



Welcome to the LISS DTP Workshop: How to Write a Good Studentship Application!

14th November 2025, 12:00 – 14:00 GMT

Key Links:

[Online Applicant
Briefing Session](#)

[LISS DTP Open
Competition Webpage](#)

[FAQs](#)



IMPERIAL



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**

How to write a good studentship application
14 November 2025

Partnership between King's College London, Queen Mary University of London, and Imperial College London.

Commissioned and funded by the ESRC and institutional investment, with approx. 54 studentships and 4 postdoctoral fellowships offered annually.

Provides foundation and advanced social science training - all PGRs using social science approaches across the partnership can participate in LISS DTP activities and research methods training.



LISS DTP's vision



Three core principles:

Interdisciplinarity: Research across topics and disciplinary boundaries, within and beyond the social sciences

Data-driven research: Focus on various forms of data (e.g., numeric, textual, visual) and methods (e.g., quantitative, computational, digital, qualitative, participatory, mixed methods)

Impact: Engage with extensive networks of non-academic collaborators, and co-design research and training with users, practitioners, and potential future employers

LISS is organised into 6 Research Areas (RAs):

- RA1: Global Health Innovation
- RA2: Business Analytics, Management, and Applied Economics
- RA3: Language, Culture, and Education
- RA4: Environment and Sustainability
- RA5: Global Order and Security
- RA6: Government and Public Policy



- <https://liss-dtp.ac.uk/research-areas/>
- <https://liss-dtp.ac.uk/research-areas/research-area-leads/>

Introduction of Sifting Stage

Abstract (theoretical underpinning; gaps in literature; research problem/objectives; sources of data; methodological approaches; anticipated contributions to theory and practice) [max 400 words]

Interdisciplinarity (perspectives from different fields; experience/skills of interdisciplinary research) [max 200 words]

Data-Driven Research (type and scale of data; experience/skills in collecting, managing, and analysing data) [max 200 words]

Impact (potential impact of research within academia and beyond; pathways to impact; experience of generating impact) [max 200 words]

Suitability for LISS DTP (why you consider yourself a strong candidate; academic achievements; professional experiences) [max 200 words]



**Anonymous two-page
application**



Reviewer Guidance

Score	Student Research Potential (weighted 60% for 1+3.5; 40% for +3.5)	Scientific Quality of Proposal (weighted 40% for 1+3.5, 60% for +3.5)
	<p>As evidenced in the personal statement, academic references, academic transcripts, degree results, and other credentials such as prizes, academic awards or publications, and, where appropriate, professional qualifications and/or relevant experience. Some candidates may have developed relevant and rounded expertise in core research methods in other contexts, and panels may decide that this broadly equivalent background is sufficient. Reviewers should also consider if applicants' personal circumstances and educational background may have disadvantaged them to overcome barriers to achievement and develop their full potential.</p>	<p>Relevant questions to consider include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the proposal have a clear research question(s) and proposed methodologies/strategy to answer the question(s)? - Is the proposal clear and well-written? - Is the proposed work plan achievable in a 3.5 - year PhD degree/1-year Masters + 3.5 year PhD? - Does the proposed research fill a gap in existing literature and offer an individual contribution/potential for contribution to knowledge in its field? - Does the proposal demonstrate the broader societal and/or economic impact/value of the research? - Is the proposed research interdisciplinary? - Is the proposed research data-driven? - Does the proposed research fit in with the strategic priorities of the department and institution where the applicant will be based, with LISS DTP's remits, and with the remit of the ESRC?



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2026 Entry:

Applicant ED&I data, Widening Participation and Application Writing Guidance

LISS-DTP Diversity (2024-2025)

- **2024: 325** applicants;
- **36** awardees → success rate $\approx$ **11.1%**.
- **2025: 473** applicants;
- **33** awardees → success rate $\approx$ **7.0%**.

- **Attributes**

- Ethnicity (ONS-5: White, Asian, Black, Mixed, Other)
- Disability (by category/type)
- Gender, School type, FSM
- Parental HE by 18, Caring responsibilities, Fee status

Widening Participation for UK applicants



• 2024 applicants (UK):
Ethnic minority 52.2%,
Disabled 14.8%,
Female 50.4% (N=115).

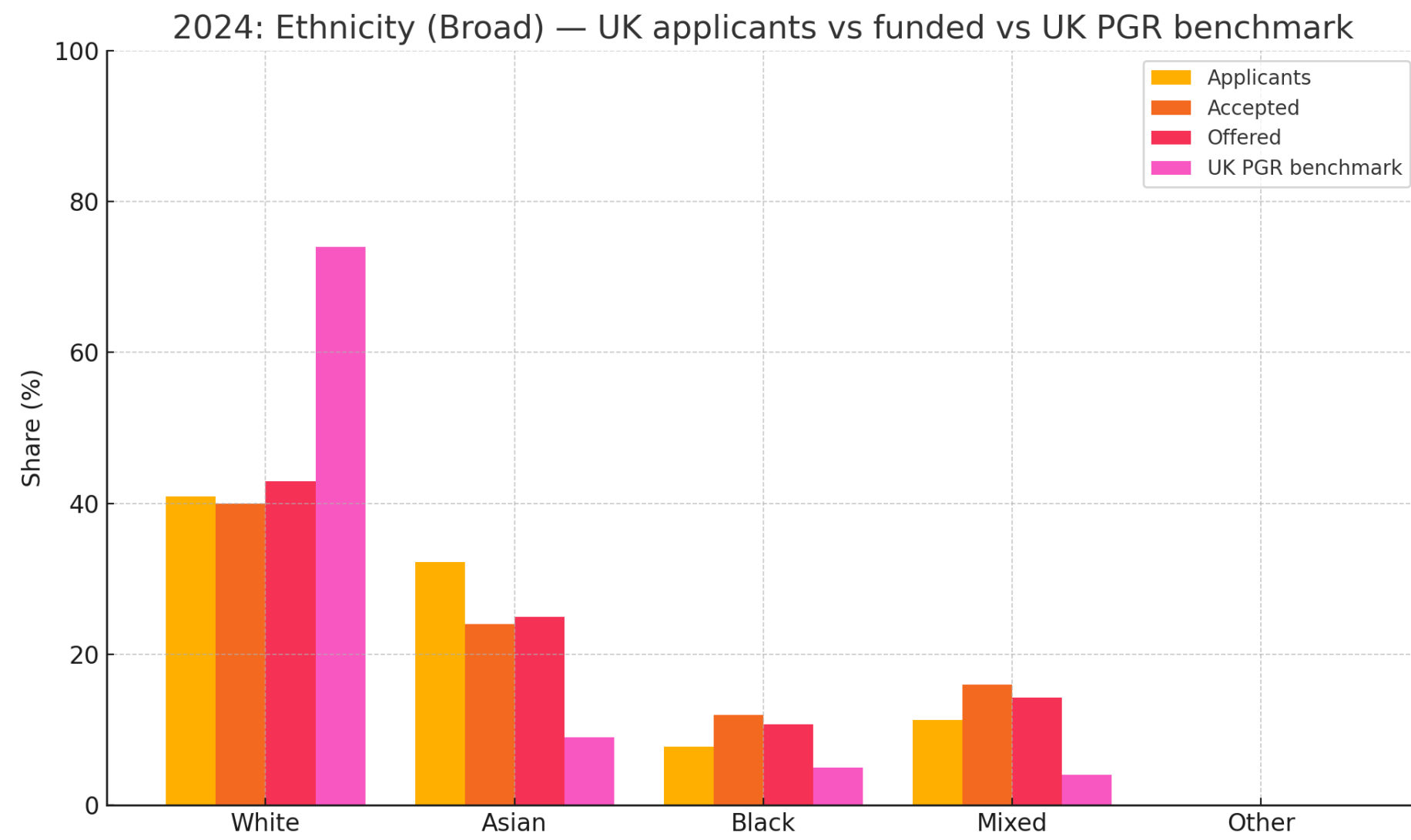
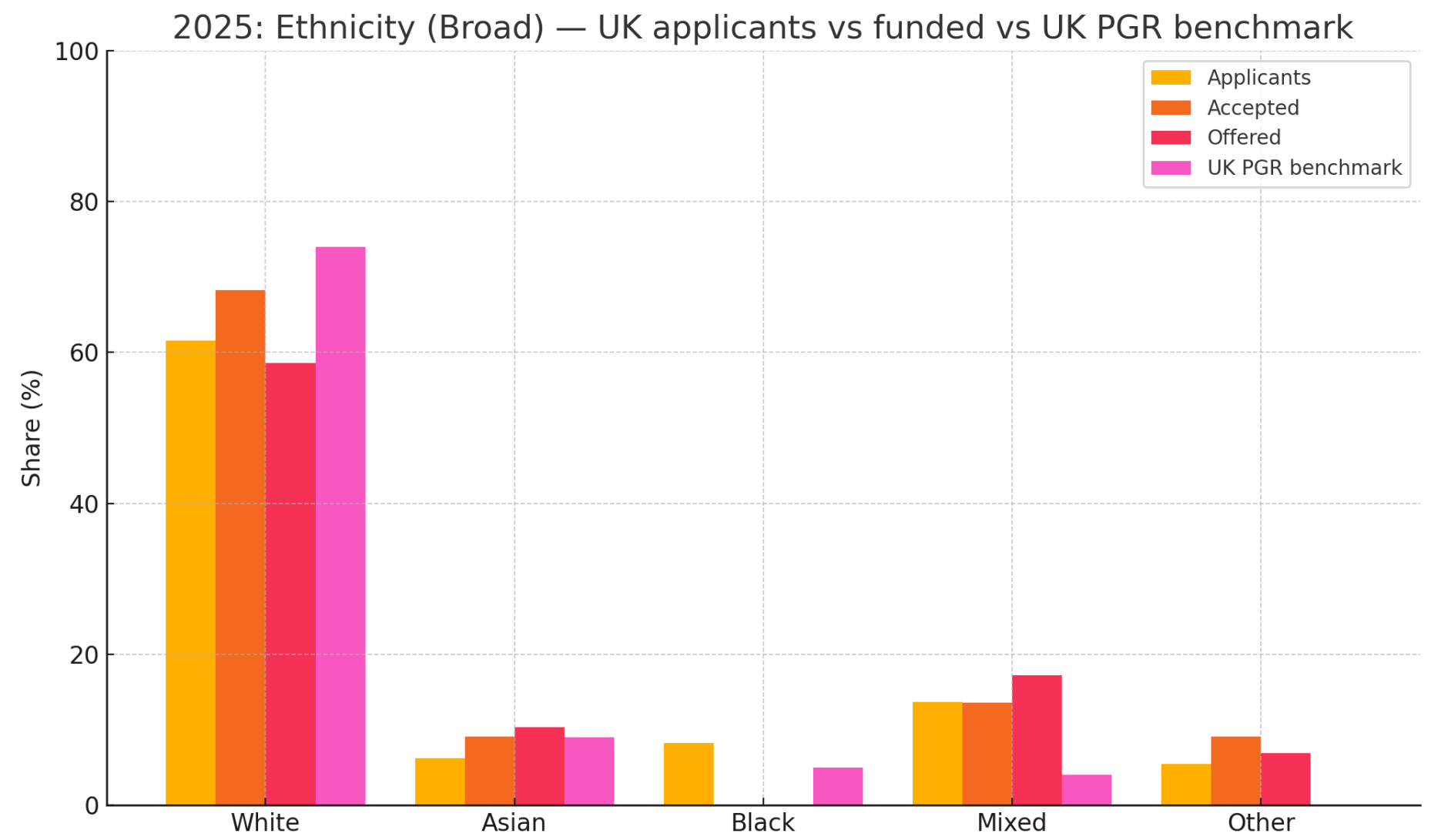
• 2025 applicants (UK):
Ethnic minority 33.6%,
Disabled 30.1%,
Female 62.3% (N=146).

• 2024 Offered (N=28):
Ethnic minority 51.9%,
Disabled 21.4%,
Female 50.0%.

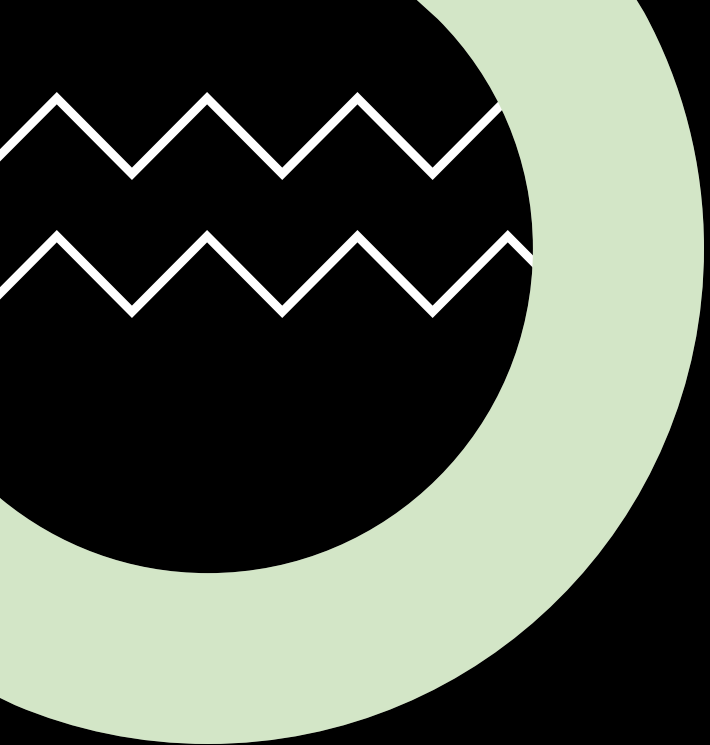
• 2025 Offered (N=29):
Ethnic minority 34.5%,
Disabled 24.1%,
Female 69.0%.

• 2024 Accepted
(N=25): Ethnic minority
54.2%, Disabled 20.0%,
Female 52.0%.

• 2025 Accepted
(N=22): Ethnic minority
31.8%, Disabled 22.7%,
Female 72.7%.



Ethnicity benchmarks from UKCGE (2022/23 PGR: White 74%, Asian 9%, Black 5%, Mixed 4%). Disability benchmark from Disabled Students UK (HESA 2023): 20% of UK-domiciled PGRs disclose a disability.



- **Ethnicity (UK-domiciled PGR, 2022/23):** approx. **White 74%, Asian 9%, Black 5%, Mixed 4%** (PGR less diverse than PGT). These are sector-level figures from UKCGE's 2022/23 factsheet compiled from HESA data.

- **LISS-DTP vs sector:** LISS-DTP's **UK-domiciled applicant pool** is substantially more ethnically diverse than the UK PGR average in **both** years (esp. 2025).

- **Disability (UK-domiciled PGR):** around **20%** of home PGRs disclose a disability (Disabled Students UK citing HESA, 2023).

- **LISS-DTP vs sector: 2024** applicants lower than benchmark (**14.8%**), **2025** higher (**30.1%**).

- **Gender (PGR, 2021/22):** ~**51.3% female** nationally (Advance HE, 2023).

- **LISS-DTP vs sector:** female shares are similar/slightly above in 2024 and well above in 2025.



Concrete, evidence-based signals for ring-fenced scholarships (UK-domiciled applicants)



Studentship eligibility

- Open to both Home and International (including EU) students, but LISS DTP can award only up to 30% of total studentship allocation to International Students (capped at this level by the ESRC).
- Students must be resident close to London.
- Project must be at least 50% social science.
- approximately 35% 1+3.5 awards
- at least three applicants meet AQM steer, three interdisciplinary steer, and three data skills steer
- Must not be more than 1 year (full-time) or 2 years (part-time) into PhD programme by the date the studentship starts (October 2026).
- Primary supervisor must be based within LISS DTP partner institutions.
- We offer 9 ringfenced studentships for home students from underrepresented backgrounds, disabled students and students with caring responsibilities.



Find out more about your eligibility (academically and for funding) from our website: <https://liss-dtp.ac.uk/applying-to-liss/>

Generic Guidance

- On our [Open Competition webpage](#), we have listed the following:
- Example template application forms:
 - <https://liss-dtp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Example-13.5-application-form.pdf>
 - <https://liss-dtp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/Example-3.5-application-form.pdf>



Introduction of Sifting Stage



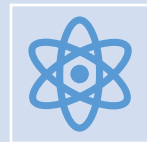
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**Anonymous two-page
application**



Tips on writing an excellent application



STEP 1: Reading, Reading & more Reading (and some thinking too!)

- What are you interested in and passionate about?
- Read as much as possible in this area – try to get a good sense of ‘knowns’/unknowns, current debates and challenges
- Read recent papers in influential in your chosen area;
- look at suggested areas for future research
- Using your knowledge of existing gaps or problems in your research area –
- think about your research project and the original contribution you would like to make
- Develop your own research questions based on this
- Consider how your developing research project aligns with [ESRC priorities](#) (and the pathway & department you will apply to)
- How will you answer your research questions?
- Read methodology sections of papers in your area and in methodology journals more broadly.
- Which methods would best enable you to answer your research questions?
- Emphasise interdisciplinarity, type of data, and impact (links to practice)
- Previous training and experience – link to your preparedness and suitability



STEP 2: Writing & Rewriting (& reaching out for support)

- Review [good examples of research proposals](#) from LISS-DTP and other ESRC funded DTPs.
- Start drafting your own research proposal using these as a guide
- Identify academics who you would like to work with – i.e., someone who conducts research in this area - and establish contact with them. Talk to them about your proposed project (finding a supervisor).
- If your proposed supervisor is able and willing, send them a draft proposal/application and work with them to refine it well in advance of the submission deadline
- Consider who else might be able to read & give feedback on your proposal – don't be afraid to politely reach out
- Rewrite & craft your proposal to ensure it is as clear, compelling, & concise as possible.
- Try to steer clear of AI to generate literature reviews, often faulty and easy for the reviewer to pick up on flaws



Developing your research idea and proposal

(an example)

https://nwssdtp.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/applicant-workshop-2025_first-in-family.pdf

Define key concepts

Project title:

Through sickness and health? A qualitative investigation into the decision to work whilst sick and the consequences for employee well-being.

May also include the need for different methods where applicable

Link to ESRC strategic priorities

Presenteeism, the act of working whilst sick, is a global phenomenon of increasing interest to organisational scholars (Johns, 2010), and medical scholars (Webster et al., 2019) alike. This rise in interest stems from evidence of the detrimental consequences to mental and physical well-being (Skagen & Collins, 2016). Indeed, research suggests that those engaging in presenteeism are more than 50% more likely to report an increase in mental health problems such as anxiety and depression (Health at Work, 2016). This report further emphasised the negative impact of presenteeism on employee performance, noting 89% of employees while unwell admitted to reduced productivity. Hemp (2004) suggests that presenteeism is an 'invisible drain' on worker productivity – often overlooked and underestimated. The cost of presenteeism from mental ill-health alone is estimated to cost the UK economy £15.1bn per annum (Health at Work, 2016). This research, therefore, aligns directly with the ESRC strategic priorities of both mental health and productivity.

Due to COVID-19, presenteeism has become increasingly salient in the public domain. Here we see the tensions between an increasing need to keep sick people at home to curb occupational spread, but equally, the pressures on organisations to remain profitable means reducing the costs associated with sickness absence may become a priority (Kinman & Grant, 2020). With many employees facing job insecurity, employees may continue to work due to a fear of consequences if they are absent (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). As such, Kinman and Grant (2020) argue for a need for preventative action, better understanding, and awareness of the decision to work while sick and the consequences both during and beyond the pandemic.

Existing evidence on the consequences of presenteeism has also produced mixed findings (Skagen & Collins, 2016). While the inconsistencies in these findings are not yet fully understood, Skagen & Collins note that the majority of studies focus on negative health outcomes and do not consider potential benefits that workers, with, for example, chronic health conditions may experience by remaining in work. Recent work has proposed the concept of 'functional presenteeism' (Karanika-Murray & Biron, 2020) as a balanced behaviour that allows an individual to adjust performance in line with health capacities. To progress this line of inquiry, these authors highlight the advantages of longitudinal and diary studies as a means to learn more about the dynamic nature of presenteeism, and thereby enhance understanding of when working whilst sick may be a sustainable choice.

Evidence key importance of topic focus

Highlight existing debates & problems in current literature

Explicitly highlight gaps/ problems in existing knowledge

Similarly, scholars have called for increased methodological diversity in presenteeism research, specifically the use of in-depth qualitative methods to provide valuable insight into the psychological and decision-making process and the complex interplay between individual and broader social contexts (Miraglia & Johns, 2016). In response to these theoretical gaps and increasing demand in the public domain, this research aims to address the following questions:

RQ1. How do employees make the decision to work whilst sick?

RQ2. How does enacting presenteeism affect employees' experiences and well-being?

Methodology
The study will employ a multi-method qualitative design to explore the decision-making processes driving presenteeism and its consequences. Specifically, the research will combine in-depth interviews with qualitative diaries. This will...

Practical Contributions
The data will address gaps in the current understanding of how and when decisions are made, by developing a framework outlining this decision-making process. By capturing lived experiences of employees, this research will offer valuable insights into the effects on mental health and crucially how these outcomes can be managed, but equally, offer an enhanced understanding of how and when presenteeism can lead to beneficial outcomes. In addition...

Include clear RQs that emerge directly from the above

Clear, well-justified methodology- how will you answer your RQs? (including literature)

Spell out clearly the contributions you will make to academic knowledge & society



Reviewer Guidance

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Rating/Scores

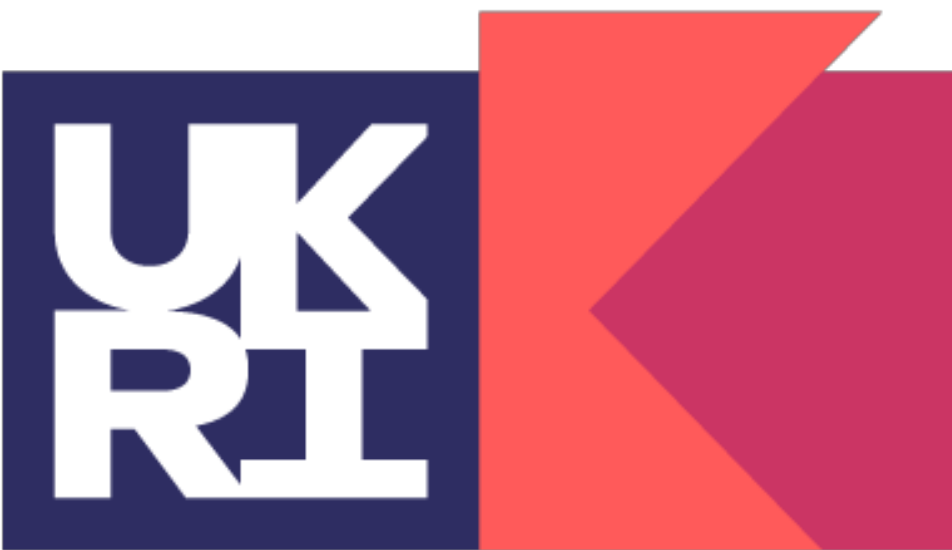
- 6 – outstanding
- 5 – excellent
- 4 – very good
- 3 – good
- 2 – marginal
- 1 - reject



- Outstanding:
- Proposed research is of exceptional merit and will make a very considerable scientific contribution and greatly enhance the research environment of the host department/research group



London Interdisciplinary
Social Science
Doctoral Training Partnership



Writing a Good Studentship Application

**Economic
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Research Council**

Who I am



KING'S
College
LONDON

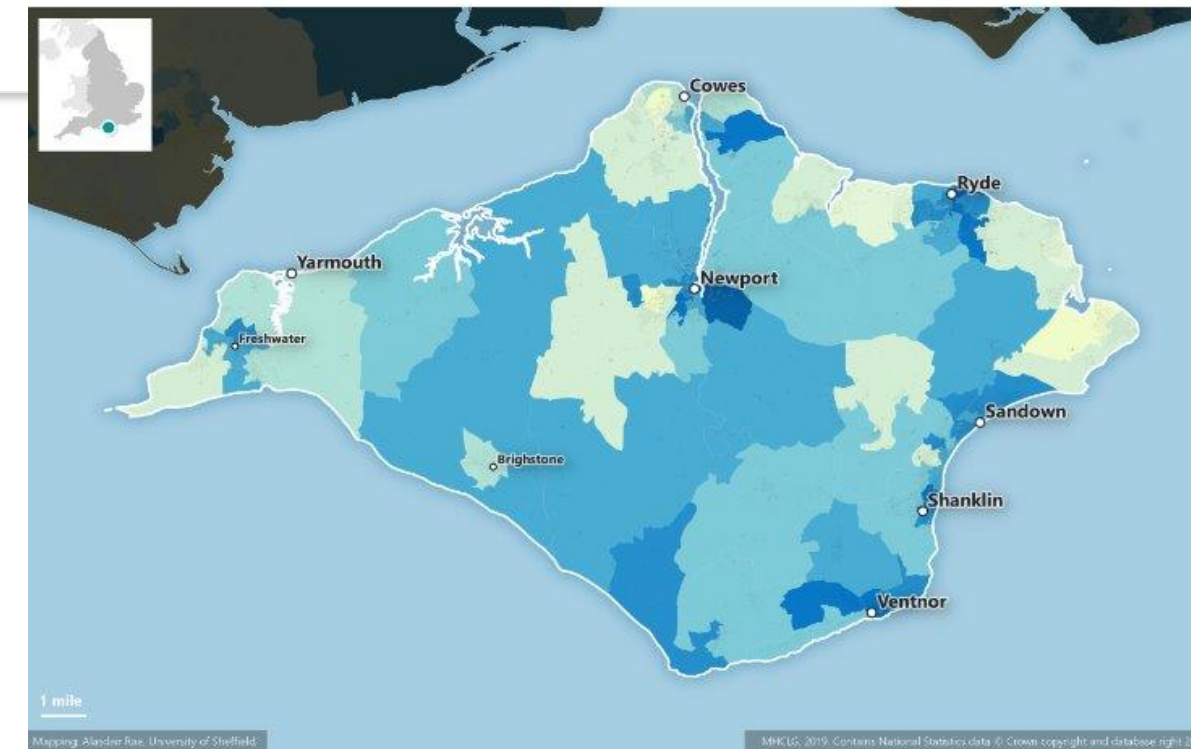
- First year PhD in International Political Economy at KCL
- Focus: UK-Commonwealth relations
- First "LISS DTP 2" cohort (2024 onwards)

My background

- Isle of Wight
- W/C, single parent
- First-Gen to go to university
- BA History and Politics (2020-2023)

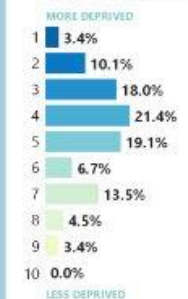
Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019

ISLE OF WIGHT



Local authority profile

% of LSOAs in each national deprivation decile



What this map shows

This is a map of Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019 data for **Isle of Wight**. The colours on the map indicate the deprivation decile of each Lower Layer Super Output Area (LSOA) for England as a whole, and the coloured bars above indicate the proportion of LSOAs in each national deprivation decile. The most deprived areas (decile 1) are shown in blue. It is important to keep in mind that the data relate to small areas and do not tell us how deprived, or wealthy, individual people are. LSOAs have an average population of just under 1,700 (as of 2017).



UNIVERSITY
of York

My journey to LISS DTP (1)

- Enjoyed my BA; not an "A*" student
 - Wanted to be an academic and do a PhD
 - Set my sights on ESRC funding
- MA in Social Research (2023-24) still at York
 - ESRC recognised modules
- 3 different PhD proposals throughout my BA and start of my MA

My journey to LISS DTP (2)

- LISS DTP Application from September 2023 to Jan 2024
 - Juggling MA studies
 - Reaching out to my potential supervisor (with some help)
 - Applying to KCL alongside
- Waitlisted in April; offered in June
 - Made arrangements for alternatives
- Started at KCL in October 2024

My potential alternative routes

- High School Teacher
 - In contact with my old teachers and headmaster
 - PGCE; learning "on the job" as a history/politics teacher
- Some sort of policy work
 - Work experience with MPs, Civil Service, Think Tanks
 - Civil Service Fast Stream



Why I am doing a PhD

- Enjoy teaching and research at the university level
- Found a topic I am passionate about
- Freedom
- Want a career in academia

My application advice (1)

- Start the application early and work through several drafts
 - Try and get feedback from mentors and seniors figures if possible
- Know the process, dates, forms, timelines:
 - Your sake
 - Your potential supervisor(s)
 - Reference writers
- Show you're a well-rounded researcher
 - Relevant experiences outside of academia

My application advice (2)

- You must align with the LISS DTP/ESRC/UKRI's grand visions;
 - World leading and world changing research
 - Collaborations with partners (outside academic) for impact
 - Interdisciplinarity and Data-driven
- Find a mentor/someone who is "ahead of you" by a bit; has won funding already etc
- Have alternative routes planned



London Interdisciplinary Social Science
Doctoral Training Partnership



My (Less than Perfect) Doctoral Journey

Emma Hayashibara

PhD Candidate

Queen Mary University of London

Email: e.hayashibara@qmul.ac.uk

My background

- Mixed Japanese-Scottish
 - Born and raised in Japan until the age of 10
 - High School in Stirling, Scotland
- BEng (Hons) Biomedical Engineering at the University of Strathclyde
- MSc Physics and Engineering in Medicine at University College London (UCL)



Years of “feeling lost” & “figuring things out”

- Period of uncertainty
- Worked in hospitality
- Applied for medical physics jobs
- Questioned what I really wanted



My doctoral journey began with **my lived experience**

- Realised my passion for mental health advocacy
- MSc in Psychological Science (Conversion), University of Glasgow
- ADHD diagnosis → self-understanding
- Discovered a different side to research
- Rejection after rejection...
 - PhD studentships
 - Research Assistant jobs

My time at the National Autistic Society

- Evidence and Research team
- Autism Information Analyst → Information Process Coordinator
- Worked on compiling evidence reviews
- Identified research gaps and what autistic people *actually* want from research – meaningful and impactful research driven by lived experiences
- Developed passion for intersectional and participatory research approaches
 - Where research is done *with* people rather than *on* them



Building my PhD



- Reached out to potential supervisor
- Pitched my ideas
- Co-developed a CASE proposal – successful funding application
- **Thesis:** Addressing mental health disparities in neurodivergent youth: An intersectional approach to mental health assessments
- What I previously saw as “weaknesses” became my “strengths”
 - Non-psychology background
 - Lived experiences of neurodivergence and mental health difficulties
 - Not getting into research straight away after MSc → charity sector perspective

Lessons and tips

- Put yourself out there!
 - Attend events, webinars, connect with others over social media (LinkedIn, BlueSky)
 - Don't be afraid to reach out!
- Reflect and value your own perspectives
 - Your unique background adds value
 - What matters is passion and authenticity
- Plan ahead and be persistent
 - Research proposals **take time**
 - Seek advice and collaboration
 - Speak to people who your research might impact
 - Rejection is **normal** – don't give up!

Looking beyond the PhD bubble

- Think beyond the PhD bubble
- Why are *you* the right person to do this work?
- Your values, experiences, and perspectives = impact

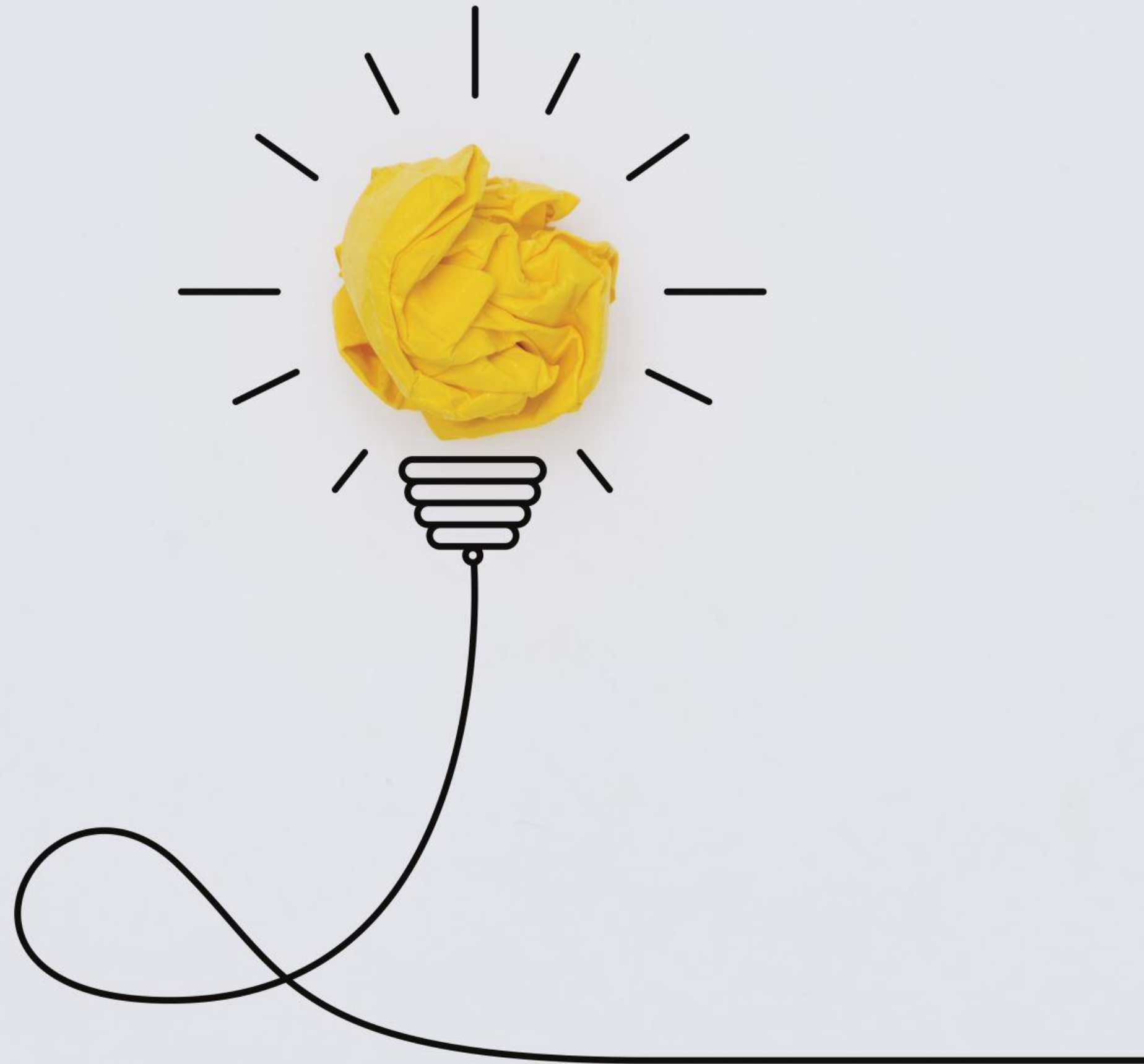


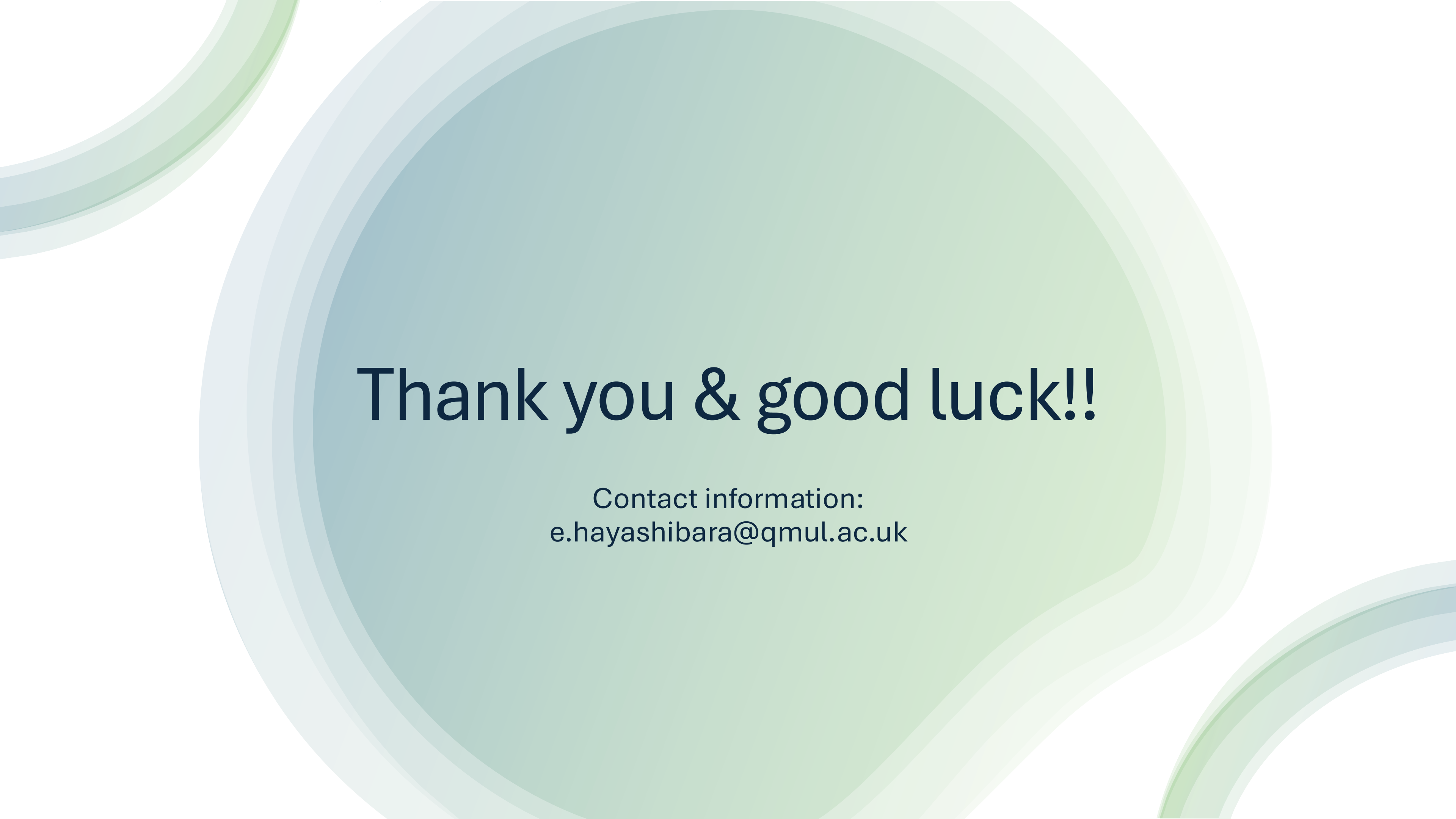
The reality of doing a PhD

- Emotional ups and downs
- Creative and challenging
- Balancing multiple responsibilities
 - Multiple research projects
 - Supervising undergraduate dissertation students
 - Teaching statistics to psychology undergraduate students
 - Running my own network – PhD Participatory Research Network
 - Attending research groups
 - Attending training courses
 - Attending conferences
- You get out what you put in!

Closing thoughts

- Non-linear paths are valid!
- Use your story to your strength
- There *is* space for you in academia
- Representation → change!





Thank you & good luck!!

Contact information:
e.hayashibara@qmul.ac.uk



Thank you for attending our LISS DTP Workshop! Here are your next steps:

- Sign up and attend our [Open Competition Online Applicant Briefing Session](#), 3rd Dec 2025, 10:00 - 11:30 (GMT).
- Review guidance and apply now on our [LISS DTP Open Competition Webpage](#)
- You may also find our [FAQs](#) useful.



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