and student wellbeing.
- Similar format to existing Mental Health Awareness Week.

Mental Health Awareness Week

13–17 May 2024

Movement Moving more for our mental health



Programme of events

Monday 13 May

Tuesday 14 May

Wednesday 15 May

Thursday 16 May

Friday 17 May



All day - [SeeingHappy @ Imperial Photography Exhibition](#).

Activity: Exhibition

For: Staff and students

Format: In person

Join SeeingHappy & Imperial for an inspiring event during UK Mental Health Week! Explore global humanity through photos at the main reception, South Kensington campus.



09:30 - 16:30 - Wellbeing in Research. [Register on ICIS/OLM](#).

Activity: Course

For: Research Staff

Format: Online

Academia can be overwhelming. Learn tools to increase your resilience to stress, anxiety and burnout and to enhance your overall wellbeing.

Activity: Design one day of the Learning Well Programme

World Café Process



Photo: World Café Community

1. Decide on a theme for your day (e.g. Movement for Wellbeing) and design a schedule of 3-5 activities, workshops, talks, etc. for this day. Consider how each idea relates to learning (well)/study strategies. **25 minutes**
2. Rotate around the room and comment on /add to other group's ideas. One person remains at each table as the 'host'. Host welcomes newcomers, summarises prior conversations, invites new ideas and feedback. **20 minutes**
3. Debrief and summary from each group. **15 minutes**

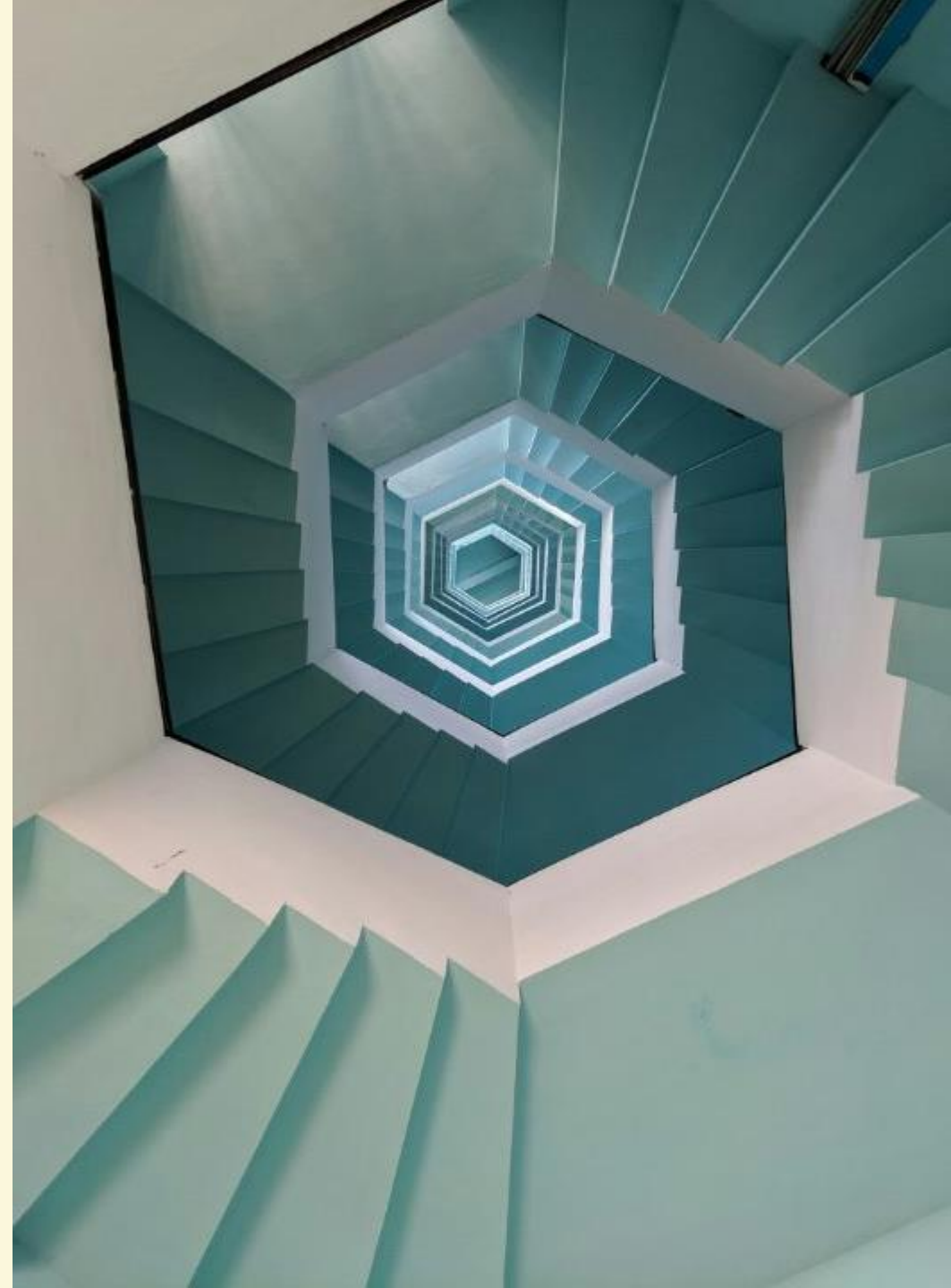
What's next?

StudentShapers Project (July-August 2024): Co-development and crafting of the Learning Well Programme for STEMM students

- ✓ engage with and experience how the findings and pedagogical implications from educational research can be devised for practice in meaningful and useful ways
- ✓ identify gaps in current study support and wellbeing resources and develop evidence-based examples and resources
- ✓ develop pedagogical materials such as designing infographics to showcase effective learning strategies, producing podcast episodes for promoting effective learning strategies and behaviours, etc.

Collaboration with colleagues across the College:

- ✓ We will use insights from this Town Hall as we develop the programme and may contact you to discuss your potential involvement in delivering sessions and activities.





Collective responsibility