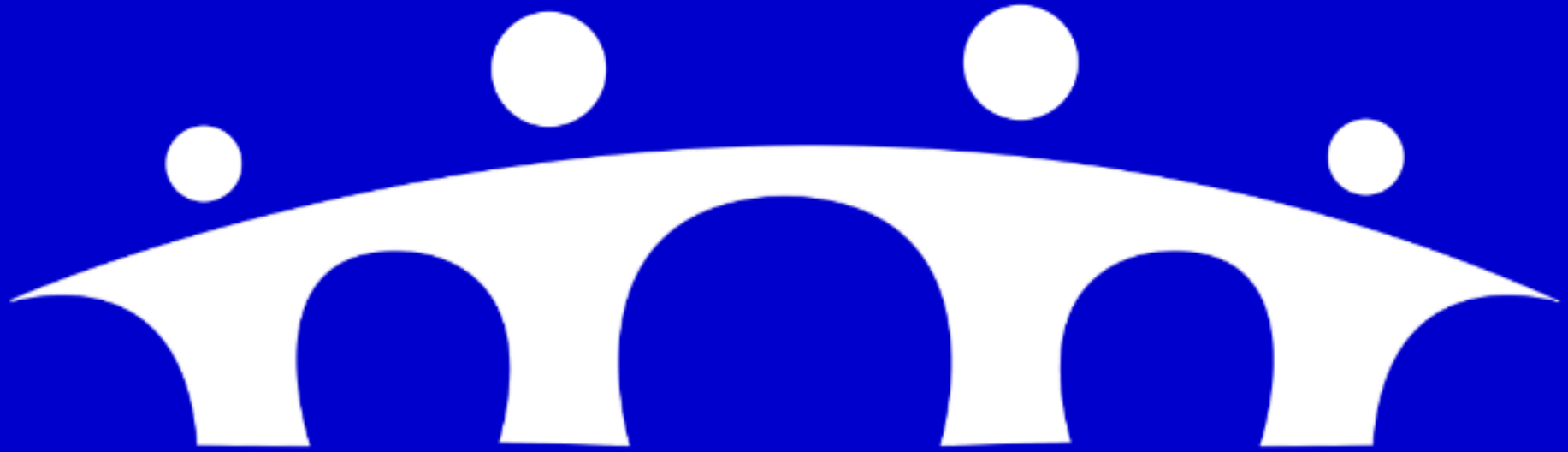
IMPERIAL



BRIDGES

Bridges: Purpose & Aims

Bridges was established in 2021 and aims to support first year undergraduate students from *ALL* underrepresented backgrounds within the Faculty of Natural Sciences.

The goal of the programme is to ensure that all students feel a strong sense of belonging and have the resources that they need to thrive socially and academically.

- Peer Guide Scheme
- Events and workshops throughout the academic year

What does "underrepresented" mean in FoNS?

- **Widening Participation (~12% of UGs in FoNS)**
  - Students in, or previously in care
  - Grew up in a socio-economically deprived area
  - Attended a low-performing school
  - Estranged from family
  - First in family to go to university
  - Young carer responsibilities
  - Eligible for free school meal
- **Ethnicity**
  - Black students significantly underrepresented (~2% Black heritage students in FoNS)
- **LGBTQ+, Students with Disabilities, Gender etc.**

Bridges: Why?

BRIDGES

Research shows that students from underrepresented background

- Gap in social, cultural and science capital
- Students from underrepresented groups are less likely to enter STEM
- Differential outcomes (drop-out rates, attainment gaps and graduate outcomes) which are more prominent in FoNS
- Black students at Imperial have lower student satisfaction than their peers (belonging, transition etc.)
- High reported rates of imposter syndrome
- High reported rates of loneliness

Bridges offering was refreshed in Summer 2024 by StudentShapers

Bridges

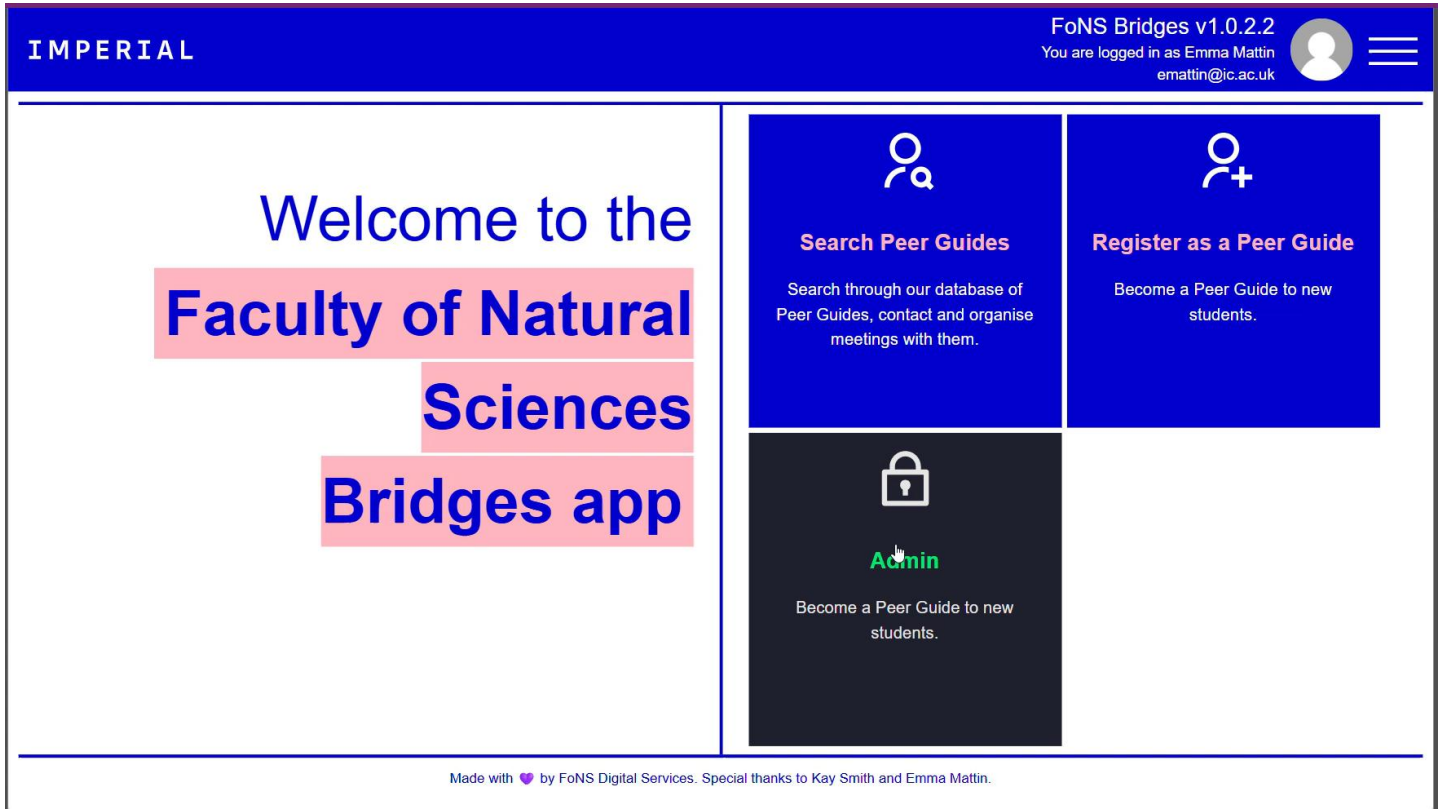
Bridges: Peer Guide Scheme

Upper year students provide 1:1 support. Students can select a peer guide from a pool of upper year students (also from underrepresented backgrounds and identities).

Appointment Theme	Number of Appts
General Support	3
Transition to Year 2	3
Unknown	3
Transition to HE	5
Workload	5
Internships	7
Study Support - Exams	15
Study Support - Coursework	20
Study Support	31

Bridges: Peer Guide Scheme

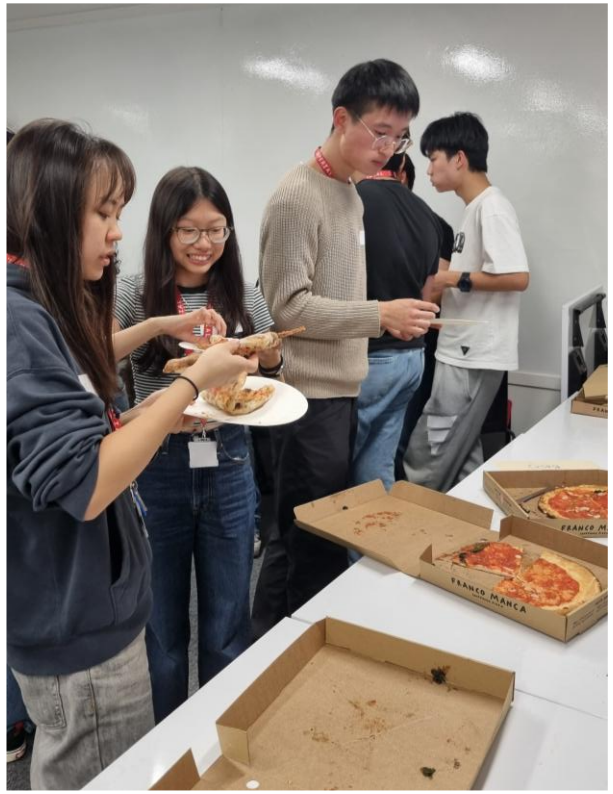
The peer guide scheme is managed via an app where students can browse Peer Guide profiles, message and book appointments



- Administered by Faculty Education Coordinator
- Managed by Faculty Digital Services Team

Bridges: Events

Focused on community building, opportunities to get advice from upper year students and careers and academic skills development!



Bridges: In Numbers

24/25

- **Registration:** 237 students
- **Event attendance:** 15 – 40 students per event
- **Peer Guide appointments:** 92 bookings for 17 students

25/26 (...so far)

- **Registration:** 183 students
- **Event attendance:** 15 – 60 students per event in the Autumn term
- **Peer Guide appointments:** 58 bookings for 12 students

Further evaluation via:

- Mid Year Survey
- End of Year survey
- Feedback from Peer Guides

With more resource:

- Analyse peer guide app usage
- Continuation and differential outcome rates

(*but note that Bridges is wider than just WP students)*

Bridges: Why it works well

Faculty ownership allows for:

- Interlinking of Peer Guide scheme and events makes Bridges more successful
- Proactive engagement with students, meeting them where they are
- Student led programme
- Co-creation of activities and resources
- Peer guides act as programme ambassadors
- Departmental buy in through close relationships with departmental staff and signposting to the programme by departmental staff
- Clear understanding of Natural Sciences cohort needs, with bespoke support and tailored advice
- Close collaboration with RSCU, student societies and departmental networks

Bridges: Future Plans

- Mobile version of the app
- Continue to develop and enhance activities, co-creation with Bridges Alumni
- Bridges Advisory Board – seeking members!
- Expanding Bridges support to Year 2+ with the Bridges: Leadership & Skills Development Programme (subject to StudentShapers funding!)