

A group of five diverse students (three men and two women) are standing on a stone balustrade in front of a brick building and lush green trees. The students are dressed in casual to semi-formal attire. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting a sunny day.

# Culture and Belonging at Imperial

Learning & Teaching Festival 2022



# We are Imperial College Union



- Mission: to make a positive impact on the experiences and outcomes of all Imperial College students from all backgrounds
- Provide services to, and represent the interests of Imperial's **20,000+ students**
- Led by 5 elected full-time officers



# Our Roles and Objectives

- Expanding support for international students
- Review of the Mum's and Dad's scheme
- Writing an EDI Strategy for the Union
- Reviewing the Culture of Clubs and Societies (CSPs)
- Reviewing the College's Student Disciplinary Procedures

*... just to name a few!*

**Daniel Lo**

Deputy President  
(Education)

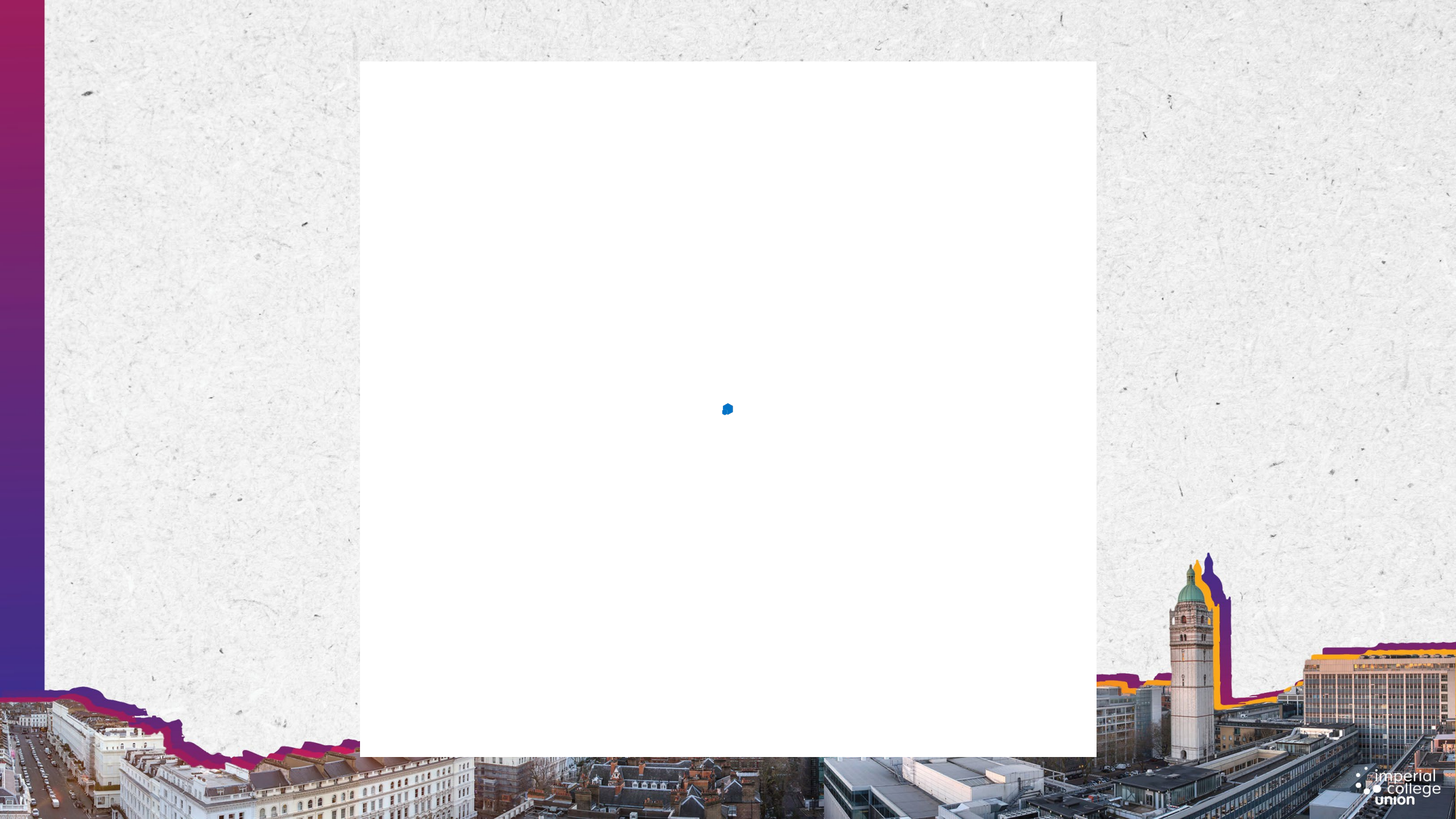


**Nathalie Podder**

Deputy President  
(Welfare)







# Student Responses

What words come to mind when you think of culture at Imperial College?

Mentimeter

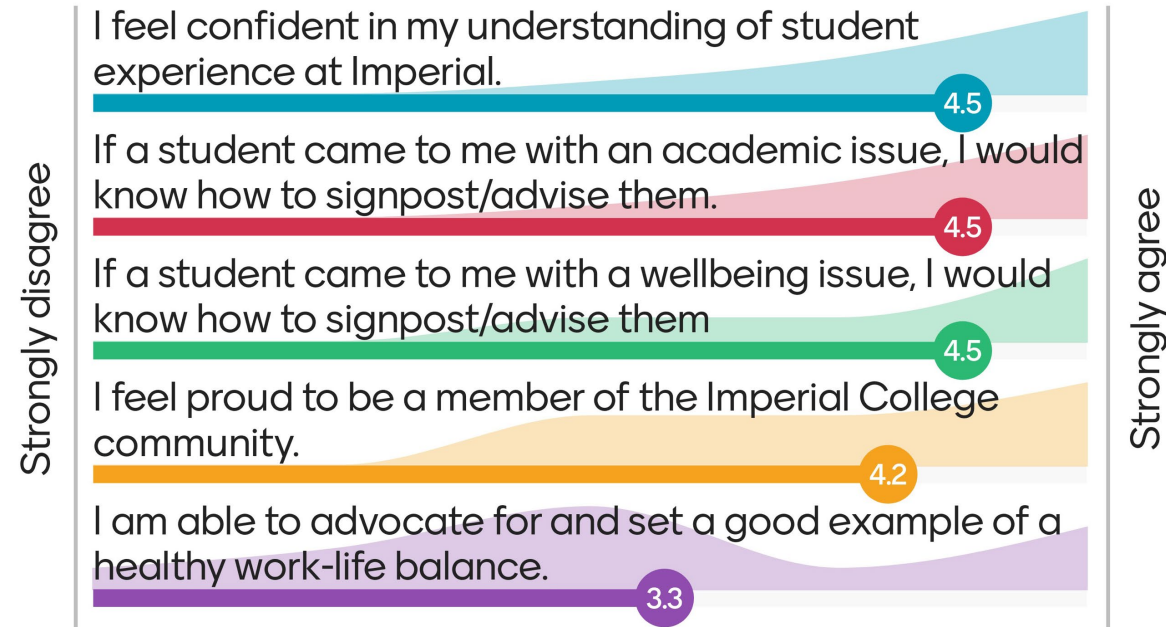




# Student Responses

How strongly do you agree with the following statements?

Mentimeter



# Student Responses

## What can the College do to improve a sense of belonging among students and staff at Imperial?

Mentimeter

More talking about issues with imposter syndrome and competitive culture.

More support for community-building events and initiatives within faculties and departments

Students and staff more often interact in an academic setting. Would be nice if there are more casual, informal socials for staff and student.

Change the senior leadership team, having more in-person teaching and social events, work with the SU to improve the Imperial culture and student experience

Being down to earth and normalizing struggles with self confidence and mental health as a shared human experience that we can all support each other with.

diversity and inclusivity make college more like home to us. Not sure how to improve tho.

More representation and focus on LCOs.

Start from departments, improve rapport between staff and students

I think maintaining the teaching quality, and open opportunities for students to learn and achieve what they want will make Imperial Community thrive.

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# 2016 Review of Culture



This word art was created 2016 as part of Dr. Alison Phipps' A [review](#) of *Imperial College's institutional culture and its impact on gender equality*

- How have things changed? What themes have stayed the same?



# Education at Imperial College – before and during COVID



- How has COVID impacted students' learning experiences at Imperial College
- How COVID-19 changed the way institutions deliver their Education
- Looking at the future: How should Imperial College deliver Education post-COVID
- What can the College do to improve the culture and belonging



# How has COVID impacted the HE sector

- Reduced acquisition of international students
- More students seek to defer
- Additional costs due to remote working
- Loss of commercial and accommodation income
- Increased reliance on IT infrastructure and systems
- The predominance of online learning



# How has COVID impacted students – Learning and Teaching

- Minimal in-person teaching, and social activities
- Limited access to research labs
- Students have limited access to campus services, such as the library
- Unable to hold in-person meetings with their supervisors and coursemates
- An adaptation of technology, such as the utilisation of online meeting software
- Difficulty in virtual transition, such as field trips and labs
- Mental health related issues

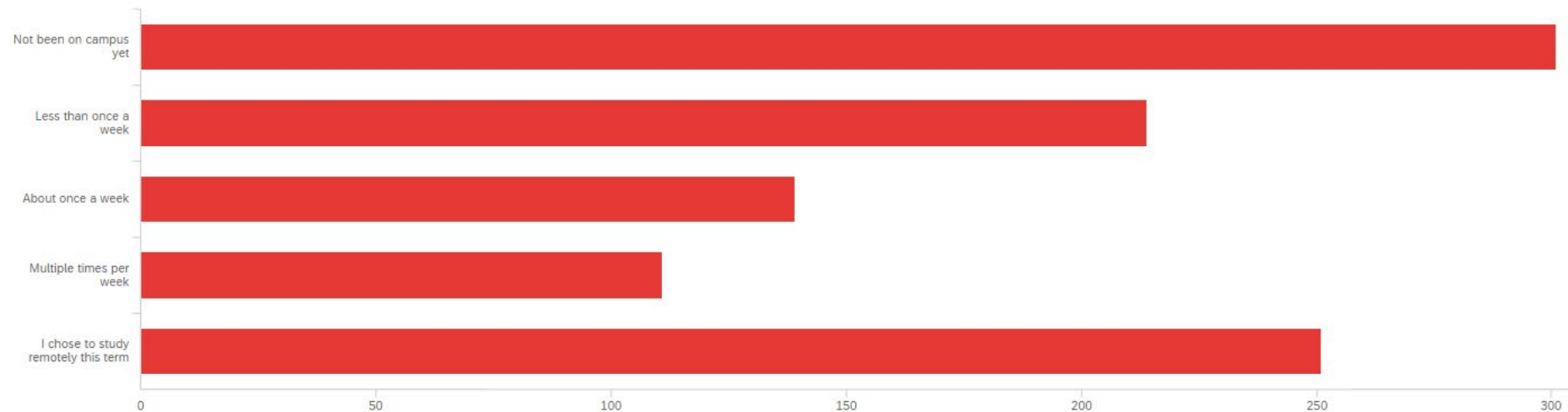


# What our students have to say...

- *"One of the things that is noticeable in my department is that some staff are reluctant to want to come back to teach on campus."*
- *"I think first, and second year teaching is more negatively affected by that as students aren't as experienced in University-level study and managing their time."*
- *"This happened last year for second years - less than 6 hours' time on campus for the full fees."*
- *"I love things online. [...] I have time to look after myself [...] so I have more time and lectures are uploaded so I can do them any time."*
- *"When I did my final year project, I spent 95% of my time in front of a computer. I really wanted to have an opportunity to work in a lab, but I couldn't due to Covid."*

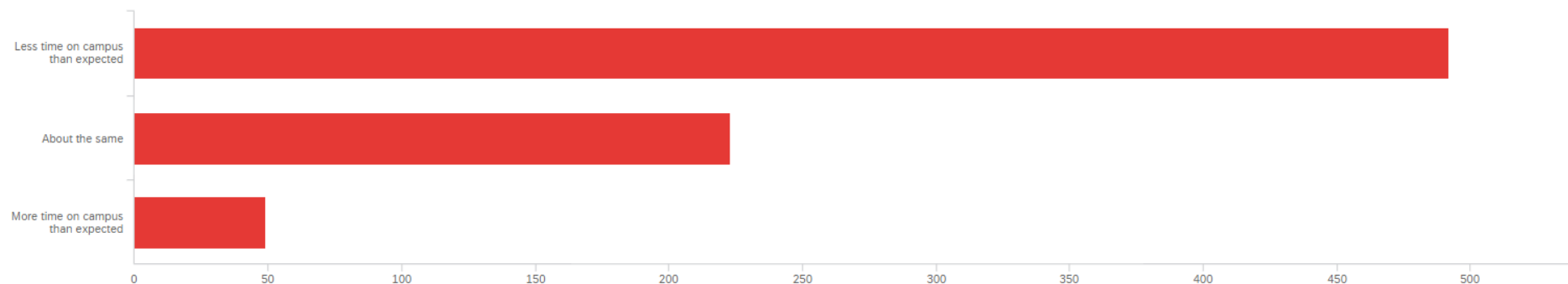


Q26 - How often have you been on campus for teaching?



Q27 - How does this compare to your expectation of on-campus activity before term started?

Page Options



Most students do not have access to regular in-person teaching back in 2020. Unsurprisingly, students would expect more on-campus activities, but COVID had disappointed the majority.



# How has COVID impacted students - Assessments

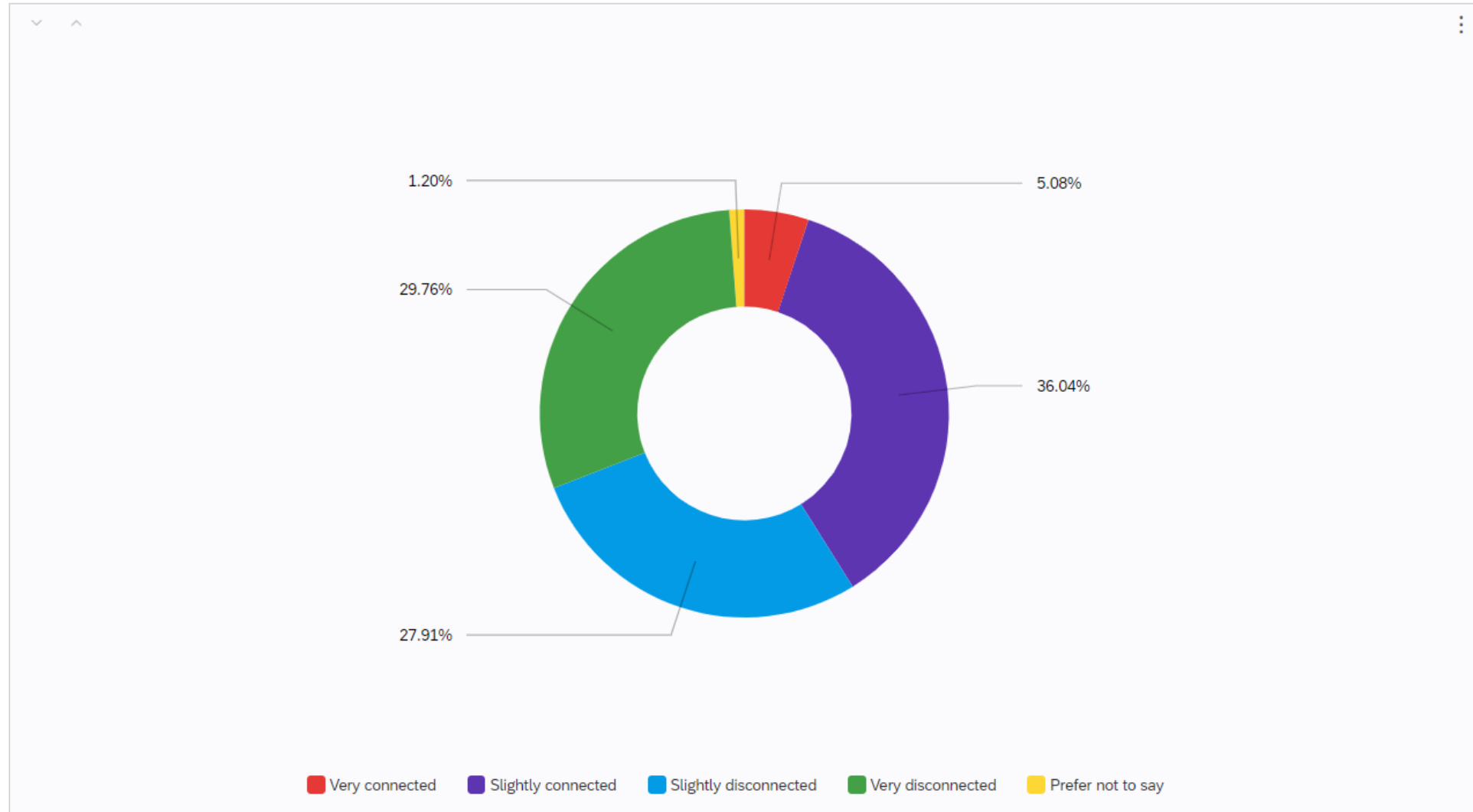
- A new concept of online exams, or timed-remote assessments (TRAs)
- Limited or no experience in taking in-person exams in a university setting
- The fear of Departments making exams harder to reflect that exams are open-book
- More submitted mitigating circumstances application by students
- More academic misconduct cases
- Even more exam stress...



# How has COVID impacted students – Community and belonging

- Feeling isolated, less happy, more anxious
- Increased drop-out rate
- Dissatisfied with their learning experience – degree value for money
- Unable to organise group social activities
- Mental health challenges
- Barriers to belonging, such as first-year and underrepresented students
- Different learning environment





Almost 58% of Imperial students did not feel connected to the Imperial community.



# What our students have to say...

- "Generally, I feel the entire community would benefit from a shift in culture from one of shame and low self-esteem to one of collaboration and support."
- "Too much work, less focus on mental health and community."
- "This year (2021) has been deeply lonely and isolating. I feel not sense of community throughout my time at university and have made no strong social connections."
- "My experience here has been positive. I feel part of a community. Teaching has been excellent."
- "Motivation, encouragement, feeling to belonging and achievement (can be improved to enhance my research programme experience)"



# The new norm

- Hybrid teaching vs in-person teaching?
- Open book exams vs closed book exams?
- Digital notes vs handwritten notes?
- Flexibility of remote learning vs mandated presence on-campus?



# Lessons on Inclusion

*“Hybrid has made me healthier, my grades have come up since hybrid working came in, that is my opinion.”*  
– Anonymous disabled student at Imperial



Academic Year	College Average	Disabled Students
2016-17*	4.8%	10.5%

- Disabled students have seen a dramatic decrease in discontinuation rates over COVID
- Working group is being formed by the Student Experience Committee on examining how to continue improvements

\*Taken from the [Access and participation plan 2020-21 to 2024-25](#)



# Challenges of Marginalized Groups

## Access to Mental Health Support Services

- Mean waiting time for counselling service: **3 weeks**
- **21%** of students put down “shorter waiting times” as a suggestion for improvement in the College’s counselling service

## Sexual Harassment and Violence

- The Union’s [Sexual Misconduct Survey 2021](#) reports that **30.8%** of participants experienced sexual harassment and **15.0%** experienced sexual violence.
- **84.2%** and **87.5%** of those respondents who were survivors of sexual harassment and sexual violence respectively were women.

Survivors of  
sexual harassment



**30.8%**  
of survey  
participants

Survivors of  
sexual violence



**15.0%**  
of survey  
participants

**51.2%** of survivors of  
violence responded with the

“

**I did not seek support from  
anyone at Imperial**

”

Among the respondents who identify as  
having a disability there were:



**50%**  
survivors  
of sexual  
harrasment



**20%**  
survivors  
of sexual  
violence



# Challenges of Marginalized Groups

## Finding Support Away from Home

“[t]he most important thing that international students need . . . is *having an advocate* who can vouch for [international students], be there for them, and be *present as a supportive and approachable person* that they can easily come to; this is the type of support that is currently missing for international students, as it would be *typically provided by one’s family, who many international students are distant from.*” – Anvesh Rajeshirke, International Officer

## Imposter Syndrome

“The *imposter syndrome* hit even more like 'cause I got to that point I thought I'd finish like my whole first year, and I think *I'd met one other person who identified as working class*, like that's the big thing for me” – from [Experiences of First-Gen/WP students in DoLS and strategies for improving department support for students](#), July 2021

## Communication

“During early stages of pandemic, I *heard from Imperial once in a blue moon.* . . I felt *more cared about by other unis* as a prospective student. I did feel like *communication reassures students that they are cared about*, and are having their issues taken seriously.” – Rebekah Christie, BME Officer



# The future of Education post-COVID

- Rethink our teaching and assessment delivery, so they can be more accessible
- To re-build the Imperial community by introducing more social events (collaborating with the Union)
- Maximise in-person teaching whilst retaining flexibility for students with different needs
- Communicate proactively with students on academic and non-academic issues
- Improve mental health support, as this correlates with students' belonging
- Regain trust from students with the College's Working Together Task Group
- Strengthen our alumni network to connect with current and outgoing students



# Get in Touch

**Daniel – Deputy President (Education)**

[dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:dpeducation@imperial.ac.uk)

**Nathalie – Deputy President (Welfare)**

[dpwelfare@imperial.ac.uk](mailto:dpwelfare@imperial.ac.uk)



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**Any Questions?**

