

# Routes to a flexible future:

## Imperial College Library Services – COVID and beyond

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UHMLG Summer Conference 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021

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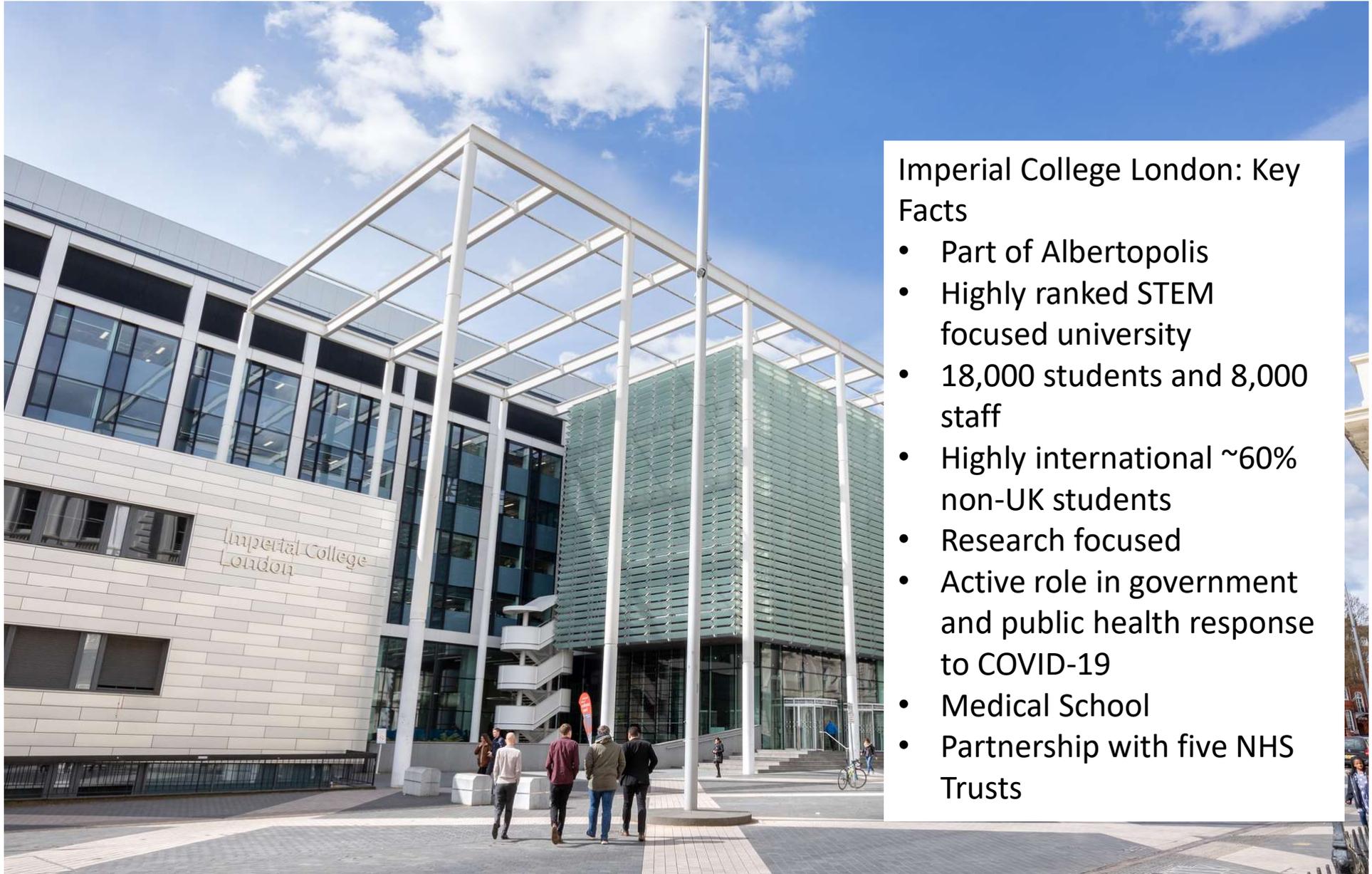
# Acknowledgements

My thanks to:

- Katherine Rose and Chris Banks from Imperial College Library Services for providing elements of this presentation.
- Colleagues in the Relationship Management Group for the changing work practices grid exercise



# Imperial College London



## Imperial College London: Key Facts

- Part of Albiontopolis
- Highly ranked STEM focused university
- 18,000 students and 8,000 staff
- Highly international ~60% non-UK students
- Research focused
- Active role in government and public health response to COVID-19
- Medical School
- Partnership with five NHS Trusts

Imperial College  
London

Imperial today



- Eight campuses:**
- Charing Cross
  - Chelsea and Westminster
  - Hammersmith
  - Royal Brompton
  - Silwood Park
  - South Kensington
  - St Mary's
  - White City

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# Imperial College London

Date	Activity
23/03/2020	Start of Lockdown 1, all libraries close apart from Chelsea and Westminster Hospital study space
27/07/2020	Reoccupation of Medical Libraries
03/08/2020	Reoccupation of Central Library
17/08/2020	<p>Medical Libraries open for study space and browse and borrow with staffed enquiry service.</p> <p>Central Library open for click and collect and scan and send service, no in person enquiries. Library Attendance staffing front of house service.</p>
14/09/2020	Central Library reopens for study space and browse and borrow. Click and Collect ceases, limited in person enquiries
05/11/2020 (start of lockdown 2)	Reduced in person enquiries at Central Library, all other services remain unaffected
04/01/2021 (start of lockdown 3)	No in person enquiries at Central Library, minimal staff at medical campuses but in person enquiries and study space remain open
March 2021-May 2021	Phased resumption of most services and extension of staffed hours to evenings and weekends

# Thinking beyond restrictions

Emerging from lockdown 3, attention turned to planning for future ways of working.

Staff were keen to know how their roles would be affected and whether they could continue to work from home.

COVID had shown that home working was compatible with providing many high quality library services but some services couldn't operate remotely.

# Thinking beyond restrictions

## Challenges

- Maintaining a sense of community and team
- Delivering our services whilst facilitating more flexible working
- Many different staff preferences
- Staff expectations/preferences not in line with service requirements
- Equipping our offices and staff for greater flexible working

## Opportunities

### Benefits for our users:

- Great use of Technology Enhance Learning
- Repurposing office space for teaching or study space.

### Benefits for our staff:

- Increased flexibility and work-life balance
  - Opportunity to design new services
  - Satisfaction and productivity
-

## Our Community :: Our Services :: Our Wellbeing

### Policies

- HR
- Expenses
- Travel & Accommodation
- Provisions (equipment, furniture etc.)
- Use of shared spaces
- Health & Safety

### Practicalities

- Mobile technology
- Docking
- AV for Conferencing/meeting
- Personal storage Pedestals/lockers
- VPN (or similar) vs virtual desktop
- Knowledge management
- Bookings systems (space, kit etc.)



As flexible as possible  
as fixed as necessary

### Personal Preference (& Performance)

- Incentives
- Motivations
- Personal preference/needs as an enabler of performance

### Place

- Shared
- Bookable
- Varied/adjustable
- Smaller footprint than current, but more flexible
- Technologically enabled



Reflecting in each team on new innovative practices and obsolete activities



Surveying staff for their views



Upgrading the technology in our office meeting rooms



Planning new working patterns and trailing changes



## Reflecting on changes in working practices during the pandemic



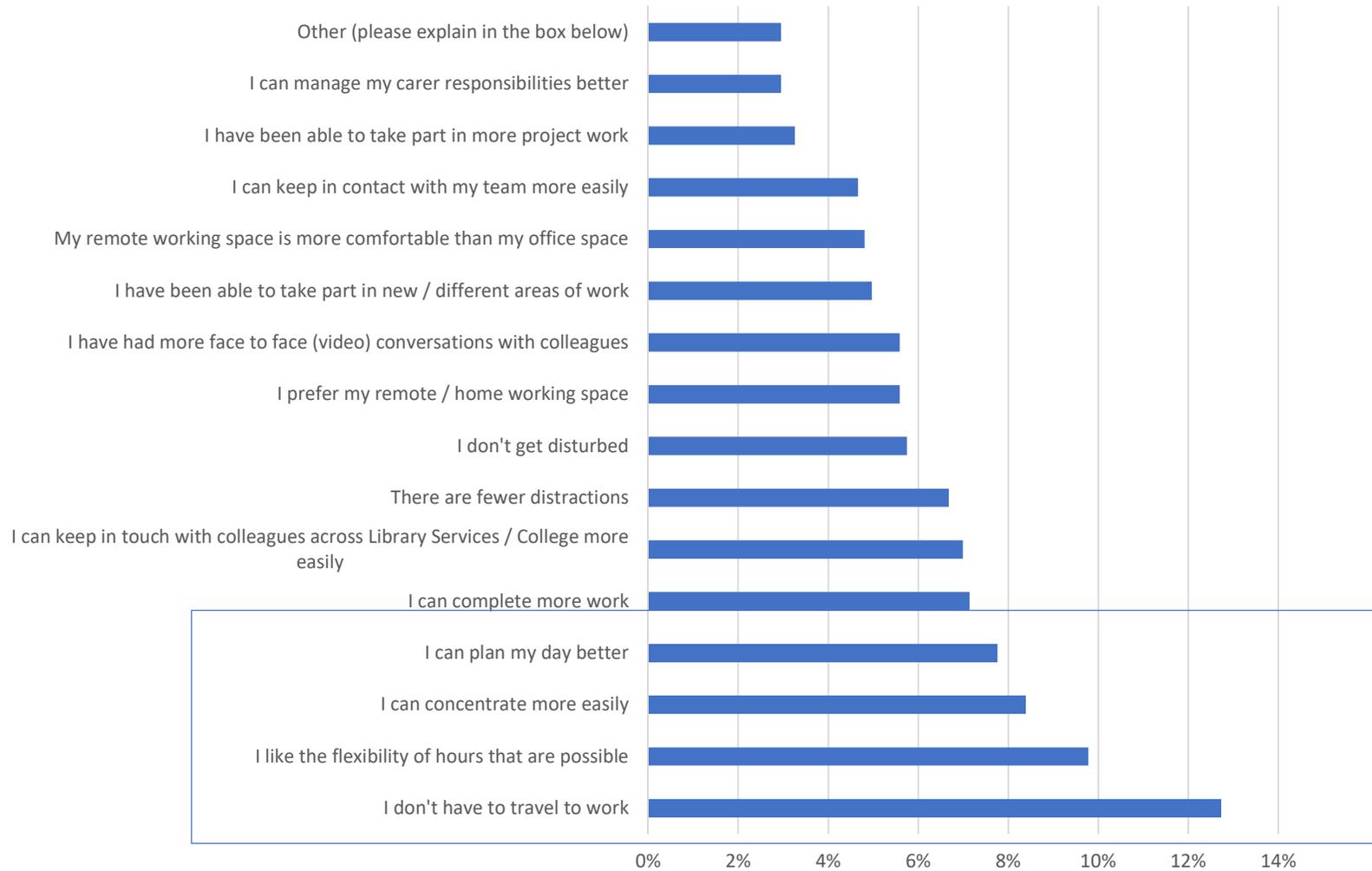


## Library Post-COVID Working Preferences Survey

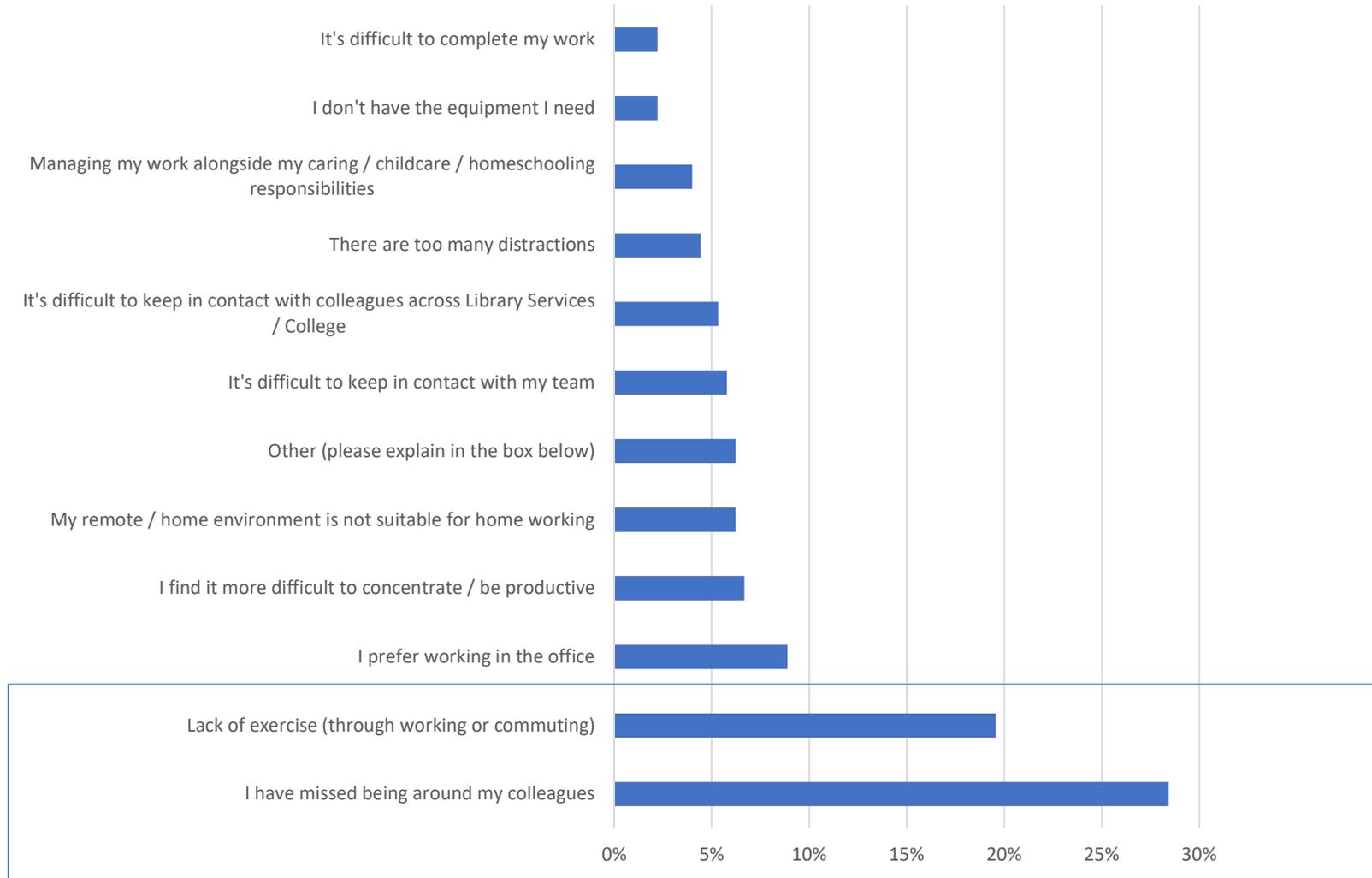
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- Survey carried out in late February 2021
  - Focused on the medium to long term
  - Over 100 responses
  - Wide diversity of views expressed
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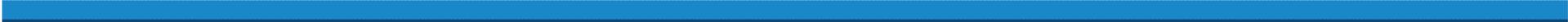
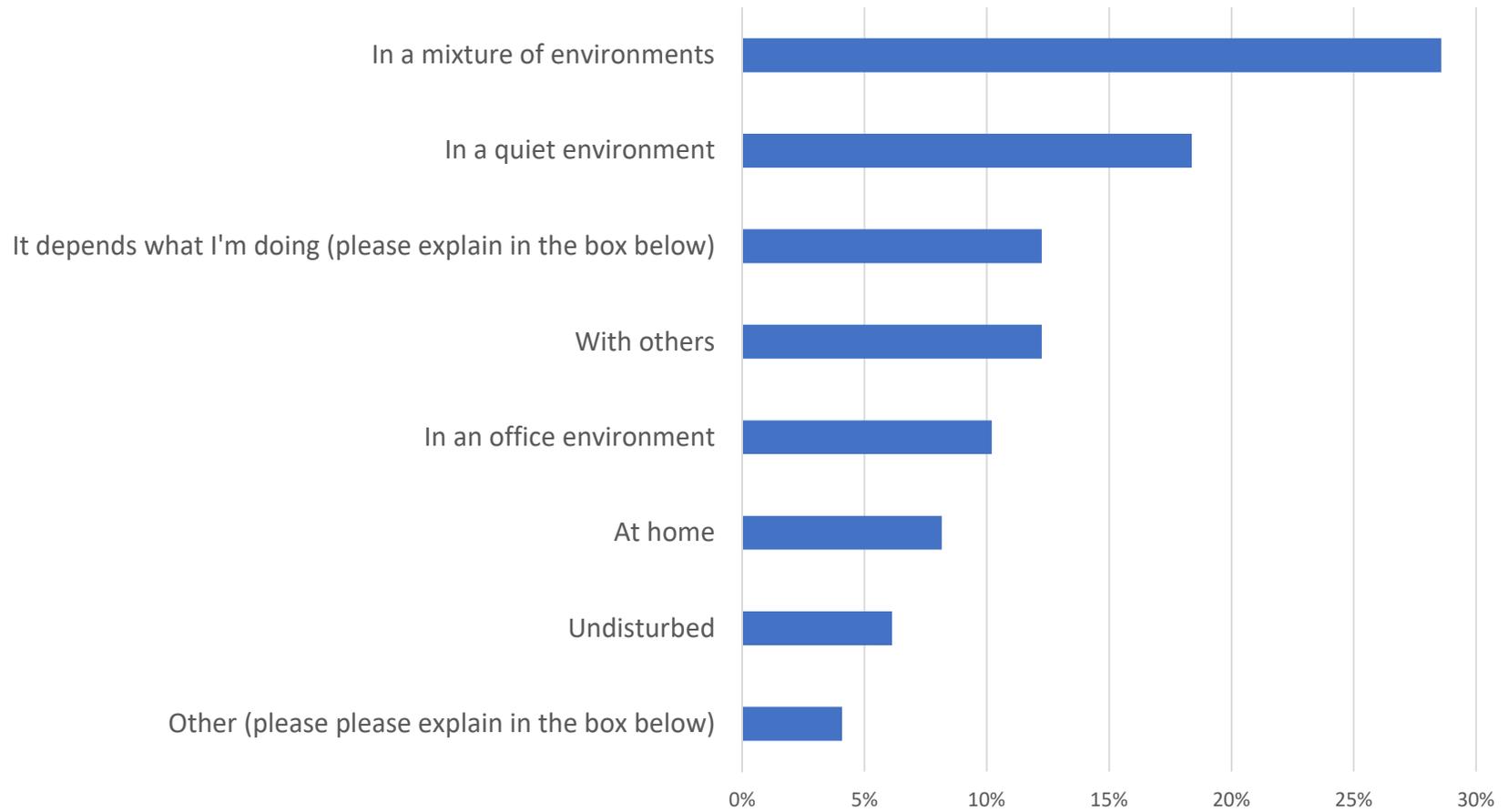
## Positive aspects of working remotely



### Challenging aspects of working remotely



What type of environment do you prefer working in?

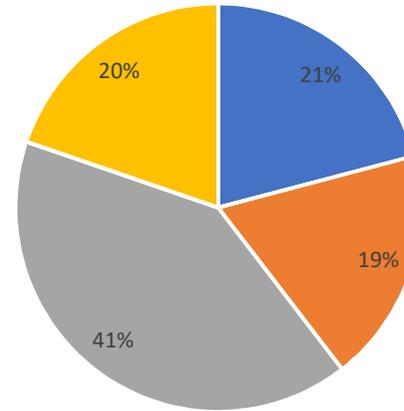


## Communication is where it gets complicated

- Stats divided in whether remote working has positively or negatively affected teamwork, working with other teams and working with others across the university
  - Comments show a much more nuanced picture
  - Our wide range of skills and strengths and the services we deliver mean we have a wide range of preferences
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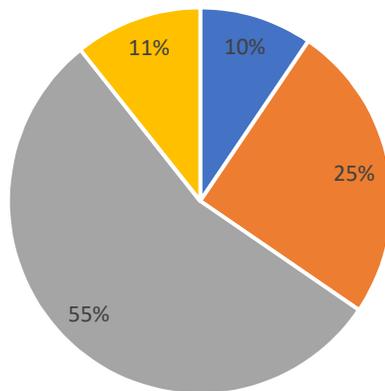
### Working with your team remotely

- More difficult
- Less difficult
- About the same
- Other (please explain in the box below)



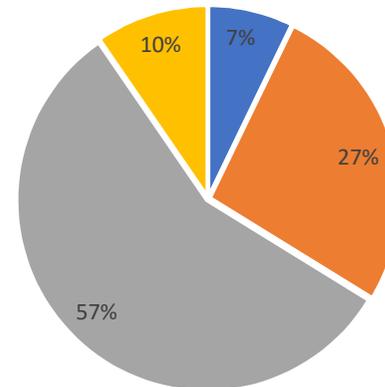
### Working with other library teams remotely

- More difficult
- Less difficult
- About the same
- Other (please explain in the box below)

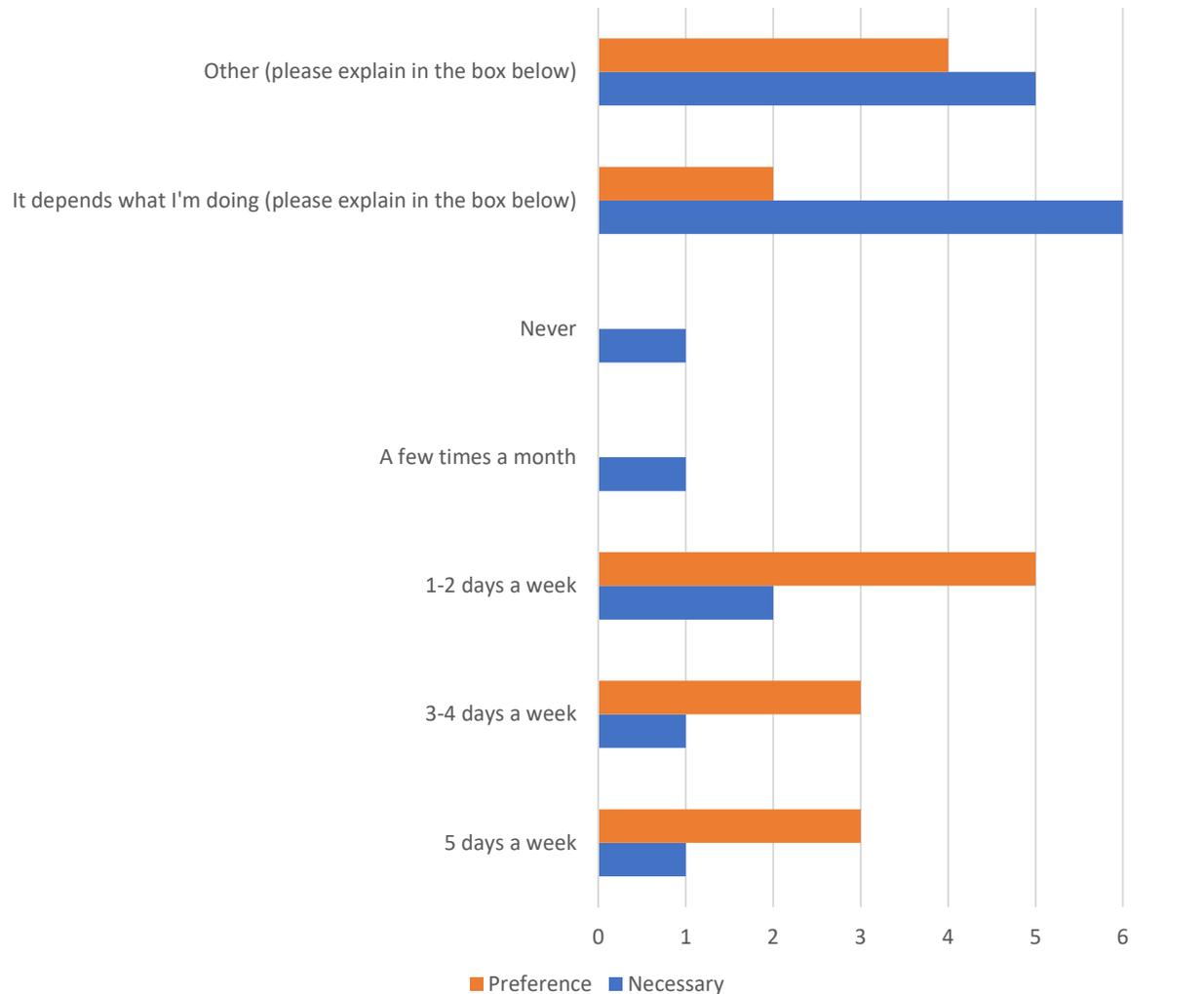


### Working with others across the uni

- More difficult
- Less difficult
- About the same
- Other (please explain in the box below)



## How many days do you think it is necessary/your preference to work on-site



Comments:

“Depends on other people's on-site working pattern”

“My role is very varied and changes depending on the time of year, some parts of the year I would only need to be in 2-3 days of the week. However, when I'm teaching I would have to be in more”

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I was scared of the damage working remotely might cause to relationships with the NHS but these fears have been unfounded. Our relationships have been good and have developed.

...it's always easier **turning to someone in the office** to ask a question, or help with an issue, than working remotely which can involve a lot of **back and forth** emails.

I've found that communication within my team and with others has really **opened up** with remote working. I am now talking more often and with more staff across the library who all appear to be **more relaxed** in their new working environment

I feel so **much more part** of imperial libraries as a whole and have had the opportunity to **form new relationships** and make new contacts...

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**Our way forwards**

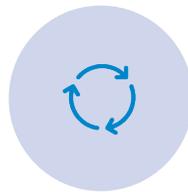
**As flexible as possible, as fixed as necessary**



**KEEP AN OPEN  
DIALOGUE WITH STAFF**



**PRIORITISE OUR  
SERVICES AND USERS'  
NEEDS**



**TALK TO OUR USERS**



**FACILITATE CHOICE  
WHERE POSSIBLE**

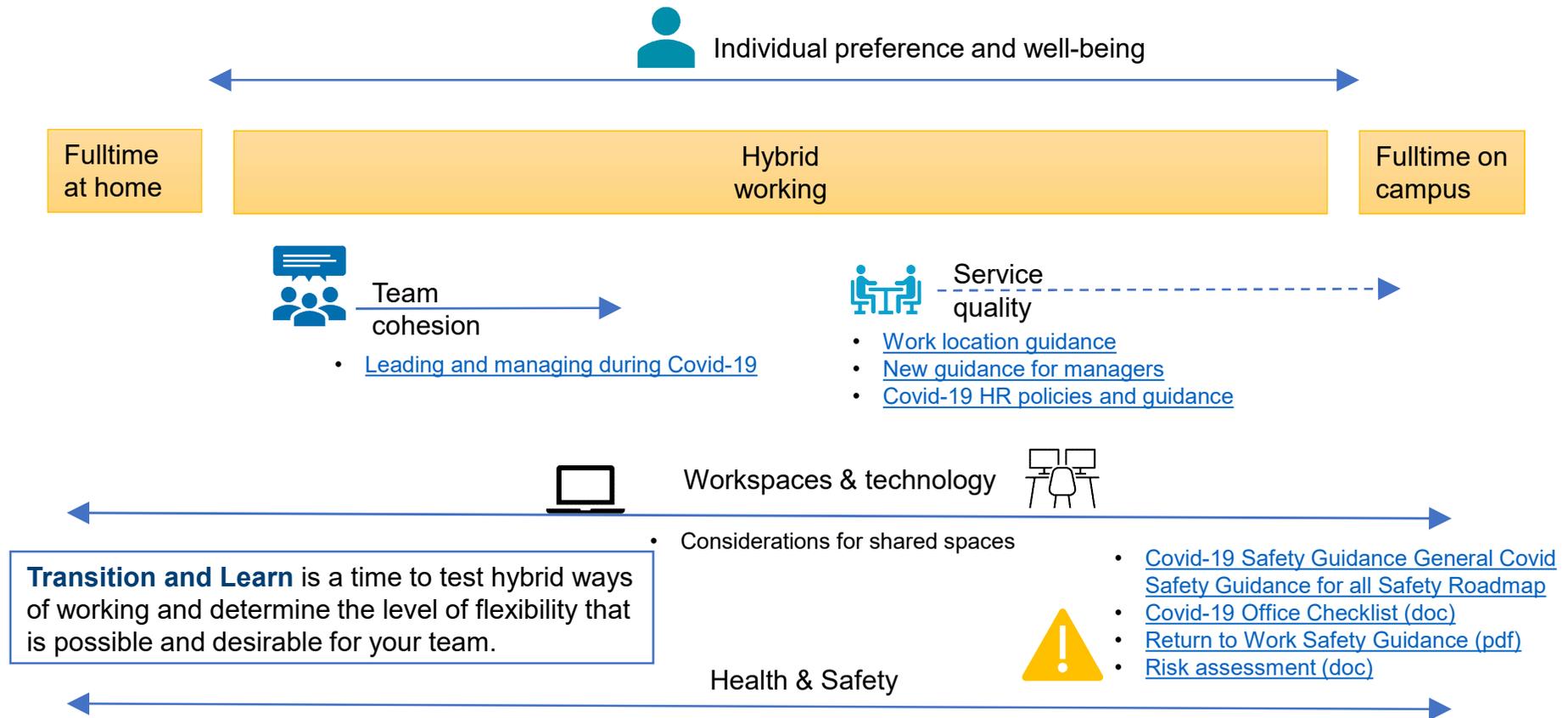


**RECOGNISE OUR  
LIMITATIONS AND BE  
HONEST**



# As flexible as possible As fixed as necessary

Balancing multiple dimensions to achieve optimum outcome for service, team and community



## Transition and Learn in Practice

Six month period of practical implementation of hybrid working

No final decisions made during the transition period

Already started in a practical sense but will officially start when social distancing measures are eased to the point we can get more staff into the office

The level of flexibility and the ability to work from home will be highly role dependant

At a College level plans are in place for three types of employment contract: On campus, hybrid and fully remote.

Whilst we anticipate significant levels of hybrid working we are unlikely to move lots of staff onto the hybrid contracts



## Transition and Learn in Practice

Roles that are based largely on-site with potential for occasional work from home days.

- Library Assistants
- Frontline supervisors
- Library Attendants
- Facilities coordinator

Roles that can work with hybrid off-site/on-site working.

- Subject Librarians
- NHS Support Librarians
- Most managers
- Library Systems Team
- Content and Discovery Team

Roles that can work largely off-site with occasional days in the office

- Scholarly Communications Team
- Some managers

## Personal reflections on the process so far



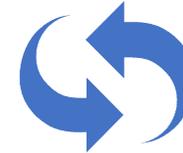
Engagement and open discussion is key



Take the time to reflect as a team on the past 16 months



Never forget the library users



Flexibility works both ways



Be prepared for a few tough conversations



Avoid making firm commitments too early



The end results should be happier healthier staff and a better service for our users



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