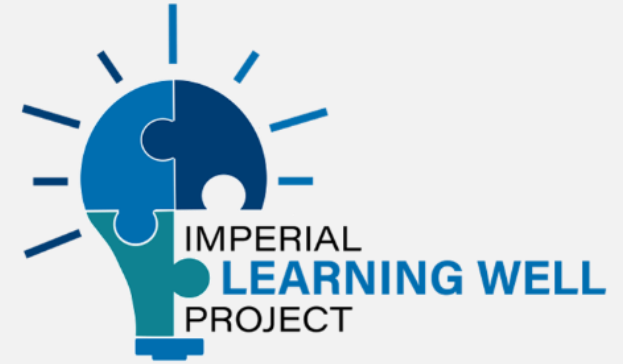


*...that's something that the [school] teachers did mention...  
you need to work hard, there's like no time to play.  
It's Imperial... (Sachith, Y3 Medicine, FG26)*



## **Undergraduate students' preconceptions of a world-leading, high-achieving STEMMB university: Potential implications for students' ability to learn well at Imperial**

Dr Sue Sing, Dr Tiffany Chiu & Dr Richard Bale  
Centre for Higher Education Research & Scholarship (CHERS)

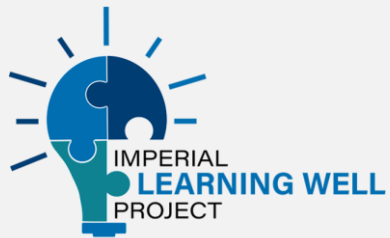
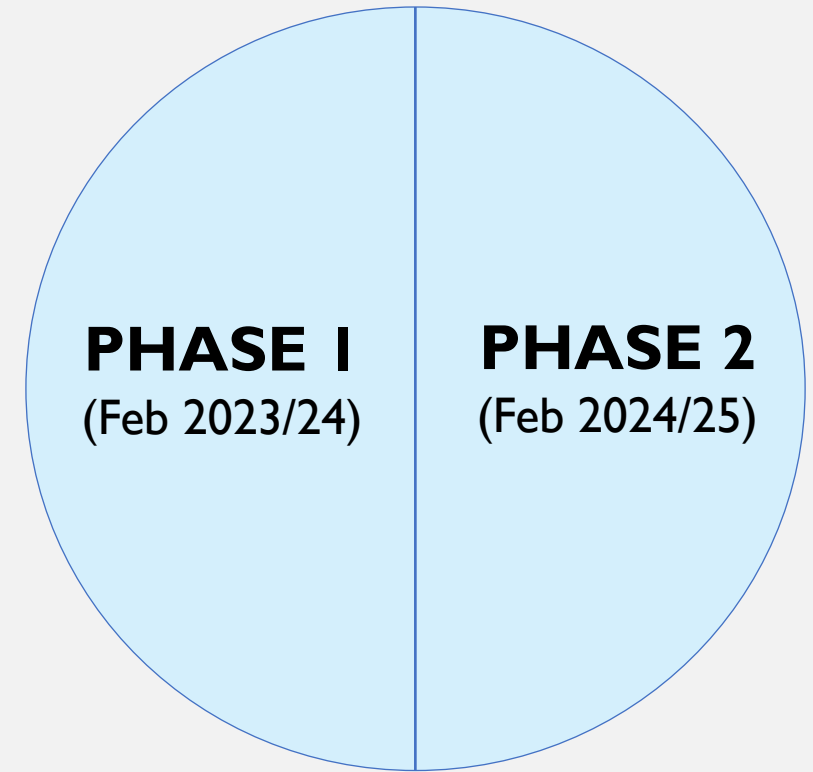
Funded by the President's Excellence Fund for Learning & Teaching Innovation

**IMPERIAL**

Festival of Learning and Teaching 2024

# Learning Well Project: Focus & Aims

- To engage students with **evidence-based learning & wellbeing strategies** to consider their study approaches and scaffold students to **recognise learning behaviours** linked to improved wellbeing
- To move away from the deficit model to **a more proactive approach**
- To enhance students' wellbeing and sense of belonging

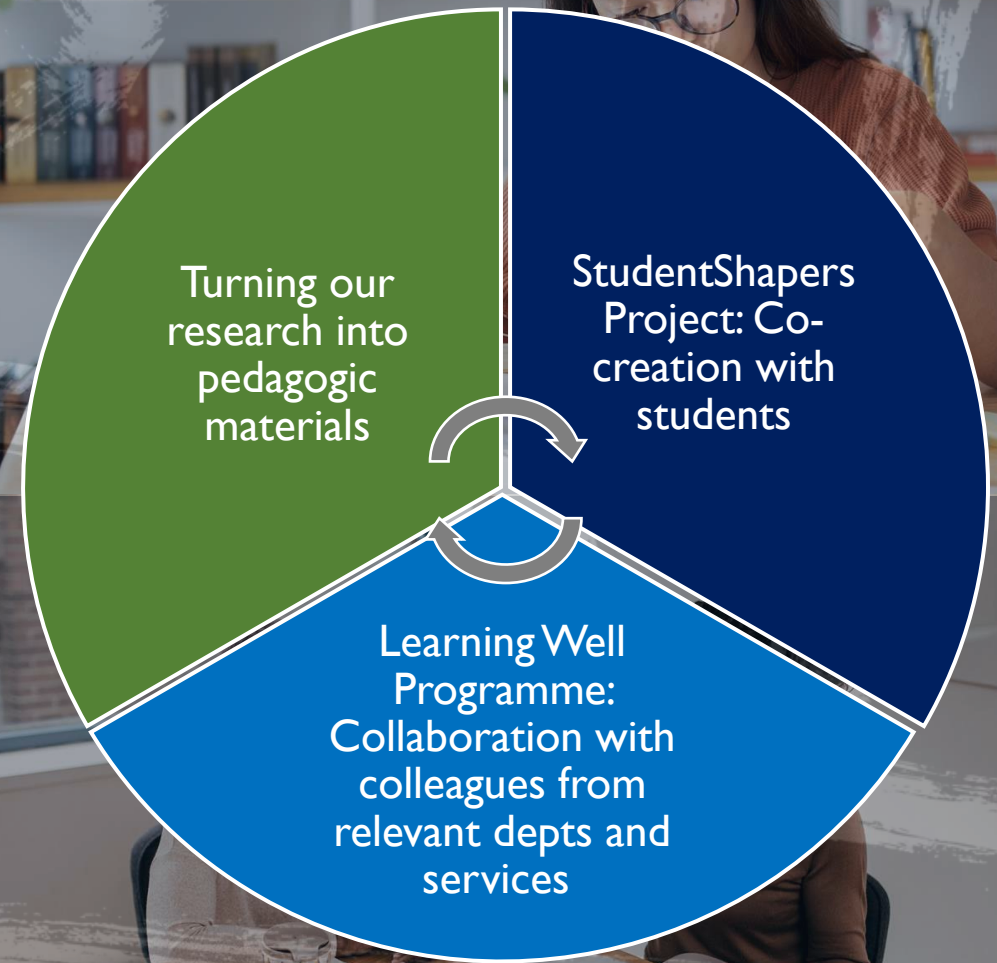


## Introduction to the project

## PHASE I Research & Data collection



## PHASE 2 Resource development & implementation



# Focus of today's presentation

Students' preconceptions prior to coming to Imperial

Preconceptions

Matches v. mismatches

Extent to which expectations match students' experiences

Points for further consideration

Potential implications for students' ability to 'learn well' during their time at Imperial



# THEME: Students' preconceptions prior to coming to Imperial

## Mainly related to:

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

I was honestly quite scared before coming to Imperial because, oh yes, **world-class institution, STEM subjects, everybody is going to be studying all the time, and I'm going to have no friends.** I remember I was in London in December and it was really nice. But then **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)

So, I watched like a lot of YouTube bloggers and stuff. I also had some discussions with past students. We've got some people from my school. There is the stereotype, actually... **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 like a life** and so... (Nasir, Y1 Engineering, FG20)

**Workload**  
**Social life**



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

# Influences on students' thinking

Family and/or  
friends

Own research  
including online  
forums & social  
media

In-person visits to  
Imperial

School including  
teachers & alumni

COVID



***...that's something that the [school] teachers did mention...  
you need to work hard, there's like no time to play.  
It's Imperial... (Sachith, Y3 Medicine, FG26)***



# Match v. mismatch: Extent to which expectations match students' experiences

Match –  
positive/negative

Mismatch –  
positive/negative

No expectations –  
neither match nor  
mismatch

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. You know, we are pushed, which as someone who kind of missed that a lot at school, I really like it.** (Andrea, Y2 Physics, FG13)

Match – as expected (positive)

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 much time for free time** or like they're not very society-focused. 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 knew I'd have a big schedule, like a very full schedule and to be honest I have... **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)

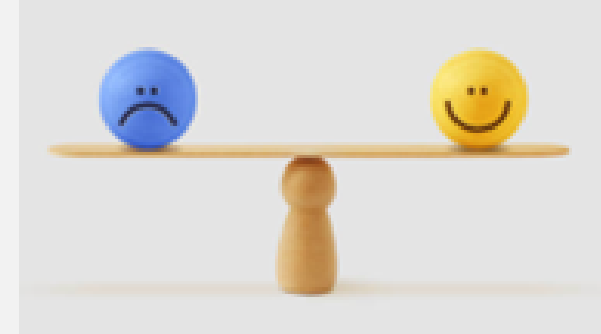
Match – as expected (negative)

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



# Why this matters: how might 'learning well' at Imperial be impacted?



[W]hen you realise how much work you're doing and how much work other people are doing, it puts in perspective how to do well, you have to **sacrifice** a lot of things. It's about **finding a good balance**. (Ajith, Y3 Engineering, FG1)

- Preconceptions (and misconceptions) can lead to unhealthy and unsustainable study strategies – **sacrifice**; lack of **balance**

- Detracts from a **rounded student experience**; disrupt unhealthy **institutional myth making**; alumni feed into more positive narrative

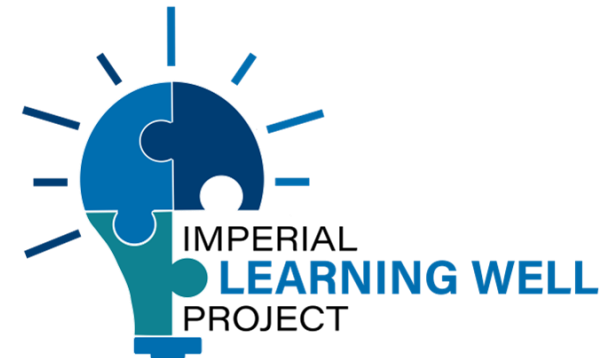


I knew that it was a STEM uni. So it's **not so much partying and going out** all the time as other ones would be. So I expected it would be a bit less... **I don't want to say less fun than other unis**, but that sort of thing. (Josiah, Y2 Maths, FG9)



# Pedagogical implications & Areas for consideration

- **Transparency in expectations** (mindset preparation prior to arrival): Understand what it means to be a university student at Imperial; disrupt misconceptions
- **Support for transition to university learning** (ongoing process  $\neq$  pre-arrival/welcome week): Explicit discussions on study strategies; preparation for different teaching, learning and assessment methods
- **Reciprocal relationship**: Support students to recognise that positive wellbeing and study strategies are not mutually exclusive but mutually beneficial
- **Enhancing social interaction**: Creating opportunities that encourage peer support and collaboration



# Opportunities to contribute to our work



**Learning Well  
project website**



**Get in touch**

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**Town Hall meeting  
(June 2024)**

**Interested to join?**

- To learn more about our project research findings
  - To collaborate with colleagues from across the College
- To generate ideas for the design of the Learning Well Programme



**Learning Well  
Programme  
(Spring term 2025)**

- To support students to proactively consider their study strategies and scaffolds them to recognise learning behaviours linked to improved wellbeing.
- More details will follow in the Town Hall meeting