

# Supporting PGR mental health and wellbeing at Queen Mary University of London

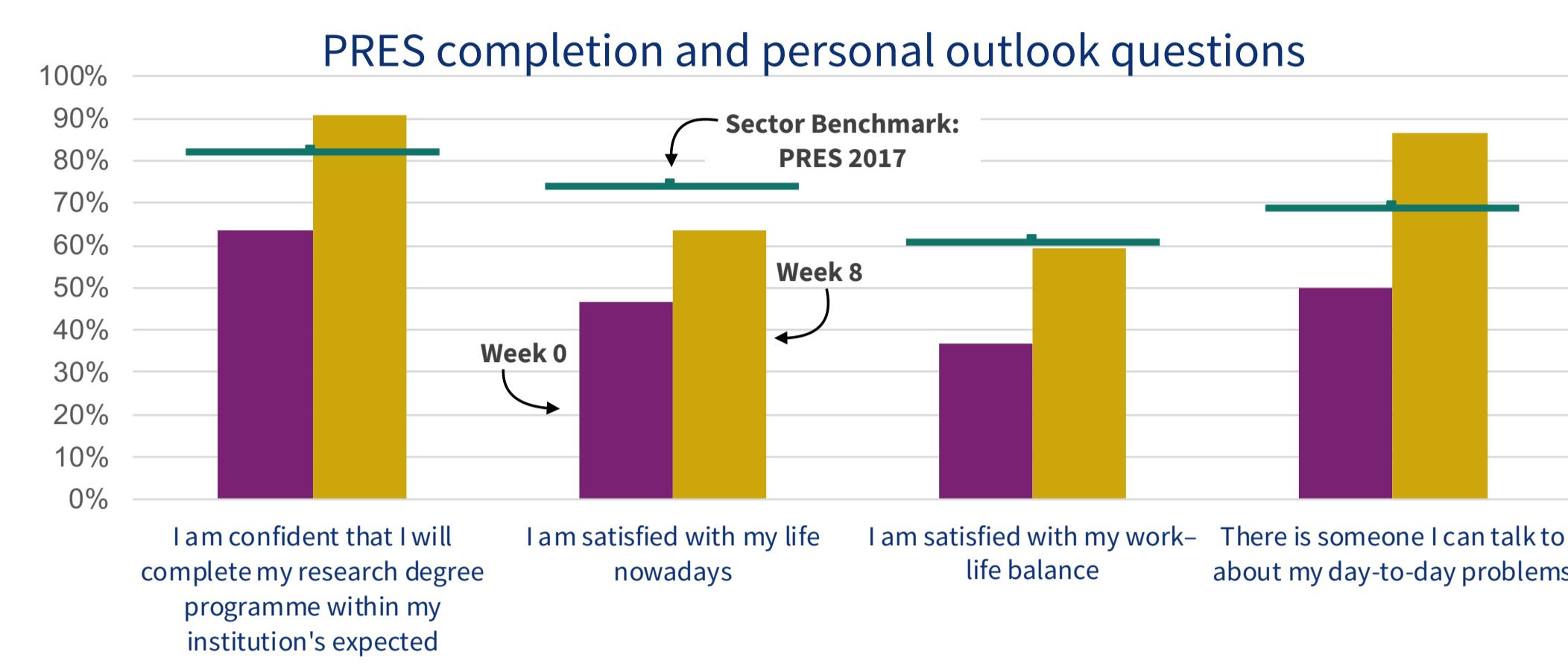


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## 1. Support Group for PhD Students

- Facilitated by a Researcher Development Adviser and a Counsellor
- Eight weekly 90-minute sessions with a maximum of 12 participants
- Evaluation at start and end of the group: PRES 2017 wellbeing questions & all 14 questions from the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS)

### Results from 2018-19



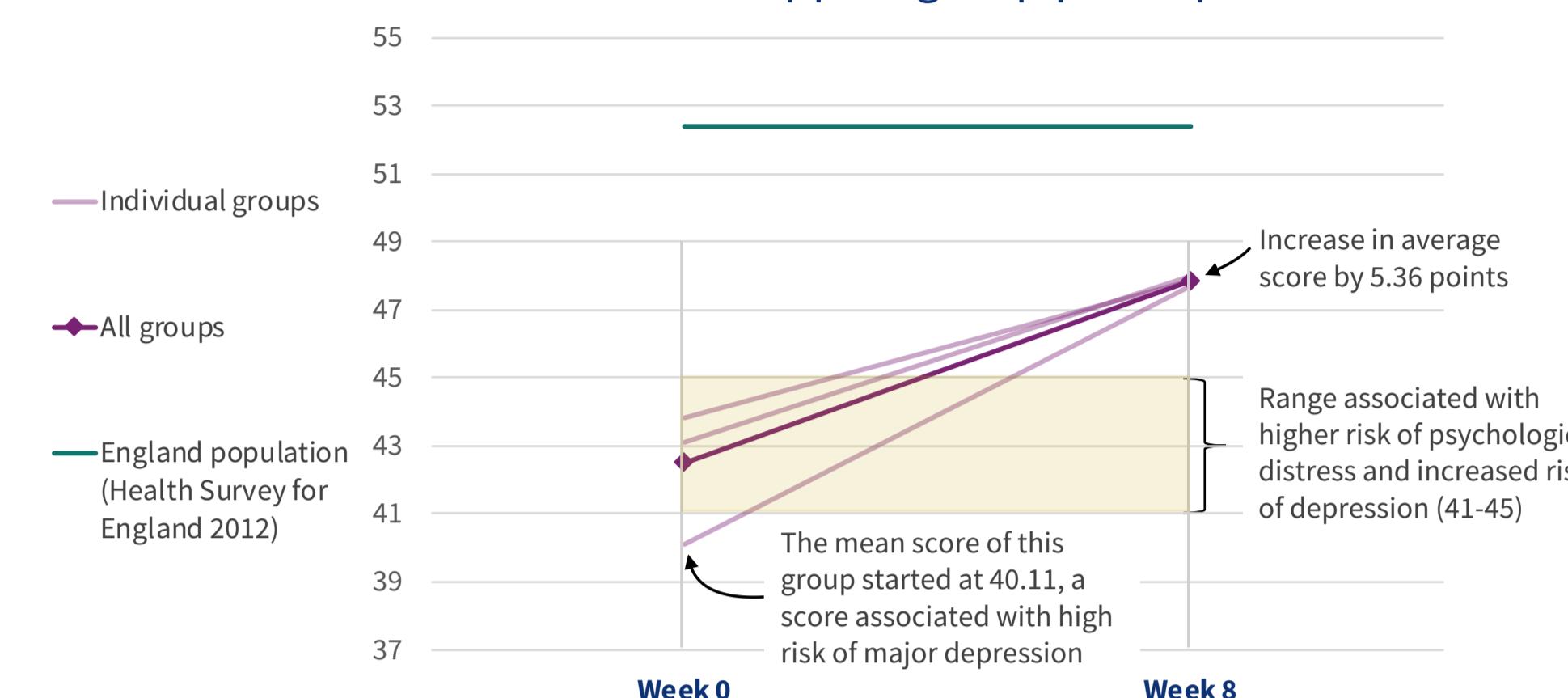
“Finally I can open up and talk about my problems that have been bothering me for a long time, but I didn't know how to deal with or how to talk about it with other people. And it feels nice to know it is not shameful to have these problems and it doesn't mean I am not good enough.

“Hearing what other people were going through helped to give me a perspective on my own issues. Often the advice given to one person would apply to me too. Helped to feel less alone and felt good to think we were helping one another. A dedicated space once a week away from work was surprisingly helpful.

“It was important to have a space to come and talk. To be surrounded by people who understand the struggles of doing a PhD

“It has been useful to feel part of a group, which was missing in my life.

### WEMWBS mean scores of support group participants



What were the most useful aspects of the Support Group experience?



New data shows effectiveness of **support groups** in **increasing PGR wellbeing**

Collaboration between **Counsellors** and **Researcher Developers** allows for **holistic support of PGRs** – emotional and academic

Mental health & wellbeing training for Supervisors and PGRs is **most effective when embedded in core training programmes**

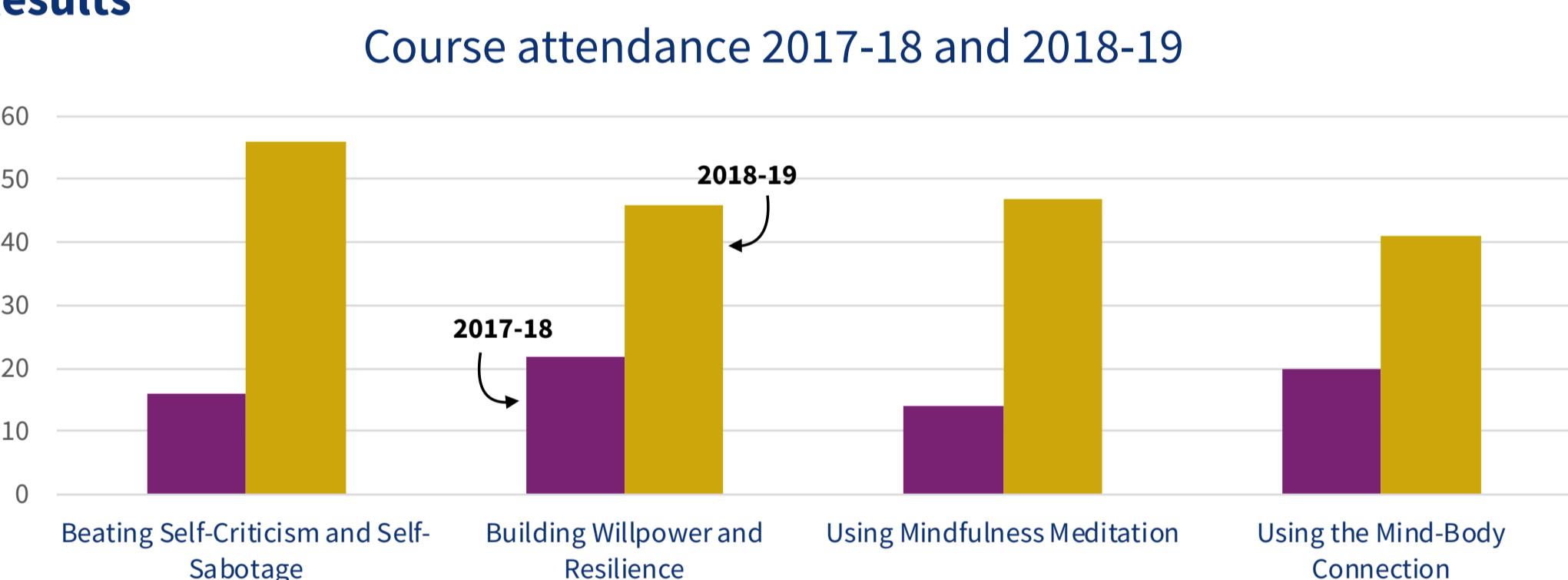
## 2. Training for PGRs

The aim of this strand is to send a clear message that the tools provided to manage the emotional pressures are equally important for a successful PhD journey as the academic skills training.

### Survive and Thrive

- Four-part training programme
- Expanding the training provision by an additional 150 places in 2018-19

### Results



“Poor mental health is a silent killer. Students and academics suffer from it but are reluctant to be too open about it. It would be a good idea to have group sessions of these courses for groups of people that must regularly work together (eg research students and their supervisors).

“...generally these series of workshops are extremely useful and they highly improved my well-being.

“Very helpful for a student struggling through their PhD.

Survey Questions	Self-Criticism & Self-Sabotage	Willpower & Resilience	Mindfulness Meditation	Mind-Body Connection
How do you rate your knowledge of the subject after the workshop?	Good / Very Good 88.9%	Good / Very Good 100%	Good / Very Good 66.7%	Good / Very Good 77.8%
How likely are you to use what you have learned during this session?	Probably / Definitely will 88.9%	Probably / Definitely will 92.3%	Probably / Definitely will 66.7%	Probably / Definitely will 88.9%

### PhD Cohort Days

- Inclusion of emotional resilience and resourcefulness half-day sessions into the three annual Cohort Days to reach a large number of PGRs in 2018-19
- Year 1: Your PGR journey; getting the best start** – 40 attendees
- Year 2: Keeping up the momentum** – 99 attendees
- Year 3: Crossing the finishing line** – 42 attendees

“[This workshop] helped in refreshing the mind and thinking a bit more outside of the research

“...it's helpful to talk to others and see they have the same problem as you

“[The most useful aspect was] highlighting that it is both okay and important to have times when you are not working on your PhD

## 3. Training for supervisors and staff supporting PGRs

### Supporting Mental Health and Wellbeing in PGRs: a guidance for supervisors

- 3-hour optional training course piloted in May 2019
- 33 attendees (24 supervisors, 9 support staff)

In response to feedback, from 2019-20:

- Inclusion of half-hour excerpt of the training in the mandatory New Supervisor training (4 times per year)
- New 1-hour lunchtime workshop for supervisors and support staff on looking after their own wellbeing

Survey Questions (response rate 84%)	Response
How do you rate your knowledge of the subject after the workshop?	Good / Very Good 82.2%
How likely are you to use what you have learned during this session?	Probably / Definitely will 78.6%
How likely are you to recommend this course to a colleague?	Probably / Definitely will 78.5%

## 4. Wellbeing campaign and events

### PGR Wellbeing weeks

- Two weeks of free activities in February 2019
- 100% of survey responders were satisfied with activities
- 162 registrations

### Is it just me? Discussing Mental Health and the PhD Experience

- Event in January 2019, comprising talks and panel discussion
- 244 registrations, 721 Eventbrite page views



## Acknowledgements

This project was made possible through the support of:

- the Office for Students and Research England Catalyst Fund: supporting mental health and wellbeing for postgraduate research students
- the Charlie Waller Memorial Trust by assisting in the development of new training for supervisors and the Cohort Days wellbeing sessions.
- Dr Caroline Dunmore, University of East London, who developed and delivered the Survive and Thrive programme.

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