

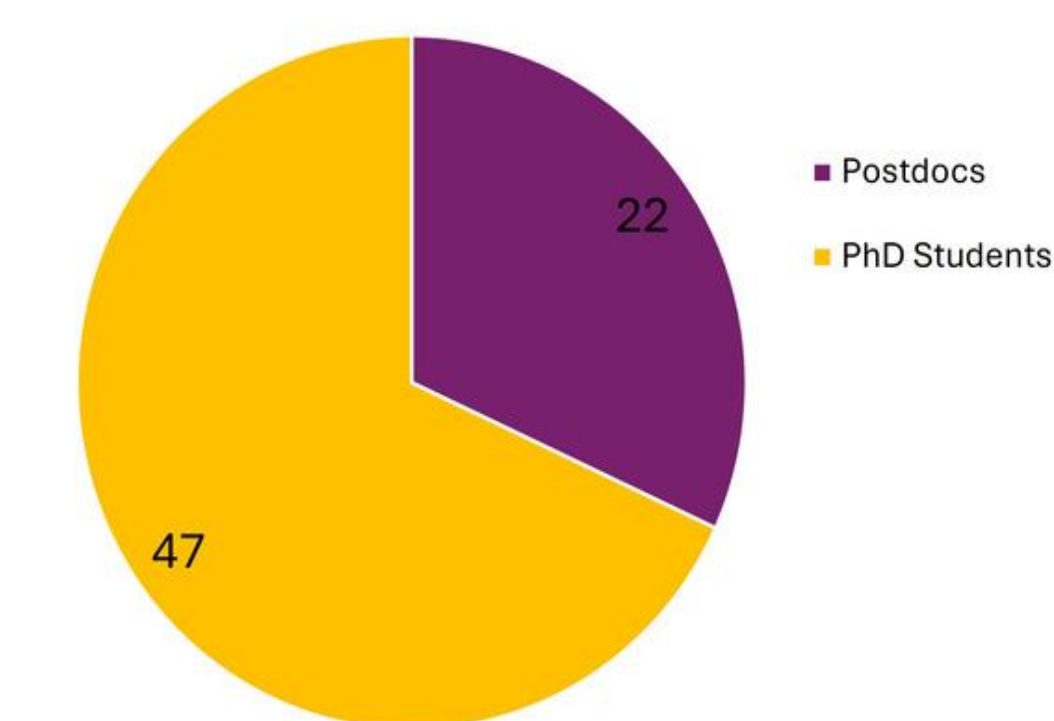
Rationale

Wellbeing is central to academic success for Early Career Researchers (ECRs), yet many work in environments shaped by overwork, precarity and limited structural support. Long working hours, insecure contracts and restricted access to supportive spaces place sustained pressure on general and mental wellbeing, contributing to stress, anxiety and burnout (Stead et al., 2025). Global studies show that PhD students experience higher levels of psychological distress than the general population, with elevated rates of anxiety, depression and burnout (Dreisoerner et al., 2026). Postdoctoral researchers report similar challenges, including job insecurity, pressure to publish and unclear career pathways (van der Weijden and Teelken., 2023). Structural pressures within research culture, such as competition, long working hours and limited stability, have been repeatedly identified as major contributors to poor wellbeing (Wellcome Trust, 2022). Strengthening wellbeing literacy has therefore become an important strategy for supporting ECRs, especially when daily working realities limit the time and resources available to sustain wellbeing (Oades et al., 2023; Riva et al., 2024). Approaches that build awareness, skills and shared language around wellbeing are increasingly recognised as essential for healthier research cultures and help ECRs navigate structural pressures while fostering more supportive academic environments.

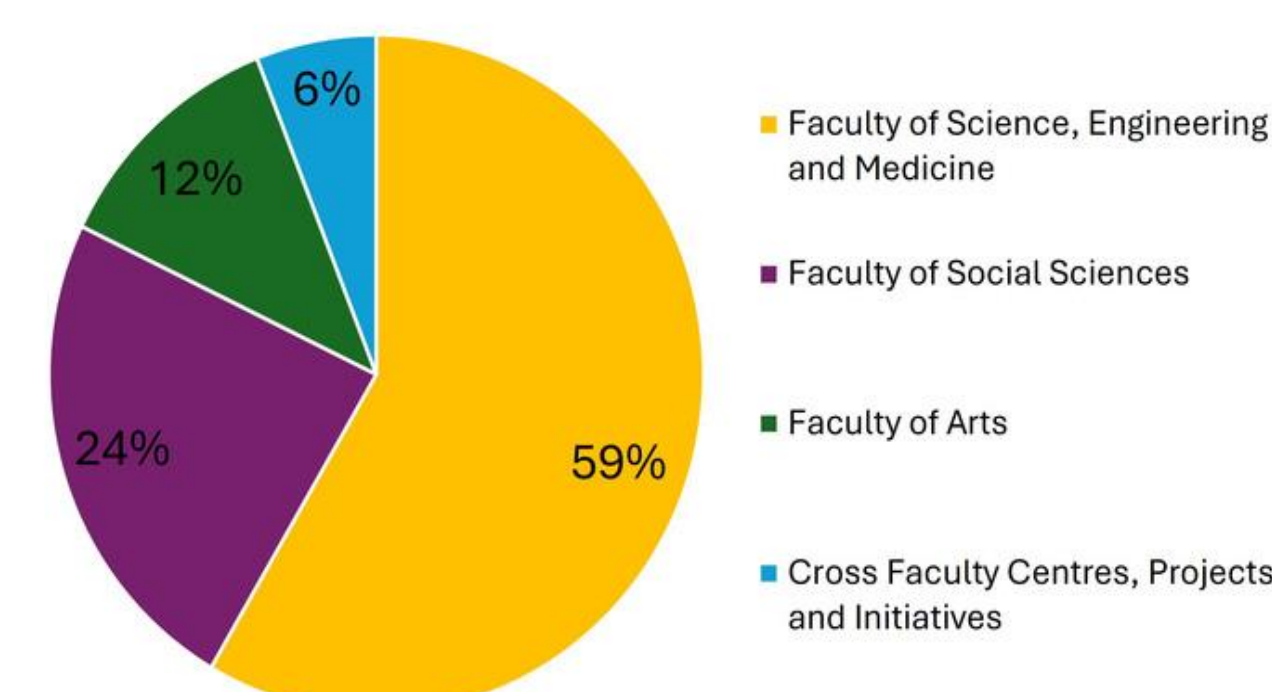
Methods

As part of the Building Wellbeing Literacy project, we gathered insights from PhD students and postdoctoral researchers to understand their challenges and shape tailored wellbeing literacy support. Using a co-participatory approach, we centred ECRs' lived experiences and involved them directly in designing the resources.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION



Distribution of Participants Across Faculties



QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis following the Braun and Clarke approach (2006).

ECRs highlighted in the listening workshops structural, cultural and interpersonal pressures shaping their research experiences. They described challenges including job insecurity, workload expectations, uneven support, comparison, imposter feelings and loneliness.

"I think one of the things that leads to low wellbeing is feeling alone and loneliness because you are kind of the only person doing your projects and we don't really talk about mental health and wellbeing." (Warwick Postdoc)

69 Warwick
ECRs
Participants

11
Listening
Workshops

Online
Resources
Development

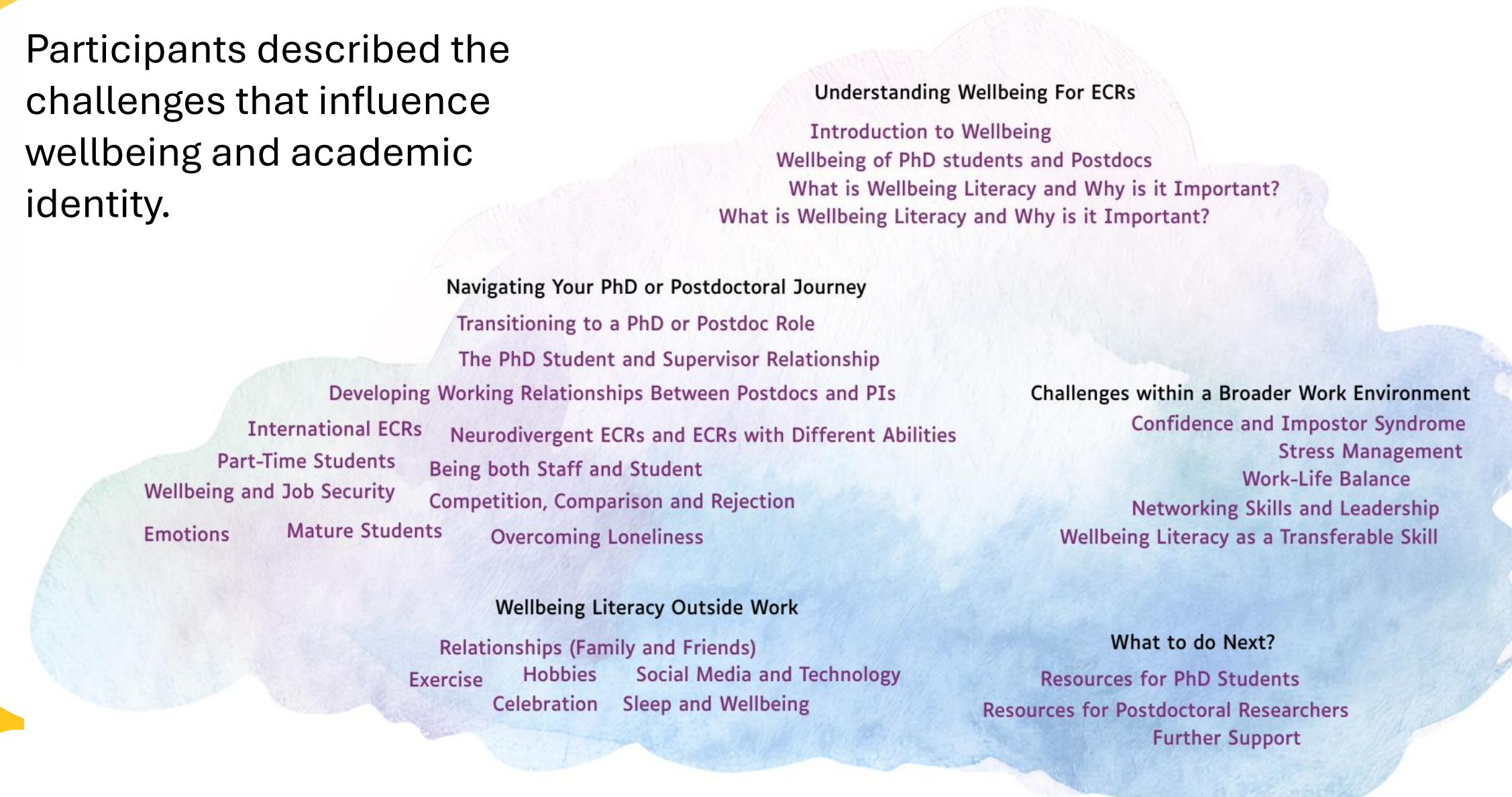
29
TOPICS

4
Listening
Feedback
Workshops

Results

From the thematic analysis, challenges were converted into wellbeing literacy topics; twenty-nine emerged and were then grouped into clusters using pedagogic principles, ensuring the resources are structured in a clear, coherent and learnable way.

Participants described the challenges that influence wellbeing and academic identity.



The emerged topics were used to create the Building Wellbeing Literacy online resources, developed in Rise 360 (Articulate) and embedded in Warwick Moodle for PhD students and postdoctoral researchers. The resources were produced with support from the Flexible Online Learning Division and guest experts (FOLD), who contributed research-based content and recorded multimedia materials.

Each topic was designed in formats ECRs told us they prefer, including:

- Videos
- Podcasts
- Infographics
- Visual Scribing
- Animations

Optional reflective activities and quizzes were added to support deeper engagement, alongside signposting to external sources for further reading, watching or listening.



This visual scribing on the topic "Overcoming Loneliness" was created by independent artist James Bayley for the Building Wellbeing Literacy resources.

Conclusion

This collaborative development of the Building Wellbeing literacy resources shows how grounding support in researchers' everyday realities creates a more connected and responsive approach to researcher development. Involving ECRs in the creation process added clear pedagogic value, strengthened their sense of belonging, and ensured the resources reflect authentic needs. This co-creation approach also contributes to improving research culture by modelling inclusive, participatory and wellbeing-focused practices.

Perspectives

A longitudinal study is now collecting data on ECR engagement with the resources, assessing their impact on wellbeing and their contribution to healthier research cultures.



Scan to explore the Building Wellbeing Literacy project

References.

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