

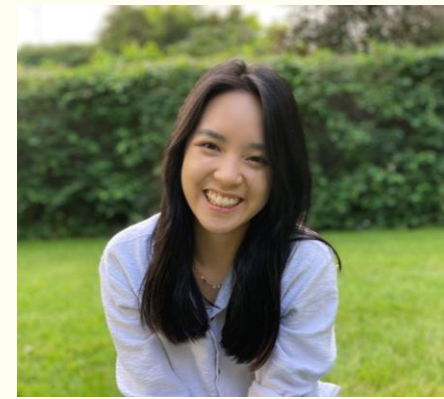
**Imperial College
London**

Exploring barriers to success: A student partnership to improve support for First-Gen/widening- participation students in Life Sciences

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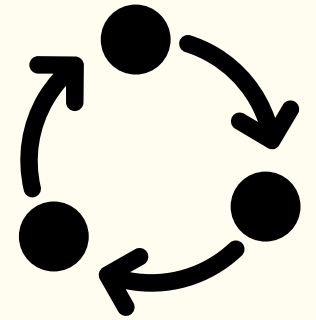
Rationale

- Awarding gaps across sector
- Lack of understanding of the student perspective → StudentShapers
- Admissions WP initiatives across the department and college (Access and Participation) e.g. SIDUS and DoLS recruitment initiatives
- Also initiatives that were implemented as part of this project

*“I just feel like a **burden**, a **statistic**, ...a box to be ticked, and they've got me here and that's all they needed to do.”*

Methodology

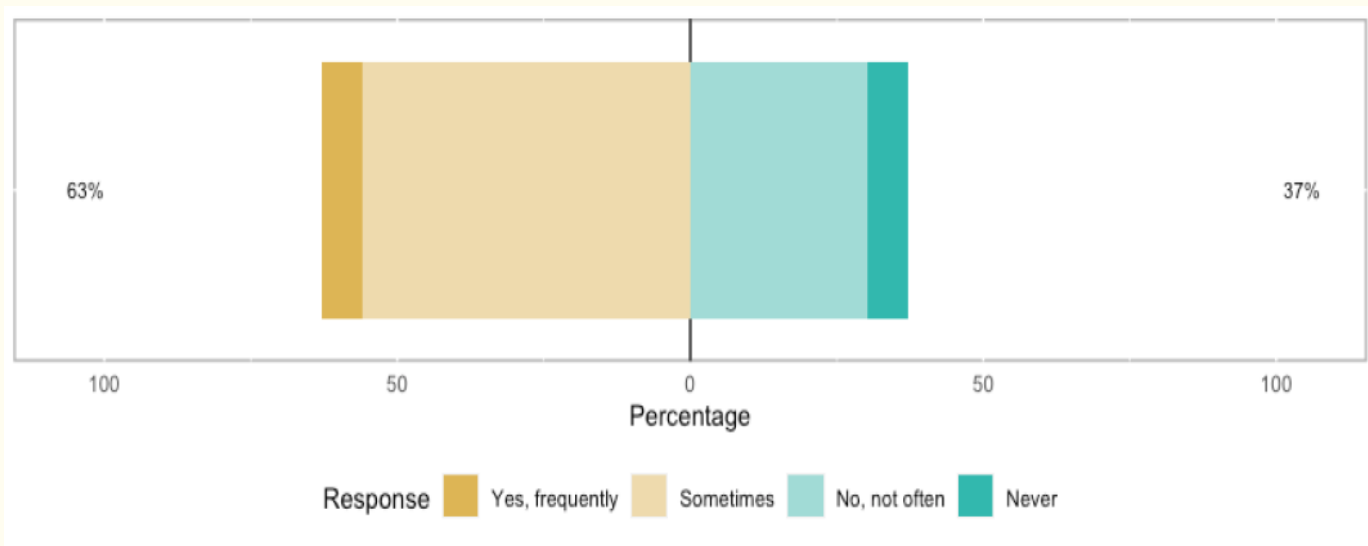
- Qualitative research methods following ethical approval
 - **Survey** (66 respondents, 44 completed)
 - **Focus groups** (student run) – 9 participants across 2 focus groups
- Students self-identify as WP/First-Gen/Working class



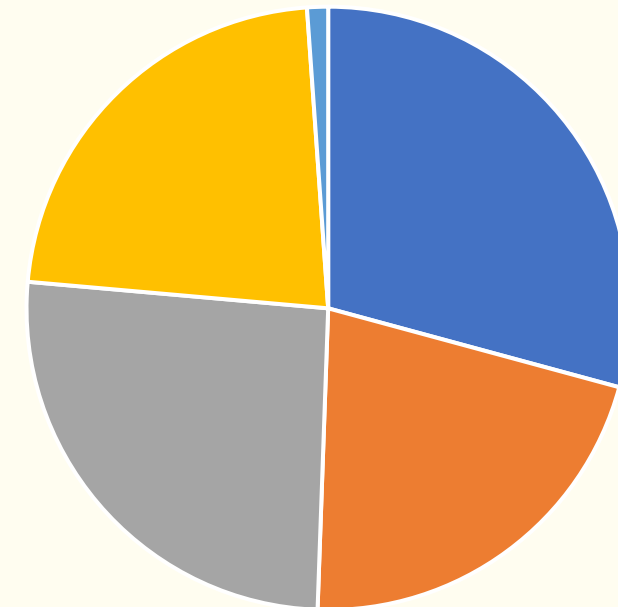
“it's such a vague term that I don't really know what it means. I feel like it's just used to cover everything I would only [apply for this] because it was WP / first generation / working class that I knew where I fell into this category, but widening participation means very little to me and all honesty.”

Results

At university, do you feel like you've ever faced barriers specific to being a WP student?



Types of challenges/barriers



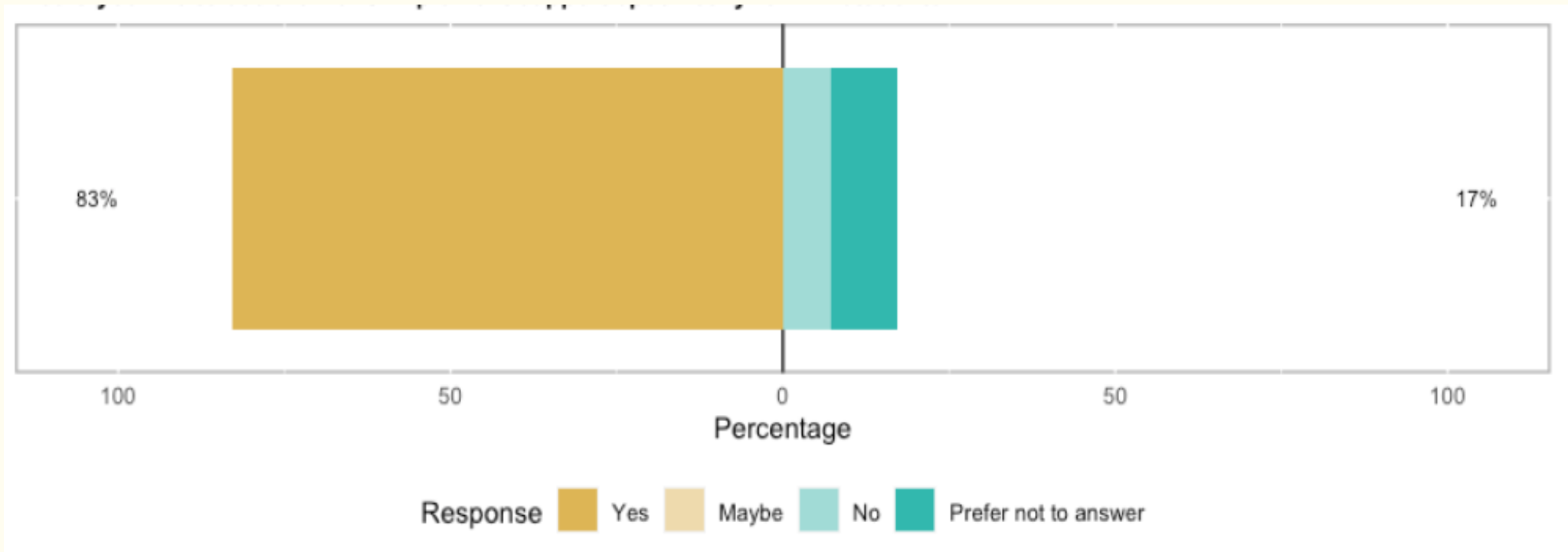
Financial Academic Mental Health Social Other

*“Like **little issues** like worrying about what you’re gonna do when you graduate or like your how comfortable your **living situation** is like at home or when you go home for the holidays. Being able to have like a **good space to study**, like little things that really add up that add little stresses”*

"I think it would put too much of a spotlight on us."

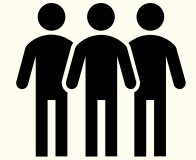
Results

Would you like to see DoLS implement support specifically for WP students?



Main themes

- **Sense of community/belonging**
- **Lab experience**
- **Career planning and progression to postgraduate study**
- Need for WP staff representation
- Unequal footing from school experiences/Academic challenges
- Personal tutoring and mental health



*"I'm not part of any societies. I feel like I'm **barely just part of the biochemistry department**. In terms of I go to lectures I did assignments. And that's pretty much it."*

*"Beating **impostor syndrome** was the biggest thing for me...Overcoming it was actually through...**the working class network**...we've kind of formed a bit of a **community**."*

"I don't really know anyone else that's working class or first-generation..."

Sense of belonging



*"I have made little to **no social connections**. I feel as if I haven't been to university at all."*

*"All my friends were getting these really bougie takeaways like sushi and all these really fancy things...I **just felt like I didn't have anyone to bond with over**...a chip shop takeaway or...these silly things that I had from my **own culture** from back home"*

*“if you're from a background where you haven't really done labs you, you're **already on the back foot**”*

*“there is a lot of focus in first year on making sure everyone is at the same level in terms of academic knowledge...but there was not the same focus on making sure everyone's **lab skills were equivalent** by the end of first year.”*

Academic and lab support



*“other people will have experience with **complicated equipment** and we don't and we're just expected to know what to do...We have been in a school lab which **didn't have the money** for equipment.”*

*“workshops where you can **practice** your lab skills **without the pressure** of having to do a lab report and having to get everything done on time”*

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*“I do think there is a **big divide** when it comes to **opportunity**, many peers get internships through family connections and nepotism and it feels like there are **less opportunities** for WP groups”*

*“**UROP bursaries** available **specifically** for WP students, so that more students are able to **access research** projects”*

Support with research placements and careers



*“I think private school students have like way bigger advantage going for **placement years** and industry because...They have that **interview prep, application prep**, stuff like that. ... But I think there's people you can go to, but **it's hard reaching out and asking for help**”*

Implementation

- **WP profiles** - <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/life-sciences/about/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/widening-participation/student-shapers---student-profiles/>
- **WP networking events**
- **Lab skills**

*“Just from even before reaching the college
- making people aware that there are
people out there, like from a similar
background to you, we have been through
the same experiences”*



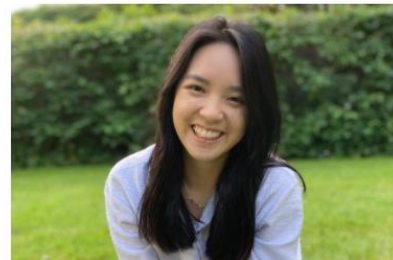
Find out more about Esha
Kumari



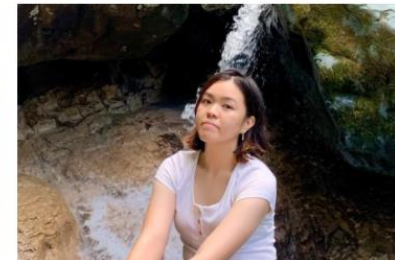
Find out more about Grace
Fisher



Find out more about Holly
Monkhouse



Find out more about Holly Yang



Find out more about Maria Le



Find out more about Yash Gupta

*“I'd love to have like a **community** where working class students like throughout all the years could just come and just talk”*

Recommendations

Lab drop-in sessions

WP staff
representative

Increased staff
awareness/personal
tutor training

WP careers support

WP UROP bursary

Postgraduate
support – and
financial

Thanks!
Any questions?

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