Navigating Uni Life

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Table of Contents

A Quick Word Before You Start

Part 1: Surviving and Thriving at University

Chapter 1: First Year, The Bum Era
Chapter 2: Second Year, The Comeback
Chapter 3: Third Year, The Pivot Away from Finance
Chapter 4: Should You Do 3 Years or 4?
Chapter 5: Living at Home vs Halls
Chapter 6: Imposter Syndrome
Chapter 7: Time Management & Avoiding the Crammer Trap
Chapter 8: Exam Period & Revision Method
Chapter 9: Year Abroad & Exchange Programmes
Chapter 10: Should You Do a PhD?
Chapter 11: Wellbeing, University Counselling & Support

Part 2: Building Yourself

Chapter 12: Fitness & Solo Sports as Mental Fortitude
Chapter 13: Reading as a Habit
Chapter 14: Travel, Why It's High ROI
Chapter 15: Dating, Going Out & Social Life
Chapter 16: Friends Old and New
Chapter 17: Societies, Your Free Sandbox for Everything
Chapter 18: How I Earned £30k+ During Uni

Part 3: Mindset

Chapter 19: Growth Mindset & Challenging Yourself
Chapter 20: Why Some First Years Are Cracked From Day One
Chapter 21: Knowing, or Not Knowing, Your Future Goals
Chapter 22: Final Reflections, Audit Yourself
Chapter 23: What Imperial Students Actually Say
A Final Word

Part Two of The Imperial Manifesto series

A Quick Word Before You Start

Everything outlined in this document is simply my opinion. It shouldn't be treated as fact, since these are all technically subjective. So to quote Bruce Lee, "take away what is useful and discard what is not." And a reminder, I don't know everything either, but I try my best.

My name is Khuselee. I was born in Mongolia and came to the UK to live in London when I was very young. As of the time of writing, I have just finished three years studying an MEng in Materials Science and Engineering. I've had four internships, I've started a business, I've earned over £30k so far. I was president of and started a calisthenics society, I gained positions within two of the largest societies within Imperial, I've done 17 muscle ups in a row, I read books, and I make content that goes semi viral in a particular niche.

I spent my first year completely broke. I travelled alone for the first time during my second year. I met some of the most driven and successful people my age. I've felt stupid and completely unqualified and behind. I've earned a 2:2 grade and changed my approach to get a higher grade. I've also felt the smartest and most qualified in a room. I've met some of the richest people my age having come from a background on free school meals and borrowing laptops to use. I have one more year left in university and I intend to make the most of it. These notes help me track myself, reevaluate my approach, and make sense of everything going on in my life, and hopefully inform and help others.

So far, during my time in university, I've learned, unlearned and rediscovered lots of new processes, mindset changes, and approaches to life, self development and success in achieving my goals. My goal has always been, since young, to achieve financial freedom in order to realise my true goal to build my character and achieve multiple lifestyles and freedom to go and do whatever I wish. I imagine a lot of people share this goal, or say they do. So I write these notes assuming we share the same goal.

Going to a top university like Imperial will undoubtedly change your life. I like to think reaching success is like being on a rollercoaster, and the track's trajectory, how high up or low down it is, is determined by your actions in the present. As they extend out like different plots on a graph, some choose to make it more exponential, some at a slower linear pace, and from these different rates of progression, wider and wider gaps form. You start to see why some people are destined to find success while others may not. In the very beginning the gap is almost unnoticeable and there appears to be no difference between person A and person B, but one does things more regularly, and that compounds and grows into a trajectory aimed at success.

Going to a top uni will introduce you to people, friends and networks who will discuss things you didn't consider, and it opens your mind to all the endless possibilities. Iron sharpens iron, and that holds true for ambitious people being friends with even more ambitious people. The famous saying, if you're the smartest person in the room, you're probably in the wrong room, is a very true statement within a top uni like Imperial. Many times in my life I have felt out of my depth and frankly stupid, but these offer chances to accelerate yourself and grow into a more successful version of yourself.

I imagine you're reading this to:

- get into your dream uni, which is most likely Imperial
- you're a fresher and want to understand and learn how to navigate uni life
- you just want to listen to someone going to one of the hardest unis in the world

All of these are fine and I hope to help you in your goals, but first a caveat.

If you fall into the first group, you must understand the nature of top universities. My personal list is Imperial, Oxbridge, UCL and LSE for the UK, and these are applied to by hundreds of thousands of students from countries all across the globe, not just the UK. Some courses may see 10+ applicants for each space. At a certain point you begin to understand why these unis have high entrance requirements, it's because they can afford to given the number of applicants. Even students with top grades will still get rejected, and in a lot of cases there's seemingly no good reason.

So if you don't get in, it's not because you're not good enough. You have to realise you were always qualified for it, and that mathematically and logistically, unis like Oxbridge, Imperial and LSE just can't take everyone who applies even if they wanted to. Lots of people are qualified and would thrive if given the chance, but not all of them will be given that chance. So if you end up somewhere that wasn't your first choice, keep your head high. It's not rejection, it's redirection. A lot of uni is purely what you decide to make of it, and this should also explain why plenty of people go to lower ranked or lesser known unis and still outperform some students at Oxbridge and Imperial.

I cannot promise you will get into Imperial just by reading this, but I can give you a much clearer picture of what Imperial is like, the patterns and trends of thinking and working in a top university, and things you can carry out yourself that will be applicable wherever you end up. My aim is to lessen the uncertainty that comes with this transition, give you a broader picture, and help you carry a head start that can begin compounding as soon as you start reading.

This particular guide, Navigating Uni Life, picks up right where Getting Into Imperial leaves off. You've got your offer, or you've already started, and now the actual work of building a genuinely good university experience begins. It covers my own first, second and third year in full, a first year I'm not proud of, imposter syndrome, time management, wellbeing support, fitness, reading, travel, friendships, and the mindset shifts that took me from a broke, directionless fresher to someone who's genuinely glad they came here.

Now, on that note, let's begin.

One more thing before we start: this guide is written entirely from my own experience, which means it's one person's perspective by definition. If you'd rather hear it from 56 other current Imperial students instead, in their own words, jump straight to Chapter 23: What Imperial Students Actually Say, near the end of this guide.

Is University Actually a Scam?

This gets asked more than you'd think, and it deserves a straight answer rather than a dismissal. Tuition is high, a lot of contact hours are genuinely light, and it's easy to find people online who dropped out and did fine, or graduates working jobs that never asked for their degree. So it's a fair question, not a naive one.

My honest answer: it depends entirely on what you actually do with it, and that's not a cop-out, it's the actual mechanism. A degree from a top university is not a golden ticket that pays out automatically, it's a concentration of ambitious people, resources, and optionality that only compounds if you actually engage with it. Turning up to lectures and doing the bare minimum for three years genuinely can be a poor use of £9,250 a year. Using the same three years to build a network, take internships, start something on the side, and stress-test yourself against genuinely smart people is a completely different outcome, from the same degree.

The parts that are hardest to get anywhere else: the peer group (iron sharpens iron, covered above), the brand recognition that still opens doors in competitive industries whether that's fair or not, and the structured excuse to spend three or four years experimenting with who you want to become before the stakes get higher. You can technically get all of this without a degree, but it's a lot more friction to assemble yourself.

So is it a scam? Not inherently, but it is genuinely possible to pay full price for it and get very little back, if you treat it as something that happens to you rather than something you actively use. The rest of this guide is essentially an extended answer to "how do you make sure it isn't a scam for you specifically."

Part 1: Surviving and Thriving at University

Chapter 1: First Year, The Bum Era

I spent my first year being a bum. I found the transition from sixth form to first year a very difficult jump. I didn't revise at all, I didn't attend many lectures, and crucially, I didn't take the time to catch up meaningfully. I would spend a lot of my time staying over at friends', playing games. This was a terrible start to uni, and I fervently tell people to avoid this type of lifestyle. To be clear, it's completely fine to have fun and be relaxed during freshers, that's part of the experience. The real issue was I never balanced that with also giving my degree the time it deserved. I was very unused to the idea that you didn't have to attend lectures, and to the increased independence in general. It got so bad that I completely missed a test worth 20% of a module, losing that 20% outright.

Why was I like this? Multiple factors: I was dead broke, since I received no student finance or bursary in first year due to visa complications, I had just moved house at the start of the year, I felt a bit of resentment having not made the grades for my first choice at Cambridge, alongside previous personal circumstances, so I wasn't in a good mental frame, and I was, and still am, very lazy, and didn't take the steps necessary to fix myself there and then.

Looking back, I should have started attending lectures more, taken the time to properly catch up on missed content, improved my time management, and followed a clearer routine. Fixed my sleeping schedule, learned to wake up earlier. Obviously hindsight is 20/20, and I genuinely had a tough year. I was dead broke with no real financial support given the circumstances, and simply telling someone to sleep earlier and organise their time better, when they feel no real consequences at the time given the newfound independence and no real discipline skills, is an inevitable recipe for disaster. Some things I had to learn myself through experiencing them, in order to properly reframe my mindset.

Initially I found listening to lectures very hard, since I was arriving late, sleepy, hungry, and hadn't caught up on previous lectures at all. I now understand I didn't give myself a fighting chance, and just hoped my haphazard attendance would somehow fix itself. My lack of funding was a major toll, it wore on my stress and required me to fill out extra funding support requests through my uni, which they did help with (the power of asking and using uni resources), and it required me to work as a tutor during my time at uni. Being dead broke and constantly worried about your funds can be very detrimental. Your mind is constantly worried, you're concerned whether you should even go to campus and pay the travel fare, you skip lunch as everything at uni, especially South Kensington, feels too expensive. I didn't have a personal laptop (I had to borrow one from university), a good phone (mine was four years old and broke midway through first year), and couldn't afford an iPad (I used paper, and my notes were always disorganised, manageable at A-level but a real handicap once uni content got a lot more in depth).

I also found a lot of the content hard to get used to, given there was a fair amount of Further Maths content I wasn't accustomed to, since I hadn't taken Further Maths, and the learning format of large lectures compared to classroom learning with around 20 students, which I was more used to in college. The volume of coursework, workload and content to get through, all by yourself, was a genuine step up from college. I also fell into the trap of skipping loads of lectures, telling myself I'd rewatch them later, which I never did. This is a very negative and dangerous spiral to fall into, since it promotes laziness and fixes nothing. My advice is to only ever skip a lecture if you're running a business, working a part time job, or genuinely occupied elsewhere. If you're a regular first year without those major commitments, you should be attending your lectures and completing your studies to a satisfactory degree. There's frankly no excuse, and it develops good skills in consistency, waking up early, being prepared, and engaging your brain, things a lot of people underappreciate.

Think back to how in sixth form or secondary school, you attended every single day, in every lesson, learning. Some days may have been difficult, but the sheer volume of consistency, being there day in and day out, meant your brain was constantly engaging and developing. Over time you simply got better, and it was good for you. This applies to uni too. If you're spending three to four years studying a degree, you might as well get some use out of it.

As a first year, I actually regretted going to Imperial and didn't like being a student there at all. Everything felt lonely, and all the buildings felt like offices with no warmth or social life. A lot of these issues, everyone feels, and the only remedy is to work through it, it gets easier over time as the level of content and new jargon becomes familiar, that's just building your foundational knowledge. But other things, like having no money at all as a student in London, shouldn't be normal. Nowadays I don't care how the uni looks, and at times I genuinely find my campus beautiful (during summer), since I've become more accustomed to calling it my university, and in a way, my home.

I spoke with my department and looked into support resources for funding, and took advantage of it, since they're specifically designed for that exact purpose. Universities recognise that students shouldn't have to worry about food, transport or costs, ideally, so they'd rather students focus solely on their degree. On the last day of first year, I spoke with my department about scholarships and simply explained my circumstances, my financial difficulty, and how a scholarship plus extra funding would help. The perks of a good uni like Imperial is that they generally have solid funding and will gladly use it to make sure students can afford their needs. I was lucky, since I stayed at home with my family and didn't have to pay rent. I grew up with free school meals, and a lot of my peers growing up struggled to make ends meet, given rent, food, independent living and, at times, irresponsible spending on nights out and alcohol. It's fine to spend a little on leisure now and then, but you have to be responsible about it. So many students simply don't understand basic financial literacy or a basic saving routine, and these skills compound massively later in life, so it's important to develop them early. A simple habit worth building is working out your monthly costs and building up an emergency fund of around three months' worth of expenses. I'd also get into the habit of checking your bank statement every so often, not obsessively, but often enough. You'll probably notice a fair few unnecessary costs where you could've saved, spent the money on something better, or just cut back entirely.

It's very common for first year students to slip up in a lot of areas, and that's honestly fine, first year is generally treated as a "finding out what works for you" period. Use the time to get used to independence, to financial spending as a student, and to figuring out how and where you study best. Realistically, you can probably work most of this out within about a week of consciously sitting down and exploring your options properly, what routine suits you, where you focus best, what you actually want to achieve. From that point on, it's just a matter of taking action and doing the things that reinforce it. Get organised early if you can, since it compounds and saves you a lot of time, stress and indecisiveness later on.

This "finding out what works" framing is also reflected in how a lot of universities don't count first year grades towards your final degree. Mine did, it was worth 7.5%. Midway through the year, after missing my graded test, my department head sat me down and asked if I actually wanted to study, and despite everything I'd put myself through, I still said yes. I ended first year with a grade of 51%, and frankly I'm surprised I didn't have to resit anything.

I did some very basic introductory work experience that summer, including a week at an asset management firm, secured by asking the head of an organisation I was part of. I was the only person who got into that firm for work experience without any nepotism. I also padded my CV with a finance academy through SEO London, a two day programme where we networked and did group interview

exercises together. I also spent the summer cold calling and learning how to run an SMMA on YouTube, experiencing the hard journey of entrepreneurship firsthand.

> **Key takeaway:** First year is genuinely a "find out what works for you" period, and most universities design their grading to reflect that. But don't mistake that leniency for permission to disengage completely. Financial hardship and a rough transition are real and worth getting support for, actively use your university's funding resources, but the study habits and consistency you build (or fail to build) in first year set the tone for the rest of your degree.

Chapter 2: Second Year, The Comeback

I entered second year with regained motivation, wanting to prove wrong my peers who thought I was just a lazy idiot, and to prove to myself I still had my intellectual spark. In a dramatic move, I shaved off the tied up man bun hairstyle I'd had since Year 10, to signal a new change and serve as a cringe, constant reminder. I also received a scholarship that provided extra funding every year, wiping away my financial stress and motivating me to actually try. So for every lab session and coursework assignment we had, I gave it extra effort. I didn't always get a good grade, but simply putting in more effort for once bumped up my coursework grades.

The scholarship, combined with regular student finance and bursary payments for the first time, meant I no longer had to worry about transport or food costs, and I was able to buy myself an iPad to help with revision. I also came into second year far more knowledgeable about the application process for finance and consulting. I'd spent my first year doing a whole host of webinars, career fairs, finance events and SEO London hours, and applied to roughly 100 internships. In November of second year, I made it through to, but fell through at, the assessment centre stage for Global Markets at BNP Paribas. I had banked heavily on getting an early banking offer in second year, and was gassed to be making it through the stages, so when I got rejected, I felt genuinely depressed. It makes sense, the amount of time and effort you put into an application process, only to get rejected right at the end over small, basic mistakes, costs a lot in a competitive industry like banking.

I spent the start of 2025 unsure of my own progress since first year. My grades hadn't gone up much, my winter exam results were mediocre, and I hadn't secured any internships. My attempt at an SMMA venture had also fallen apart around that time, so I had effectively nothing going for me. After attending an Imperial career fair in autumn, I heard about a consulting firm releasing internships. I applied when the January cycle opened and made it through the initial stages. I'd also joined UpReach as well as SEO London that year, and used them for interview practise and technique. Towards the final assessment centre stage, I landed a role at Newton Europe Consulting in January. This was my first proper internship offer, and I was elated.

A couple of friends were also applying to spring weeks at the same time and encouraged me to apply to some as well. I applied to around 15, managed to get a telephone interview with Deutsche Bank, and landed a spring week in February. I was also actively setting up my own calisthenics society, since I'm passionate about fitness and calisthenics and was surprised there wasn't an active community for it within Imperial, plus it would look good on my CV. I also ran for several committee roles within the Investment and Finance Society, which meant putting together a manifesto. Not particularly important in itself, but I believe putting your face out there and trying something new matters.

I also worked on a B2C career website called Tealink, where we onboarded over 50 mentors who'd arrange coffee chats with students, and sold notes on technical finance interview topics, later adding an AI CV builder to help people pass ATS scans on internship applications. Doing this with my friend was an invaluable experience, it showed me the importance of conviction, speed and action for startups. We spent three months just planning, getting bogged down with exams and internship applications along the way, when in hindsight we should have and could have started much earlier. My friend developed his technical side a lot more, and I developed my social media page further, since I had to make essentially UGC content to drive sales for Tealink. We both learned a host of skills and gained an experience we can always reference back to.

This is why I place a lot of importance on self starting. If you have no internships or nothing to show, you can always start or create your own experience. For my exams that year, I crammed, but gave it a much

better level of focus and revision time than in first year, where I would give up easily. This time round I felt more prepared going into the exam hall, and finished the year with 65%.

I was also very consistent with working out, and through my friend, cofounder and gym buddy at the time pushing me past my mental barriers, I achieved PBs of 45kg dumbbell shoulder press, 75kg weighted dip, and 55kg weighted pull up. For reference, I weigh around 73-75kg, so safe to say I was decently strong for my size. I also had enough financial stability by this point to start investing after my 20th birthday, and by the end of my first year of investing I'd saved and invested several thousand pounds, which I'm still proud of, given a couple of months prior I had never even seen a thousand pounds in my account.

On investing specifically, it's worth its own note. The key principle is simple: put in cash you genuinely won't need, since you're most likely investing for another 40+ years of your life anyway, and those extra few years of starting earlier compound more than people realise. You can start small, it doesn't need to be a large amount to begin.

This is mainly aimed at anyone who finds themselves in the fortunate position of having a decent amount of savings with nothing responsible to put it toward. Don't spend money simply because you have it, if you have the means, fund yourself and invest in yourself first, but not all of it. If you've got leftover cash that's reasonably substantial, say £1,000 or more, sitting around doing nothing, I'd genuinely encourage you to invest it into a simple ISA, I use Vanguard, though there are other solid options. I won't go into the full nuances here, they're genuinely simple to grasp after about an hour of your own research, but it's worth actually thinking about rather than leaving it to sit.

If you're not yet at that point financially, that's completely fine too, just treat it as something to work toward. Worth remembering that money sitting in a bank account isn't neutral, it actually loses real value over time to inflation. The core message here isn't “go invest everything,” it's simply: be financially sensible and deliberate with what you have.

Overall, a pretty good year, one where I achieved a lot and pushed myself to improve across a lot of different areas.

> **Key takeaway:** Second year is where the compounding effect from actually trying starts to show. A scholarship, a bit of financial stability, and putting in effort even when the grade doesn't immediately reflect it, all build on each other. If first year knocked your confidence, second year is a genuinely realistic point to turn it around, most of what changed for me was mindset and consistency, not raw ability.

Chapter 3: Third Year, The Pivot Away from Finance

At the beginning of third year I felt quite down on myself. All the momentum from second year, the internships, starting Tealink, the consistency, had broken down. I hadn't converted my spring week, so I had to go through another round of internship cycles. I was still applying to banking and finance this year, and knowing I had to do it all again was stressful as hell. I did several telephone interviews and penultimate stages with major banks, but I noticed within myself that I hated playing the fake game, getting marked down for silly, arbitrary things like not networking enough, or a single misspelling on a CV. I hated having to talk about markets and arbitrary M&A opportunities using jargon I couldn't care less about. I hated how focused I was on gaining an internship in a field just so the logo would look good on a LinkedIn post. I hated how the people who got finance and corporate internships generally didn't offer anything better than me, they were just a bit better at networking, applying earlier, and waffling more. Everything felt disingenuous, and I hated the mask I was putting on.

If I took away the prestige, the long hours, the salary, the actual work itself, the culture of finance and consulting just wasn't attractive to me at all. If I was going to devote that many hours, I'd much rather devote them to my own startup, or to myself, rather than to a bank that doesn't care about me. In my third year I went to a few more banking events, having done plenty during second year, and it started to feel like a scam, all the same thing, nothing changing, nothing exciting. Maybe I'd sucked out everything I could from the internships and application process, or maybe I'd just sold myself short by not landing a role at somewhere like JP Morgan. But I honestly feel glad I acknowledged to myself that I didn't want those roles, and I didn't have to feel pressure about getting or not getting them, because everyone applies to them, there's nothing especially unique about it, and my plan was never to work in finance long term anyway. I always knew I'd leave within a couple of years regardless.

So in some ways, not converting my spring week or enjoying that world was maybe a blessing. I started going through a slow shift, where I no longer wanted to chase bureaucratic corporate roles and instead became more interested in expanding my brain and learning as much as possible. I had friends applying to robotics and electrical engineering roles that sounded genuinely cool, friends building SaaS startups, and I started looking more seriously into tech roles, since they tend to be more meritocratic and a better place to work than investment banking. I also went deeper into content creation to see where it could go, and fell back in love with my actual degree, appreciating materials science and engineering again. I'd always been interested in new technologies, and materials are crucial to quantum computing, semiconductors, the AI revolution, nuclear fusion and nanotechnology.

Towards the end of third year I was applying to any internship that sounded genuinely interesting, realising uni is the only time you can try out completely different industries without doing the groundwork or facing any stigma for switching. This meant I was free to pursue a nuclear research internship and an AI engineering internship at a software company in the same summer. I decided this was the year to improve my technical ability in coding and software, and to make the most of my degree, having studied nuclear fusion and nanomaterials modules, both of which I loved.

This year not much happened on paper, but my mindset and goals shifted a lot. I became more interested in the startup world, employing a more entrepreneurial mindset by self starting things I'd always wanted to do but never had the courage to. I went to a lot of events and met some of the highest value people I've met so far, networking is a skill worth developing properly. I also went to a startup accelerator through Imperial Enterprise Lab, working on an early app idea that was too basic and tried to do too many things at once (better to be niche first as a startup), but it allowed me to meet a lot of student entrepreneurs and see how many possibilities were genuinely within reach.

This year was by no means perfect, I skipped a lot of lectures and didn't heed my own advice for much of it. For my exams, I crammed again, this time our exams were all at the end of the year, so missing lectures throughout didn't have immediate consequences, which gave me the illusion of more free time than I actually had. One thing I was genuinely happy about was being far more consistent with social media posts this year. After deciding to post every day for 90 days starting in March, I quadrupled my following on Instagram and TikTok. Growth could've been faster, but it showed me the power of consistency, and that I, a naturally introverted and reserved character, could thrive in some small corner of social media content. Through it I explored and met loads of new people across different campuses, tried new restaurants, and started seeing the world a lot more opportunistically, since content can be made about literally anything.

The Fight

I also joined a university boxing fight camp in November, where we all trained and got paired up to fight each other on 5th February 2026. I grew up loving martial arts, my first sport, tried at 15, and I'd always wanted to do a proper fight, ideally in front of a crowd. I saw it as a challenge and something to cross off my bucket list. Out of the 28 fighters in the camp, I was probably the most technically gifted, not by a huge margin, but I had better reflexes and was more comfortable sparring, having inconsistently tried my hand at several martial arts growing up.

During the camp I also signed up for a month of boxing training at an old school boxing gym over winter break, one of the best £80 I've ever spent. The sessions were tough, exhausting, and properly old school, not a commercial gym. I lost a fair amount of weight during that month, down to 72kg, training HIIT drills and bag work nearly every day. Tiring, but rewarding, especially the post session smoothie from the nearby Lidl.

I got matched with the other best fighter in camp, who happened to be 8kg heavier and 4 inches taller. We'd split the fight camp into two weight classes, above and below 75kg. I was technically under 75kg, but I deliberately chose to fight in the above 75kg bracket for better competition, since everyone at my actual weight, no disrespect to them, would've gotten destroyed. Most opponents I fought as a result had a weight disadvantage against me, and I relied on my experience and slightly better reflexes to outmatch them. My eventual opponent was usually a draw when we sparred, so if I'm honest, he wasn't who I wanted to fight. On the day of the fight, I let myself oversleep, since my match wasn't until 9pm. I invited friends and family to watch. It was fun seeing the other fights, though hard to properly enjoy as my adrenaline and nerves crept up. By the time the fight before mine started, it suddenly hit me that this was really happening. My warmup ended up feeling rushed, I began hitting pads literally right before my fight, and I remember my shoulders feeling slower than usual. Old school convention says to take a week off training before a fight, I took maybe two days.

I walked through a large crowd, chanting and cheering, to Mongolian war music for my ring walk (I don't actually listen to Mongolian music day to day, but it felt right for the occasion). I'd sparred my opponent a few times during camp, a mixed bag, he was one of the trickier ones for me, constantly jabbing and never giving a moment's rest. The coaches had promised a maximum 6kg weight difference, so I'd happily sparred him assuming I'd never actually be matched with him. When I found out I would be, I felt fairly bummed, since I'd hoped for someone either my own weight or heavier but less skilled. But I thought about the aura I could get from winning, and in the end I had no choice but to rely on the self belief that had unwaveringly carried me all throughout my life.

Training for this fight was also just a different kind of experience for me. It was the first time I'd devoted serious, sustained time to something purely physical, rather than something intangible like a startup, content, or exams.

Once the bell rang, I moved forward and forgot most of my tactical thinking. I usually spar as a counterpuncher, picking my shots, but in the moment I just attacked, attacked, attacked, forgetting about body shots, timing, dodging and slipping, all things I'd worked on heavily in camp. My guard, usually solid, became an afterthought. People said afterwards it was one of the best and most brutal matches of the night. My opponent's nose was bleeding from round one, and by the end of round two his chest was drenched in blood. I also took a few unnecessary punches I would've normally defended against in sparring, but with the stakes higher, I let myself get hit just to keep moving forward and land my own shots in return.

I won the first round on most people's read, but sat down after it with my legs full of lactic acid, worried about my cardio for two more rounds. Round two went similarly, pushing forward, swinging, attacking, my gas tank felt like punching underwater while holding your breath. I noticed my left eye going numb and started letting myself get hit with consistent right crosses on that side. I've taken hard shots in sparring before and always believed I had a solid chin, but I'd never been in a proper high stakes fight where someone was hitting me at that frequency with everything they had.

By round two or three I noticed wetness and blood on my gloves, my nose bleeding for the first time ever from a punch, something I'd genuinely believed I was incapable of. Still nowhere near what my opponent looked like by that point. Round three is hazy in my memory, I remember feeling exhausted and stumbling, receiving a standing eight count. The second half of the round I barely remember at all, aside from the relief of it finally being over, only realising afterwards I'd received a second standing eight count. For clarity, I wasn't knocked down.

People said it was a close, back and forth, entertaining match, and that we were both the most battered fighters of the night. Looking back, I probably could've won if I'd stayed calmer and fought more like I usually do, rather than moving forward constantly and leaving myself open. But hindsight is 20/20, and it was likely his first time fighting in front of a crowd too, everyone in camp was nervous about facing me, so he had his own adrenaline to push through and clearly rose to it.

I gave myself a 20 minute break afterwards to assess the damage, no doctor checked on me, despite everyone else being checked, even the winners. I saw my face in the mirror: bleeding nose, black eye on the left side, still a little dizzy. I felt bummed I hadn't won, especially in front of my friends and family, but they were happy and supportive regardless. A lot of people told me afterwards I'd fought well and that they could tell I knew how to fight, so I suppose I got the next best thing to a win.

I spent fight night at a club, since the boxers got free tickets. I'm not really a clubbing person, but I let myself have that one night as one of the rare times I'd be the centre of attention there. Surprisingly, the day after, I didn't feel too bummed about the loss. Pre fight I'd genuinely expected to spiral into a low mood afterwards, but instead everyone congratulated me, moved on, and so did I. In a strange way, once the camp was over and I no longer had a looming fight to prepare for, it felt like a huge weight had lifted. Like my brain had cleared out all the negative cache I'd been carrying beforehand.

My third year, after the fight, went a lot more smoothly. I felt less stressed day to day, more accepting of things, less concerned about not having an internship lined up yet. I leaned further into content and became less reliant on external validation, or at least I like to think so. It's an interesting feeling that I haven't really discussed this openly before. Maybe the fight was just a genuine life event that forced a

mental shift, and I can't reliably recommend the exact method to everyone, but if you need real change in your life, sometimes you need to try something new and go through a major event, good or bad.

Landing Two Internships

Until the final month of third year, I had no internships lined up, and was fairly content accepting I'd probably be a "bum" that summer. But I chose to keep focusing on content creation and expanding it, since it's genuinely possible to earn a living from it. It's always going to be a backup safety net I can grow and experiment with. Because there's no set standard or fixed rules for content creation, if you've got a semi established audience, you can do whatever. It's better to start than not to, there's essentially nothing to lose unless you do something genuinely stupid. Simply putting my face out there made my life easier in a lot of ways, getting recognised, having an easy talking point in almost any conversation, something genuinely impressive to network around, and a way to meet other influencers, at least within the "uni influencer" scene. Doing content is generally seen as a respectable thing too, showing consistency, creativity and the ability to entertain people.

My two internships for this year, I applied for late, one to two months before the end of third year. One was advertised inside Imperial, a research placement conducted on campus. I applied, did a short interview, and got it, largely because I showed genuine passion for nuclear research and machine learning methods, had solid technical knowledge from my nuclear fusion module, and was reasonably experienced with coding and software. The other internship I found by searching directly for a technical, software related role, as technical as I could realistically aim for given I'm nowhere near a software engineer's level. I found an AI engineering role that fit my profile well and that I was genuinely passionate about. I did several interviews for it, and I think what got me over the line was my experience automating parts of my own life with tools like n8n, being an active, effective user of AI, and displaying real passion for what I was talking about.

What helps in moments where you feel underqualified is to prepare as much as you genuinely can, and crucially, to actually be passionate about the role. Don't apply somewhere just because it's "a role," recruiters can hear it in your tone. If you're genuinely passionate about what you want to learn and what you can offer, you come across clearer and more confident in interview. It also helps to put more focus on fewer individual applications, rather than mass applying and spreading your focus and dedication thin across dozens of roles. I could send a genuinely well crafted, tailored cover letter to one company I actually cared about, rather than a generic one to twenty.

I managed to hear back from and secure both roles within the span of a week, and suddenly my summer became my busiest yet. I fit both in by being upfront about having two offers and asking if dates could shift. It's not always possible, some internships, like my second year consulting one, run to fixed dates, but for smaller internships at smaller organisations, it often is. It never hurts to ask.

Towards the end of third year I had to cram heavily for a lot of my exams, something I hadn't wanted to do, and by now you can probably see the trend within me. I'd become used to cramming and learning information quickly, but the downside is it doesn't really transfer into the workplace, and you don't retain it. It's a give and take, cramming buys you more time during term and can be a genuine lifesaver if you're building something else on the side, but it's never good practise as a default.

> **Key takeaway:** Realising a path isn't for you, even after doing everything "right" to get there, isn't failure, it's information. Removing pressure I'd placed on myself over roles I didn't actually want opened space for a genuinely difficult, physically demanding personal challenge, and that challenge reset something in how I approached the rest of the year. Two internships came from being honest

> about passion rather than chasing prestige, and both were secured in the final stretch, not months in advance.

Looking Ahead to Fourth Year

At the time of writing this, it's summer, and I'm in the middle of my nuclear research internship, not having started fourth year yet. This will be my final year. A lot of my friends have already graduated after three years, which brings the idea of graduation much closer to home and gives me a brief look into what it's actually like.

I'd like to spend my fourth year trying out every society I wanted to but never got round to, despite being at uni for three years already. I want to be on campus close to every day, at least five days a week, since it may be the last time I get to see friendly faces that regularly, and so I can stay consistent with my studies without constantly worrying about falling behind, I don't want to cram as much this time. I want to go to more events, meet more people, try more experiences, and go on more holidays abroad this year, since travelling was never easy for me growing up, given my personal circumstances at the time.

I also want to push myself in my final year project and modules, specifically choosing courses I found genuinely interesting and reasonably challenging, so I actually use my brain, and because it's probably the last time I'll ever be somewhere called "university," so I want to properly maximise it. As you get older, you'll have less and less time to just learn about random, cool things. Uni is meant to be a hub for exactly that, and you'll notice a lot of people in work who reminisce fondly about learning random things within their degree. Social life still matters too, but simply getting wasted was never going to be part of my playbook.

More broadly, I genuinely believe pursuing hard things, challenging your brain, your mind, and your physical development, is one of the most important things you can max out while you still can. By the time you're around 25, once everything is more fully developed, a lot of your attitudes and habits tend to set in stone. So you want to be maximising all of it while your brain is still malleable and elastic, and while your body is at or near its physical peak. That window doesn't stay open forever.

Chapter 4: Should You Do 3 Years or 4?

Plenty of Imperial courses let you choose between finishing after three years or continuing into a fourth, sometimes decided at application, but often genuinely still open to you partway through your degree. If you're facing that choice, here's how I actually thought about mine.

I do a four year MEng course, and I'm quite glad of my decision. US degrees are four years anyway, and I get to leave uni with a masters degree. I don't think leaving with a bachelors versus a masters is really that important anymore for employment, but it sounds cooler to say I have a masters in engineering. I don't feel like I'm being dragged along by doing a four year course, though it's not the same for everyone. I know plenty of people who chose to leave after three years instead, as their goals readjusted away from their degree, and plenty who do three year bachelors courses from the start.

For me, having that one extra year after my bachelors as an integrated masters means I don't have to pay extortionate external masters fees, and the extra year gives the perfect amount of time to maximise uni. Some perks of doing a four year course: more time for applications. I did a spring week and a summer internship both in my second year, since I wasn't fully decided on my graduation date yet. You get more freedom and flexibility during your first and second year for things like spring weeks and internships, since you have the option to shift your graduation date.

Of course, one could argue you could be seriously locked in and achieve everything perfectly within three years, but frankly, when I first entered uni in October 2023, I didn't even know what spring weeks were until a month later, by which point most early applications had already closed, so my chances were minuscule. It was also my first time writing a professional CV and listing experiences. I managed to fill my first year summer with rudimentary experience, work experience through organisations like SEO London, and I also tried my hand at starting an SMMA with a friend. It didn't really go anywhere, but it gave me the opportunity to try things out and gave me an extra year to land more experience in second year, where I got a spring week and a summer consulting role.

I've now just finished my third year and will be doing two internships this summer. I don't understand people who want to rush graduation. I want to appreciate my time at uni as much as possible and make the most of it, recognising the golden opportunity it is, where you're an adult but still a student, so people give you the benefit of the doubt and are more inclined to help you. Trying out new things is expected and encouraged of you. All of this diminishes severely once you leave uni and become a proverbial “grown adult,” where doing everything you want in life is entirely your own business and there's no safety net.

An integrated masters specifically is worth separating from an external one. The fourth year costs the same as a regular bachelors year, so it's cheaper, and you don't have to pay it out of your own pocket, since you can still apply for student finance. Actively knowing you're doing four years from the beginning is also better than haphazardly applying to a new masters somewhere new with no real clue what's going on in your life now that you've finished your bachelors.

> **Key takeaway:** A four year integrated masters gives you more runway to figure out spring weeks, internships and your own direction without the pressure of external masters fees later. If your course offers this route and you're not in a rush to start working, it's usually the better financial and strategic option over a standalone external masters.

Chapter 5: Living at Home vs Halls

Lots of students I've met who lived in halls genuinely enjoyed it, and it makes sense: newfound independence at a relatively young age, living close to other young people with the same freedom. It provides a great opportunity to build close friends, establish memories, and have a strong social life. That said, there's the pressure of having to speak to people if you're not used to it, not getting along with flatmates (a bit of a mixed bag), spending your time incorrectly by staying indoors and not getting out there, more common than you'd think, especially within Imperial, and the cost and pressure of cooking, rent, and taking care of the space.

In theory it's great, and for most people I'd assume it is, but it's not a guarantor, and not having done it doesn't exclude you from having a good social life. I made a lot of my early friends because I did an exclusive new starters residential just before uni actually started, which meant I walked into freshers week already having a group of new friends, rather than starting completely from scratch like most people. That head start mattered a lot.

If you don't have access to something like that, you can still replicate the effect by being deliberate in your first couple of weeks. A few things I'd specifically recommend, and why each one actually matters for a fresher:

1) **Society events.** Usually the first two weeks of term are trial or taster sessions, and a huge number of people sign up, most of them free. This matters because everyone is in exactly the same position as you, new, slightly awkward, looking to meet people, which makes it a genuinely low pressure environment to start conversations.

2) **Freshers events.** There are loads of these, and some of them are paid. I'd generally recommend paying for at least a few just to get the experience. A lot of them end up being clubbing or partying focused, which isn't for everyone, but every so often there's a genuinely good event where you meet solid people. And if you're like me and don't really enjoy clubbing, going at least once means you've properly confirmed that for yourself, rather than assuming it, and you know not to bother again.

Put your name out there, try new things without sacrificing your actual values, and go out of your way to meet people early. Most people at uni are more willing to talk than you might realise, and the anxiety you're feeling about it is probably more common than you think, so it's not just you. University offers a rare chance to build your network and meet people from every background, class and country, and you're all doing broadly the same thing by being there, so you have something to relate to despite completely different backgrounds. It's one of the best things uni has to offer, arguably placed similarly to the actual degree itself.

Learning Independence

Entering uni you're an adult, and some people move away entirely, organising their own food, paying rent, finding a place, finding roommates, living with them, cleaning up after themselves, learning to be by themselves. The typical first term for students living out involves indulging in everything they didn't previously have access to, alcohol, staying out late, and it's fairly natural to be unserious for that first month or so. I'd just say don't overdo it. I understand wanting to go clubbing and drinking on a night out, personally I wouldn't do it, but I understand why some people would. That doesn't mean you should do it multiple times a week though.

My advice, as someone who spent a lot of nights staying over at friends' accommodation, and saw plenty of private housing during second and third year: clean your room. Wash your plates. Learn to

cook for yourself at least some days of the week. It's healthier, should cost you less, and everyone should know how to cook something.

I stayed at home and got a good insight into how students live in halls, since I'd stay over at friends' fairly regularly in first year, to the point where people assumed I actually lived with them. Staying at home is genuinely harder for building the same kind of social life, since you're not in the same proximity to social events, your commute may take you a different way, and you're naturally at a disadvantage compared to people living right next to campus. That said, you can still get a good social life, it usually just requires staying away from home on quite a few evenings, so your parents can't be overly strict, since that becomes a genuine obstacle. Staying in uni or with uni friends in the late evenings still matters, not necessarily for partying, but because that's when a lot of memories get made, and having the availability to do that is important. If your parents are hindering that, it's worth speaking to them directly about the impact it's having.

If you're worried you're missing out by staying home, don't be too worried. A lot of people in halls feel lonely, don't interact with people even living in the same building, and waste a lot of the opportunity they technically have. As long as you're proactive, going to events, making friends, and keeping your availability open, you should be fairly fine either way.

I'm personally glad I stayed at home. I had a relatively good social life, went to the important events, and still made time to stay with friends. I saved money on food and rent, lived with my family, and got closer to them, family time is more valuable than you think, they provide and help out in ways you take for granted until they're not there. I also have friends who lived in halls and had a great time, got close with roommates, and probably got more of the stereotypical "uni experience" than I did. Neither is inherently better, it's largely what you make of it.

Staying at home for me was the smarter financial and logistical choice, roughly a 50 minute commute, saving on food, and I don't mind living with family, since they help with food, bills, and cleaning. I do still contribute to rent, cooking, and cleaning, a small cost, and I think it's good practise picking up more responsibility as a young adult. I started paying rent in third year, once I had a proper income, and a couple of friends did the same once they turned 18. That said, living at home has real drawbacks, quiet space can be harder to come by, my family are quite vocal and I have pet birds that screech constantly, and focus can be distracting when home is associated with comfort. You're not truly independent either, your parents still hold a degree of authority. Mine aren't as strict as others, as long as I perform and show results they generally trust me, but I still have to explain where I'm going at night, and I have to share in household duties as their son living under their roof. It's a different dynamic to living with regular roommates, where you're not really accountable to anyone. Social life can genuinely be harder as a result.

Accommodation Rankings

For first years specifically, since accommodation choice matters a lot for your first year experience, here's my honest ranking of Imperial's halls, based on what I saw and heard from friends across each of them:

North Acton is the cheapest, and probably has the nicest facilities, along with one of the highest numbers of students. The catch is it's about 50 minutes from campus, and the surrounding area is fairly unremarkable. That said, people in North Acton were consistently the coolest and most laid back group in my year. Shared rooms here also tend to be more liveable, with a bit more privacy than some of the other options.

Eastside and Southside are both right next to campus with nice facilities, but they're also the most expensive options. Some of the shared rooms have genuinely poor architectural planning, with very little privacy.

Beit Hall is also right next to campus, but I'm not a fan of its layout or interior design, and the facilities arguably feel the poorest of the accommodation options. It's also right next to the union, so it can get loud. Some rooms don't even have en suites, and some window views are literally of brick walls. If location wasn't a factor, I'd rank this last.

Wilson House is fairly average. It feels like one of the least populated accommodations I knew people in, and its location is a bit obscure, not much really happens around it. Not exciting for a first year specifically, but it's fine overall.

One thing worth adding from the wider survey of Imperial students, on the practical side of things:

> **[Physics]** *Don't waste money on food on campus, learn meal prepping, you will save so so much.*

> **Key takeaway:** Neither living at home nor living in halls is objectively better, both can produce a strong or weak social life depending entirely on how proactive you are. If you're commuting from home, budget deliberate time to stay out in the evenings rather than rushing back. If you're choosing halls, weigh proximity to campus against cost and privacy rather than picking on reputation alone, North Acton's distance is a real tradeoff for its price and community.

Chapter 6: Imposter Syndrome

This is perfectly normal to feel. I felt it going into Cambridge, so when I ended up at Imperial instead, I arrogantly believed I was above Imperial students. I got a harsh reality check fast: not brushing up on A-level content, not setting a consistent schedule, and barely coming into uni wasn't going to save me from the jump between sixth form and university. I struggled hard in first year, couldn't make sense of a lot of things, and it gave my confidence a serious knock, I could barely scrape a pass in a lot of my assignments and exams. That understandably brought on a lot of imposter syndrome at the time, since I genuinely couldn't register or take things in the way everyone else around me seemed to.

Here's the thing though: this feeling is incredibly common, especially in first year. A lot of people weren't scraping passes like me, but plenty were finding it genuinely challenging and nowhere near the 70% mark either. I went into second year with a bit more determination, gave myself more time to review and understand content, and started revising alongside a friend to pick up other study methods and explain concepts back and forth. That alone improved my grades noticeably, my first year approach, or lack of one, could only ever have produced the results it did, so the fix was simply changing the approach.

The same thing happened with internships. Having no proper internships in first year felt daunting, especially watching everyone else's LinkedIn, where you only ever see people's best and most polished offers and profiles. That made me feel like a genuine bum. It felt worse knowing about spring weeks and internships before a lot of my peers did, and still being powerless to actually land one.

How I actually turned it around:

- Spent months editing my CV, asking working professionals for honest feedback, and scraping together every experience I could find to make it look semi-professional
- Paid £60 for a one month Skool community run by a career coach, mainly for the confidence of having someone look over my CV and actually hear my specific queries and problems, I left after the month and wouldn't say it's strictly necessary, you don't need to spend money to get this kind of feedback
- Practised interview technique properly, dedicating real time to practice questions rather than winging it, making sure my brain was primed and ready to answer with maximum confidence, since I'd already worked through the same or similar questions in practice beforehand

By the time I entered second year, I had a healthier CV, built by scrapping together whatever experiences I could pull from first year, and I'd gained far more confidence in actually crafting and formatting it properly. I had a real set of experiences behind me now, and the confidence to actually speak about them. All that was left was to play the numbers game and apply. I ended up landing both a spring week and a consulting internship that year. So you can see the swing here: I genuinely thought I was the least capable person in the room when it came to breaking into competitive industries, and I managed to turn that around completely within a single year.

On studying with a friend: genuinely useful. Explaining concepts out loud, asking each other questions, reviewing answers, and testing your own understanding all help enormously, just make sure the friend doesn't drag your focus down and is roughly as serious or ambitious as you are about actually improving.

Another Imperial student put this same idea slightly differently:

> **[EEE]** *Only feel stupid for asking questions without doing your due diligence. If you've done the right amount of research, ask away.*

> **Key takeaway:** Imposter syndrome at Imperial (or any top uni) is close to universal, not a sign you don't belong. The fix isn't waiting for the feeling to go away on its own, it's identifying specifically what isn't working (routine, content retention, experience gaps) and rebuilding it deliberately. My entire turnaround from first to second year came from process changes, not some sudden jump in intelligence.

Chapter 7: Time Management & Avoiding the Crammer Trap

Time management is a hugely underrated skill, and I think it's realistically possible to fit in far more than most students assume. In first year I had days that ran with lectures from 9-5, 9-4, 9-3, and I remember looking at peers running actual businesses alongside their degree and wondering how they had enough hours in the day. Looking back, it should have been entirely possible to fit everything I wanted in too.

Take even a worst case 9-5 day: if you attend all your lectures, that still leaves roughly 5 hours free once you remove commuting and getting ready. That's obviously harder than it sounds for most people, but it forces you to actually think about what to prioritise, the importance of waking up early, and building a proper routine you actually stick to. That means making it realistic, using your notes app or calendar notifications, staying properly fuelled through the day, and planning the next day the evening before, so you're constantly on top of things rather than reacting.

The core problem to solve is decision fatigue. That's what clouds your brain and makes juggling several things in a short space of time feel genuinely difficult. It's the real difference between people who seem to do everything at once and stay on top of it all, versus people who can barely manage to wake up and do their coursework.

A few structures that actually work:

1. **Split your week into focus days.** If you've got 5-6 things to manage, uni, fitness, content, side projects, family, work, don't try to touch all of them every single day. Dedicate 2-3 days to two priorities, the other days to the rest, and keep at least one day properly off for yourself. Plan out which days cover what in advance too, ideally the week before, so you're not stuck deciding what to prioritise in the moment.

2. **Split your day into blocks.** Two or three clear blocks aimed at different things, rather than a vague, unstructured day where everything competes for the same headspace.

3. **Build in real downtime.** It's scientifically well established that proper rest improves performance, this isn't indulgence, it's part of the system working properly.

Everything gets easier with consistency. Things that feel difficult at first become second nature once you've done them for long enough, to the point you stop consciously thinking about them at all. Life will still throw in random variables, a spontaneous plan, an unexpected event, and there's genuinely no universally right or wrong answer here. Sometimes going and making a memory is worth more than sticking rigidly to a schedule, and sometimes protecting your discipline is the more valuable move. Use your own judgement, but keep rotating back to your schedule rather than letting one lost day take out your whole week.

If you're a first year asking how to manage your time and feeling like everything's overwhelming, know that I felt exactly the same as a fresher. The honest answer is to give yourself time to properly catch up and put in real, deep work. I once watched a video of a professor explaining that no matter the subject, you're realistically only ever about two weeks behind. Give yourself two weeks (could be shorter, could be longer depending on the person) of slightly elevated focus and being properly locked in, and you should be back on track and considerably more confident tackling uni again. This only works if you actually give yourself those two weeks though, talking about the problem only gets you so far, 95% of actually fixing it comes down to sitting down and doing the work.

The Crammers vs The Hard Workers

Imperial students naturally have a higher baseline work rate than the average university student, which is part of why Imperial has such strong graduate employment outcomes. But just like there are levels to intelligence, there are levels to work rate too. Broadly, Imperial students fall into two camps:

- **The crammers**, who leave revision until the last stretch, sometimes two weeks before exams, sometimes three days, and in one case I know of, genuinely the night before
- **The hard workers**, who attend lectures consistently, revise steadily throughout term, and go to the library regularly rather than in one final panic

I constantly think back to the idea that hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard, and if I'm honest with myself, I've spent far more of my degree cramming than working consistently hard.

Why I'd actually recommend leaning hard worker over crammer:

- Cramming is genuinely stressful and comes with real risk if something goes wrong
- Coming to lectures means the content gets processed once, properly, rather than needing to be caught up on later
- You get more face time with professors, which compounds over a degree
- Content learned steadily over time sticks far better than content crammed and dumped straight after the exam
- Cramming often forces you to fall back on simpler, more basic logic tools rather than genuinely engaging with the deeper uni level content, since there isn't time to properly absorb it

Life does get in the way sometimes, and a genuinely valuable event might occasionally outweigh a specific lecture, especially since most lectures are recorded and accessible on demand now. Some lecturers and teaching styles also just suit rewatching better than others. But don't let skipping become the lazy default. Time in uni goes by faster than you'd expect, so the real advice is simple: go to lectures, they build punctuality and consistency, habits worth having regardless of your course.

When cramming genuinely is necessary, AI is a strong ally here, helping you identify exactly which areas to focus on and what's actually likely to come up, since a large chunk of what's taught in lectures is often delivered in an overly complicated way and isn't directly exam relevant. To cram effectively:

- Spend most of your day revising, covering at least 3+ past papers
- Use the Feynmann technique, explain the concept simply enough that someone with no background could understand it, to test whether you actually understand it or are just recognising it
- Test yourself with friends, they'll often surface gaps or angles you hadn't considered
- On exam day itself, try waking up early, 5am if you can manage it, and revising in the quiet with minimal distractions. Your brain absorbs things better when it's the first thing you're feeding it that day
- Avoid all nighters. Studies consistently show sleep deprivation makes you slower and more forgetful, which defeats the purpose if your brain is too tired to actually apply what you crammed

A Chemistry student's version of this, specific to lab-heavy courses:

> **[Chemistry]** *Do not underestimate the amount of time you need to be spending on practical assignments. Even though you can easily be hitting double digits of hours worked on a single section*

of a synthesis report, each and every hour you spend is worth it. Half-arsing your lab reports means your entire year grade takes a massive hit and no brilliant set of exam results will save it.

> **Key takeaway:** Hard work is never a wasted or outdated skill, no matter how much "work smarter not harder" gets repeated. Developing consistency and discipline in how you study is, in itself, a form of brain development, exactly like exercise is for your body. If you're currently a crammer, the goal isn't to feel guilty about it, it's to notice the pattern and gradually shift the balance toward consistency.

Chapter 8: Exam Period & Revision Method

Students during exam period can do some genuinely wild stuff, locking in for literal days with barely any sleep, relying on energy drinks, food delivery apps to cut down on time costs, and sometimes sleeping in the library. Not everyone operates like this, but it's far from uncommon. Imperial has a real stereotype, and a fairly accurate one, of students running on poor sleep most of the time, with a solid minority being genuinely strong crammers who can absorb a year's worth of content they've never properly seen before within a couple of weeks, sometimes days, of their exams.

My honest recommendation is to start early, revising at least a couple of weeks before exams begin, so you've touched every part of the content at least once. Cramming is possible, and I've done plenty of it, but I genuinely hate doing it. It leaves me feeling guilty, feels like a bad habit to lean on, and I forget the content almost immediately afterwards. It's also risky and mentally exhausting, after finishing my third year exam period, six exams within one month, my brain felt like it had been wiped and reinstalled six separate times by the final day.

To make this smoother:

- Attend any workshops and revision sessions on offer
- Build your own revision group and schedule rather than relying on ad hoc sessions
- Get through a solid amount of practice papers in the final week
- If you have two exams close together or back to back, start preparing for both roughly two weeks earlier than you normally would, so neither gets neglected in favour of the other

Revision methods that actually work:

- Start early and revise repeatedly, don't rely on one single pass through the content, the earlier you start, the smaller each individual step needs to be, and this is genuinely the only alternative that's proven to work for people who'd otherwise default to cramming
- Attend lectures, or catch up on them properly online if you miss one, know what content exists and what's actually expected of you
- Use the second brain method (a structured notes system you keep coming back to and adding on to)
- Blurting (writing everything you remember on a topic from memory, then checking what you missed)
- The Feynmann technique (explaining a concept simply enough that someone with no background could follow it)
- Pomodoro technique for focused work blocks
- Flashcards for pure recall based content
- Practice papers, as many as you can reasonably get through
- Use AI to generate practice questions, mark your work, or give you hints when you're stuck without immediately handing you the full answer
- Watch YouTube videos on topics you don't understand, different people explain things differently, and one explanation style might click far better for you than another

- Read specific books on the subject matter for a genuinely deeper, more specialised understanding, so exam questions start to feel noticeably easier
- Ask your professor questions after lectures or send them a message, ask course friends too, but only once you're genuinely stuck, not as a substitute for trying first
- Go to revision sessions and workshops that work through practice questions or mark attempted work together

Put in regular hours, whatever they realistically are for you, as long as you're covering the content and staying reasonably caught up so nothing has time to be forgotten. Before exams you typically get a week or two completely free to prepare properly. Use that time to lock in on practice questions, assuming you've already touched all the basic content, and go deeper into the finer details to squeeze out those final marks. If you genuinely follow this approach and use these methods when you need them, it should reliably get you a 2:1, and quite possibly a first. Even the Dean's List, if pushed to the max. That said, and as I've mentioned earlier in this manifesto, I'd still rather you build genuinely noteworthy experiences, professional, fun, skill based, alongside your grades, rather than chasing the grade alone.

> **Key takeaway:** Cramming works well enough to get by, but it's genuinely the harder, more stressful path, not the smarter one. The methods above (spaced revision, active recall through blurting and flashcards, using AI as a practice tool rather than an answer machine) all outperform pure cramming for both grades and actual retention. Start earlier than feels necessary, since "a couple of weeks before" always ends up being less time than you think once life gets in the way.

Chapter 9: Year Abroad & Exchange Programmes

This is genuinely one of the most underused opportunities at Imperial, mainly because most people simply don't know it exists until it's already too late to apply. I didn't know about it myself until well into my degree.

In my own course, Materials Science, there's an exchange programme in fourth year where you can spend a term or a semester at partner universities like TUM (Technical University of Munich) or MIT. I know Chemical Engineering runs a full year exchange with UC Berkeley. A friend doing Maths is doing a year exchange with ETH Zurich. From what I understand, most departments at Imperial run some version of this, whether that's a term, a semester, or a full year abroad at a partner university.

There are also **IROPs**, International Research Opportunities Programmes, essentially research placements abroad rather than teaching exchanges. A friend of mine is doing one in Japan.

Why I'd absolutely recommend looking into this, even if you're not sure yet:

- It's genuinely great character building, living and studying somewhere completely different pushes you in ways a normal term at Imperial doesn't
- It expands your network internationally, not just within the UK
- These placements are usually heavily subsidised by the university, so the actual cost is far lower than doing the equivalent trip independently
- You get to properly experience another world class institution, MIT, ETH Zurich, TUM, from the inside, not just as a tourist
- It's genuinely rare "lore" for your own story, the kind of thing that makes you memorable in interviews and conversations later

I didn't manage to get onto one myself, and I'll probably still turn out fine without it, but I'd still recommend it wholeheartedly if you can make it work. From what I understand, universities generally select people based on a mix of your grades, your commitment to the course, and how well known you are within your own department, which usually comes down to how engaged you've been with your lecturers and course staff. But if you semi-qualify, apply anyway. You have everything to gain and nothing meaningful to lose by trying.

> **Key takeaway:** Ask your department directly, early, whether an exchange or IROP exists for your course. This isn't something that gets advertised loudly, and by the time most people hear about it through word of mouth, the relevant deadline has often already passed. Don't assume it doesn't exist just because nobody's mentioned it to you yet.

Chapter 10: Should You Do a PhD?

Doing a PhD is a great way to gain genuinely specialist knowledge in a particular field, since you're placed right at the forefront of research, where breakthroughs actually happen. You do get paid, albeit not much, and depending on your professor, your working hours can be very flexible and lenient, as long as you're delivering on what's required of you. Some PhD students even run businesses alongside their research, or find time for other side sources of income.

The upside: once you have a PhD, you hold knowledge that AI genuinely can't replace, because you're operating at the actual frontier of what's known, not just applying existing knowledge.

The catch: it's a big commitment, typically 3-4 years, and you have to be genuinely passionate about the specific area, since it will be your primary focus for that entire stretch. This isn't something to drift into because you're unsure what else to do.

A few honest questions worth asking yourself before considering one:

- Am I doing this because I'm genuinely fascinated by a specific research question, or because I don't know what else to do next?
- Do I actually want a career in research or academia, or am I more drawn to applying knowledge commercially?
- Am I comfortable with a modest income for several years in exchange for deep specialisation?

For me personally, while I find breakthrough technologies genuinely fascinating, and I've done a research internship that confirmed I enjoy that world, I don't think I'll be doing a PhD. But I know others on my course who will, and for them it's absolutely the right call.

> **Key takeaway:** A PhD is one of the highest leverage moves available if you're genuinely passionate about a specific research area and want to sit at the frontier of it. It's the wrong move if you're using it as a way to delay deciding what you actually want to do. Be honest with yourself about which one applies before committing several years to it.

Chapter 11: Wellbeing, University Counselling & Support

A lot of courses at Imperial, and the university more broadly, have mental health counsellors and a proper wellbeing department. They're genuinely useful to talk to about pretty much anything, and some even have therapy pets you can spend time with to lower stress. It's not just for acute crises either, they can help with practical things too.

As an example, in first year, when I needed help with my finances and was genuinely struggling with being broke, the wellbeing and support side of my department helped me all the way through to securing a scholarship and extra funding. They knew my full story, and helping students in that position is quite literally their job.

A few things worth knowing:

- You don't need to be in crisis to reach out, financial stress, feeling overwhelmed, or just not knowing where to start are all valid reasons to get in touch
- Most departments have dedicated staff specifically for pastoral and wellbeing support, separate from your academic tutors
- These services are free and built directly into your tuition, you're already paying for access to them
- Speaking to them early, before things spiral, tends to get you far more helpful outcomes than waiting until you're at breaking point

One JMC student's take on this, worth including in full:

> **[JMC]** *This world is tough and no one out there is going to hold your hand, people are grinding, sacrificing their mental health, and still struggling to find jobs. But don't stress about deadlines and everything in life, it all seems to sort itself out. Also, forget LinkedIn, the culture there will make you feel like you're missing out severely on life if you aren't earning 100k by 21. A lot of people in my parents' generation made less than 10k a year at our age and now have million-pound properties. Enjoy the journey.*

> **Key takeaway:** Use these resources proactively, not just reactively. I used mine for financial hardship, but that's genuinely just one example of what they're there for. If you're struggling with anything, academic pressure, isolation, finances, mental health, the wellbeing department is one of the most underused resources at a university like Imperial, and it costs you nothing extra to ask.

Part 2: Building Yourself

Chapter 12: Fitness & Solo Sports as Mental Fortitude

Fitness is a genuinely important skill, not just for uni, but for life more broadly. It's better to start young, so it can compound earlier. Fitness doesn't just mean the gym, though that's a strong, versatile base to build from, it can equally be a sport you're passionate about, or a general goal like getting stronger, improving your cardio, or simply feeling fitter. Anything that forces you to develop physically is a genuinely good complement to Imperial's demanding, mentally taxing schedule.

It gives your brain a real break from constant academic strain, and there's a genuine endorphin effect after a proper workout, I notice it clears my head almost every time. You can use it to wind down at the end of the day, kickstart your morning, or create a clean break from work once you finish for the day. There are softer benefits too, team sports specifically teach collaboration, reliability, understanding group dynamics, and even leadership. A lot of successful people, if you look into it, were high school athletes, and most successful people today still make time for the gym. It's good for your health, your longevity, and your brain. It shouldn't be treated as a chore, it's closer to a genuine necessity, just as necessary as learning itself is for basic functioning in life.

My own starting point

I started off as a chubby, unfit, asthma-suffering kid, placed in the lower sets for PE for most of my teenage years. I was never particularly athletic, and never properly learned basketball or football. I picked up my first real sport, boxing, at 15, teaching myself through YouTube videos, attending a fairly basic school MMA club once a week, and doing lighthearted (and honestly probably embarrassing to watch back) boxing matches with friends, which built a real level of competitiveness and drive in me over time.

Solo sports specifically build a different kind of resilience

Solo sports, martial arts, calisthenics, force you to rely entirely on yourself, and develop genuine mental fortitude, especially within martial arts, where the explicit objective is to damage and be damaged. Looking back, I do wish I'd been brought up on a team sport too, since that's genuinely something I lacked growing up, and it's a gap I've been actively trying to close since, with a goal of eventually picking up basketball properly.

Where I've ended up physically:

- 50kg weighted pull ups
- 75kg weighted dip
- 45kg dumbbell shoulder press max
- 17 muscle ups in a row
- A 25 minute 5k
- An 11km run
- A full boxing match, fought and finished
- A sub-13 second 100m, not elite by any means, but something I'm genuinely proud of

I've touched enough different sports and fitness disciplines by this point that I'd semi-comfortably call myself an unofficial student athlete, a genuinely long way from where I started.

Goals still on the list:

- Run a marathon
- Complete a Hyrox
- Go further into Muay Thai
- Properly develop basketball and football
- An ultramarathon somewhere further down the line, I've been reading too much David Goggins lately

Team sports vs solo sports, why both matter

Within both team and solo sports, you learn the power of taking opportunities, thinking quickly, adapting, and executing under real pressure, all skills that transfer directly into life and are commonly used as genuine markers of success. Getting into a sport, of either kind, is just as important as going to the gym and staying generally healthy. And it's genuinely best to do this young, so that when you're older, you can look back grateful, having made the most of your actual physical prime while you had it.

> **Key takeaway:** Fitness isn't separate from your academic or career development, it's a direct multiplier for both. Beyond the physical side, it keeps you mentally healthier too, sharper awareness, and genuinely better brain function as a result. Solo sports build self-reliance and mental toughness, team sports build collaboration and leadership. Ideally, build habits in both, but if you're starting from somewhere unathletic like I was, know that the gap between "unfit kid" and "unofficial student athlete" is genuinely closeable with consistency alone.

Chapter 13: Reading as a Habit

I used to read a lot in primary school and early secondary, then gave it up almost entirely for a few years through late secondary. I got back into it in first year of university, starting with a borrowed copy of Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, then *Rich Dad Poor Dad*. These were books I'd always wanted to read, fairly typical self-help titles, but I genuinely felt more educated coming out the other side. Reading opens up a part of your brain that just doesn't get used the same way otherwise, and lets you explore ideas properly rather than skimming them.

I think everyone should read, genuinely, without exception. You can do it anywhere, on the train, at home, wherever. It's also just good for you, it's linked to delaying dementia, improving vocabulary, and strengthening cognitive function generally. It also keeps you off a screen and trains you to process large chunks of text properly, a skill that's becoming rarer given how much AI now summarises things for people by default. I try to make a habit of still reading long form text without AI every so often, purely to keep that muscle semi-trained.

Some books I've read so far:

- *Can't Hurt Me* by David Goggins
- *The Almanack of Naval Ravikant*, which I've referenced a few times throughout this manifesto, purely because I agree with a lot of it and it lines up closely with what I already believed
- *Deep Work* by Cal Newport
- *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell
- *Prisoners of Geography* by Tim Marshall

Most of what I've read so far leans non-fiction and self-help, and I'll admit a lot of these books share overlapping core messages and can get a bit monotonous if you read too many back to back. Still, reading a decent spread of them helps you extract a handful of core ideas and start viewing things through a genuinely sharper lens. I want to get further into fiction classics soon too, since they've stood the test of time for a reason, and stories specifically tend to build EQ in a way non-fiction generally doesn't, you get pulled into someone else's world and perspective, and it's usually just a more entertaining read on top of that.

Genuinely, there's no real excuse not to read. Whatever you've ever found even slightly interesting, there's almost certainly a book on it already, sport, history, a niche hobby, a specific country, a person you admire, a scientific concept, anything. You don't need to force yourself through dense non-fiction if that's not what pulls you in. Read whatever's genuinely interesting to you specifically, and you'll still reap the same underlying benefits, sharper thinking, better vocabulary, stronger focus, regardless of genre.

> **Key takeaway:** Read whatever genuinely interests you, genre doesn't matter, reading itself should be enjoyable, not a chore you force yourself through for optics. Don't be put off by not knowing where to start, whatever you're curious about, there's very likely a book on it already.

Chapter 14: Travel, Why It's High ROI

Travelling young is genuinely important. Almost every successful person I've met at uni was either born somewhere else, grew up somewhere else and moved for university, giving them exposure to three genuinely different cultures across their life so far, or is simply very well travelled in general. A lot of older people I've spoken to specifically emphasise raising their children to be well travelled early on, and for good reason. Travelling during your formative years broadens your perspective, exposes you to different cultures and centres of the world, and genuinely breaks the illusion of the bubble you're currently living inside. If you're entrepreneurially minded, it also sharpens your eye for spotting different opportunities, and can plant the idea of living somewhere else entirely, building a separate network in a different part of the world. It expands your thinking outward in a way that's genuinely hard to replicate otherwise, especially before 25, while you're still highly formative.

I say all this having only properly travelled to two countries in my life, Mongolia and Turkey. I was born in Mongolia and moved to the UK very young, and despite having lived here most of my life, travel for me was genuinely limited growing up, partly funding, partly the fact that I'm not yet a British citizen, which has made international travel more complicated than it should be. Even from that limited vantage point though, I can clearly see the effect being well travelled has on people, more genuine things to talk about with different kinds of people, and a broader, more grounded understanding of how the world actually works. That's before even mentioning the purely fun side of it.

Because of that, I genuinely believe travel is one of the highest ROI priorities available to young people, and I wish I'd managed to do more of it earlier myself.

A caveat worth being clear on: this isn't an argument for blowing your budget on the most expensive destination or hotel you can find, and it's definitely not an argument for going somewhere purely to get wasted and live out a few days of a hedonistic blowout. The kind of travel I'm actually talking about is more exploratory and touristy in nature, genuinely experiencing somewhere new, without wrecking your student budget in the process. Spending a bit of money is completely fine, but don't drain yourself financially for something like a three day trip to Ayia Napa, where you're unlikely to walk away having actually learned anything meaningful.

> **Key takeaway:** Travel is one of the few investments that compounds in a way that's hard to quantify but easy to notice later, broader perspective, better conversations, a sharper sense of what's actually possible outside your current bubble. Prioritise experience over luxury, and do it now, while your responsibilities and costs are still relatively low.

Chapter 15: Dating, Going Out & Social Life

On dating

Dating at uni is a genuine mixed bag, and I think it depends heavily on the individual. I've never properly dated anyone long term myself, the closest was about a month back in Year 11, which honestly probably doesn't even count. Personally, I find that being in a committed relationship at this stage doesn't make much financial or statistical sense to me, roughly 99% of relationships formed at this age or younger don't end up working out long term, and it costs both money and time that could otherwise go toward more productive things. I also think, for me specifically, being satisfied with someone already could dull my focus and drive to keep bettering myself.

I'm not saying this is objectively right or wrong, it's simply my own experience and what's held true for me. Most of my friends mirror this too, finding a partner has never been a priority for the majority of them, and most are single. The ones who did have a relationship often seem to regret it slightly, viewing it as time that could've gone elsewhere. That said, I also know plenty of people with partners who remain genuinely productive and achieve great things regardless, which tells me this is a personal call, not a universal rule.

Casual hookups are a separate question entirely, and depending on your personal or religious values, that can feel genuinely wrong for a lot of people. If that's not something you want, don't pursue it, and don't let yourself get pulled into it just because it seems like everyone else is doing it. Relationships should form naturally, with both people genuinely benefiting from it. I don't think I'd make a particularly good boyfriend at this stage of my life, and honestly don't want one right now either, which is why I lean toward not dating, but that's purely my personal position, not something to take as gospel. It's also worth noting this can look genuinely different depending on gender, age, and where you're at mentally and emotionally.

My actual advice: don't force it. If someone genuinely great comes along and something forms naturally, great. But don't chase, and don't be a beg, nobody respects that, least of all the person you're chasing.

On going out and clubbing

People often ask what I actually do for fun, and honestly, when I stop and think about it, my mind goes a bit blank, which for a brief second makes me wonder if I have much of a life at all. But the standard answers, clubbing, parties, drinking, would honestly be worse things to say. I'm actually a fairly reserved person in real life, and I generally prefer low-key days out with a couple of close friends. Whatever impression my content gives off, my social battery drains fairly regularly like anyone else's. I can speak to people, speak publicly, put myself in uncomfortable situations, and push against my naturally introverted tendencies when needed, and I genuinely believe in working on weak points like public speaking and networking, since the world doesn't particularly care whether you're naturally social or not, it's largely indifferent to your excuses either way.

That said, regular clubbing and partying just doesn't make sense to me financially, time-wise, or physically. It's rough on your health and your wallet, and most of the time you can barely process what's actually happening in the moment, only to forget most of it the next day through a hangover, all while putting yourself at some level of unnecessary risk. I think a lot of people do this mainly to follow the crowd, either because they see no other route to making new friends, can't think of an alternative, or are riding the initial high of newfound independence after moving out.

Try it yourself if you feel you need to, plenty of people genuinely do enjoy it. I've been clubbing before, and personally found that unless you're the centre of attention, it's a fairly unenjoyable, wasted experience, too loud, too crowded, oversaturated, you're not escaping the matrix with this one. One genuinely interesting experiment is going to a club completely sober and just observing what's happening around you rather than participating, you'll likely notice how hollow and futile a lot of it actually is, an escape from reality that costs more from your health and finances than it gives back.

If you already know this isn't your scene, know there are plenty of people who feel exactly the same way, and a genuine community exists for you too. Join societies, be proactive about speaking to others, and if you spot a group you're genuinely interested in, just go over and talk to them. Most people are feeling more similar to how you feel than you'd initially assume, and once you actually internalise that, breaking the ice becomes far more straightforward than it feels in your head beforehand.

One Maths student's actual, very specific answer to this:

> **[Mathematics]** *After union closes, go to the corner shop on Gloucester Road, get some drinks, hop over the fence to Hyde Park and continue the party there.*

> **Key takeaway:** Neither dating nor clubbing are things you need to force just because they're the "default" university experience. Know yourself, don't chase either out of social pressure, and trust that your version of a good social life, whatever that looks like for you specifically, is just as valid as the louder, more visible version everyone assumes is standard.

Chapter 16: Friends Old and New

When uni starts, most of the friends you made beforehand will naturally drift away, you're no longer seeing each other in the same closed, regular environment anymore, and that's genuinely inevitable rather than something to scorn or feel anxious about. It's a natural process, especially if you came from a lower-performing school and ended up at a top university, your background and pre-uni friends will shape your character and give you a different perspective from private school friends or international students, and that's actually part of what makes you distinct.

That said, I'd still recommend holding onto a few friends from before uni. They're genuinely good for your mental health, offer a real break from uni life, and it's worth the effort to catch up with them regularly. That said, I've noticed the number of pre-uni friends I stay in touch with has shrunk year on year, I'm now down to about 3-4 I speak to semi-regularly. They understand who I was before uni, which makes them genuinely special to keep around, but you may also notice you've simply outgrown some others. That's completely normal. Eventually you have to accept everyone is living their own life with their own issues, and you're your own person too. Their problems aren't automatically yours to fix, help where you genuinely can, but if you notice someone isn't changing, progressing, or on a similar wavelength to you anymore, that might just mean you've outgrown them, and that's fine.

You are, roughly, the sum of your five closest friends, so it's worth being deliberate about filling that circle with ambitious, like-minded people who genuinely push you, progress alongside you, and are willing to try new things with you too. The overwhelming majority of my friends now are from uni, with only a small handful from before, and I genuinely don't regret that shift at all. I had real fun with my sixth form and secondary school friends, but that was a different chapter of life, and everyone grows and moves in different directions. Most research on this points the same way too, friendships formed during university tend to be the ones most likely to stick with you for the rest of your life, and I'm genuinely glad to say I've met so many great people during my own time here.

As one Medicine student put it, simply:

> **[Medicine]** *Finding friends who you genuinely enjoy spending time with and trust is probably the most important thing at Imperial, at uni in general.*

> **Key takeaway:** Losing touch with most pre-uni friends isn't a failure on your part, it's the expected outcome of genuinely growing. Be deliberate about who you keep close during uni specifically, since those relationships are statistically the ones most likely to actually last.

Part 3: Mindset

Chapter 17: Societies, Your Free Sandbox for Everything

University hands you something you'll genuinely struggle to get back later: a period where trying something new costs almost nothing, socially or financially. Societies are the actual mechanism for that, and they're wildly underused given how much is on offer.

Trying Things You've Never Done

Imperial has societies for almost everything, robotics, skiing, rowing, debate, you name it. I've never done most of these, and left to my own devices, I probably never would have. But that's exactly what these societies exist for, so people like you and me can try something out, see if it clicks, and actually get an answer either way. You won't get another period in your life where you can explore this many interests without real judgement or cost attached to trying. As you get older, responsibilities pile up fast, and that window closes. Join something, try it properly, and if it's not for you, simply don't go back, there's no contract. Even a brief go at something genuine teaches you something about yourself.

Building Your Actual Friend Group

Societies are one of the most natural places to make real friends, since you're already showing up around people who share a specific interest with you, which gives you something to talk about beyond small talk from day one. The friendships that come out of a shared society, a sports team, a hobby group, a niche interest club, tend to be some of the most genuine you'll make at uni, since they're built on doing something together rather than just proximity in halls.

Starting or Running Your Own

A third option, beyond joining or exploring, is building and leading your own society entirely. I started the Calisthenics Society and was president for a year, forming a committee, designing a logo, writing a manifesto, organising a consistent schedule and location, marketing it to show genuine demand, and taking in feedback along the way. You end up learning to lead others, teach new skills, and manage a small organisation. It's a genuinely formative experience, not just a CV line, and it taught me a huge amount about myself in the process.

A Word of Caution on Committee Roles

Committee positions can be genuinely rewarding, but a lot of committee members end up fairly lazy in practice, keen on the title but inconsistent on delivery. Running Calisthenics Society, I often had to pick up the slack myself, partly down to my own failure to delegate properly, I'm not perfect at this either. It's close to a guaranteed reality you'll encounter running or joining a committee. By my final year, I'd become genuinely happy just being an active member rather than someone running things. If you can manage a committee role well, it shows real leadership, but it's not the be-all and end-all, don't let it consume all your time and energy at the cost of everything else uni has to offer.

> **Key takeaway:** Societies are one of the lowest-risk, highest-value tools available to you at university, whether you're using them to try something completely new, build genuine friendships, or develop real leadership by running one yourself. The only real mistake is not using them at all. If you want the specific angle on using societies to break into a career path like consulting or finance, Careers, Internships & Entrepreneurship covers that in more depth.

Chapter 18: How I Earned £30k+ During Uni

Throughout primary and secondary school I received free school meals, and a lot of my school trips were subsidised as a result. When I left secondary school for sixth form college, I had to apply for the 16-19 bursary myself, and I asked them directly for a borrowed laptop to use at home. That introduced me to the idea of applying for funding early and taking whatever opportunities my institution offered, since that money was explicitly there to be given out to students, it was simply my job to go and find it and actually ask. Growing up in a lower income household, I quickly realised the importance of saving, and I'd always try to help out by lowering my own personal costs and being as self reliant as I could. The constant need to cut costs made me notice how much people spend on things that are genuinely useless, serving them in the short term while being detrimental long term.

In my first year of university, I didn't receive any student finance or bursary support at all, due to visa complications, despite having lived in the UK most of my life. Scholarships, grants and bursaries are free pots of money designed specifically for lower income students. I grew up on free school meals and hadn't seen £1000 in my bank account until the end of first year. I used a borrowed laptop throughout sixth form and into uni, and didn't own my own laptop until third year. In first year I'd often go hungry, simply unable to afford lunch. Going to a top university where the majority of students are international, and over 90% come from at least middle or upper middle class families, can be a genuine mindset shift when you're coming from a very different starting point. Learning to interact with people from completely different circumstances, and accepting that not everyone shares your situation, was an important thing for me to learn. If you want to get anywhere in life, you have to learn to navigate different types of people, and being in an environment where you may initially share nothing in common with those around you, where neither they nor you can really relate to each other, such as being the poorest person in the room, is a genuinely different ball game.

How I actually got by as a broke London student:

- Bought a monthly travelcard (roughly £120) rather than paying as you go, since I was commuting 6 days a week, it worked out far more economical, and it also removed the guilt of "spending money" every time I tapped in, which meant I actually went out and used it more
- Batch cooked at home, oven frying frozen chicken from Sainsbury's and pairing it with rice and veg, which genuinely tasted better than most of what you could buy in South Kensington anyway
- Relied on Tesco meal deals for lunch when I didn't have anything prepped, enough fuel to get through the day without overspending
- Living at home meant I didn't have to cover rent or evening meals, which was a major structural advantage over friends living independently
- Applied directly to my university for extenuating circumstances funding, a lot of students don't realise unis generally have money set aside specifically for this, and if you can show genuine hardship, they'll usually find a way to help, whether that's a scholarship, a temporary grant, or even equipment like a laptop. I was given £750 through this in December of first year

This is how I went from being completely broke in first year to not having to worry about money at all by second and third year, combined with living at home and being naturally frugal from a young age.

The actual breakdown

To directly answer the question, over years two and three at Imperial, I earned more than £30,000 in additional income, entirely outside of my student loan:

- **Bursary and scholarship payments:** roughly £9k per year, both second and third year
- **Second year:** an additional £2.6k from my spring week, internship, and my early website (disingenuous to really call it a startup at that stage)
- **Third year:** over £13k, driven by tutoring, freelance work, and two concurrent internships

This was all achieved alongside a full Materials Science course load, founding and leading the Imperial Calisthenics Society, running a content platform, and co-founding an early stage startup. The point isn't the specific number, it's that multiple income streams can genuinely be scaled simultaneously with academic and extracurricular commitments, if you're deliberate about it.

Why I Deliberately Avoided a Regular Part-Time Job

I did retail and hospitality work back in sixth form, and my honest opinion now is that a regular part-time job usually isn't a good use of a top university student's time. Most of these roles pay somewhere around £15-16 an hour, and at that rate, the actual return on your time is genuinely poor compared to the alternatives available to you specifically as a student at a place like Imperial: tutoring, freelance work, internships, or building something of your own, all of which pay significantly more per hour once you're set up, and build a far more useful CV story in the process. This isn't a judgement on anyone who needs a part-time job to get by, sometimes it's genuinely necessary, and that's completely valid. But if you have the choice, I'd actively steer toward higher-leverage options over a standard shift job, the opportunity cost is real, and it compounds over three or four years.

Just as important as earning it is what you actually do with it. The majority of this money has been saved and invested rather than spent. Alongside that, it matters just as much not to inflate your living costs simply because your income has gone up. I still live fairly frugally, in a very similar way to how I lived in second year, usually getting a Tesco meal deal or meal prepping, living at home, taking public transport, not going out clubbing or drinking. Lifestyle creep is genuinely easy to fall into once you start earning more, and it quietly undoes a lot of the benefit of earning it in the first place.

> **Key takeaway:** Most of this income wasn't from one big lucky break, it was scholarships and bursaries you have to actively apply for, small consistent side income like tutoring, and internships stacked on top of each other. None of it required a rich background or a head start, it required knowing the funding existed and actually going after it.

Chapter 19: Growth Mindset & Challenging Yourself

In my opinion, you should be willing to genuinely challenge yourself. If you want to get into a target university, you need some real substance behind you to show for it. And if you want to end up successful in some capacity after that, in an ever-changing, fast-paced world, you need to be adaptable, learn quickly when required, and be genuinely willing to take on challenges rather than avoid them.

Taking easier modules purely for a better grade should only really be done up to a point. As I've mentioned earlier in this manifesto, unless you're genuinely 85% sure you want to pursue a PhD or further research, chasing a first or Dean's List purely for the sake of it tends to be more of a personal ego pursuit with genuinely negligible returns relative to the time it costs. That said, interestingly, a lot of genuinely successful people did end up getting firsts or graduating as valedictorian, so if getting a first for you personally isn't especially difficult, and doesn't require deviating from your natural schedule or work rate, you might as well go for it. This advice is really aimed more at people who naturally land around a 2:1 and would have to push considerably harder, sacrificing real time elsewhere, just to chase that extra grade bracket.

What I believe is genuinely invaluable instead is challenging yourself directly. You've almost certainly already crossed enough difficult hurdles by this point to know that things aren't intrinsically impossible for you to learn, you just need enough time and genuine devotion to it. You can learn pretty much anything past a certain threshold, it's not fundamentally impossible, so choosing harder modules every so often to genuinely challenge yourself, building long-term learning skills, sticking to a consistent schedule, making other things feel easier by comparison, is a genuinely invaluable thing to do while you're young and your brain is actively developing.

You'll often see videos online of people complaining that what's taught in school is useless, a waste of time, that we should all just be taught how to do our own taxes instead. I disagree with this fairly strongly. You don't need 10+ years of schooling to learn how to do your taxes or reach basic financial literacy, that's something you could realistically pick up in a week, maybe a month. I get the underlying point, that we should all have standardised financial literacy, but the broader point still stands: learning maths, some English, history, religion, business and economics, the sciences, genuinely changes your brain chemistry and helps you understand the world on a deeper level, rather than being needlessly intimidated by things that only *look* difficult, like basic calculus, when in reality they're not once you actually engage with them.

That same logic extends directly to "harder" modules at uni. Some modules are essentially pure memorisation, others are fundamentally more demanding, requiring coding, creativity, or genuine nuance beyond just recall. You should view these as golden nuggets of opportunity, chances to genuinely increase your IQ and develop your brain engine, so to speak, especially as an Imperial student specifically. Having some specialist, niche knowledge is definitely worth having, but obviously if you're on the cusp of failing a module entirely, that's a different calculation, reconsider accordingly.

Why this actually matters long term

Look at a lot of billionaires, and you'll notice a striking number studied engineering, physics, or some other genuinely "hard" degree. It's not that they necessarily use that specific knowledge day to day, Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos are both into space travel, sure, but their actual job now is making high-level executive decisions, not performing hand calculations. There has to be a deeper explanation, and I think it's this: studying a genuinely hard, STEM-adjacent degree, one that AI won't easily replace, is good for your brain. It develops a systemic, analytical mental model, and builds a form of cold, structured logic

that's genuinely favoured in business and high-stakes decision making. There are obviously nuances and outliers here, but having a genuine growth mindset, seeing the opportunity in stepping outside your comfort zone, will never be discredited as a marker of long-term success. Too many people stay comfortably in their own shell, unwilling to try new things, so stepping outside that crowd requires actually acting and thinking differently.

The power of compounding

If you genuinely don't know what to do yet, that's completely fine. Focus instead on developing skills and habits that compound the earlier you start, fitness, investing, and learning, especially as a student, this is genuinely important. To build this properly, you need to develop a mindset with real agency and proactiveness. You have to actively go looking for things to work on or improve, and once you find them, act on them quickly rather than sitting on the idea.

I keep coming back to the idea of actually acting on what you say you'll do, "you can talk the talk, but can you walk the walk." I hear this phrase echo in my head constantly, and I'd guess most people have shared similar thoughts, similar hopes, similar desires. There are 8 billion people alive right now, and hundreds of billions throughout all of human history, yet only a genuine handful are remembered for anything. The only real reason they're remembered is that they actually acted on what they wanted. It sounds almost too simple, and it is, but I see this play out repeatedly, both in my own life and in the people around me. Nearly every motivational video online eventually circles back to the same core truth: successful people genuinely do what they say and follow through on their goals, while people who go nowhere tend to just talk about things, with no real visible change as a result. So the actual lesson is to learn to implement things and stay genuinely ready for change, that's really all anyone can do. If you consistently try your best at that, you'll get where you're aiming, it's simply a matter of time.

The widening gap between peers

By around age 21-22, a clear divide starts to emerge between people who were, on the surface, roughly equally matched at the start. Back in secondary school, the best and worst performing students were often only separated by a handful of marks on a single exam paper. By university, that gap widens considerably, and you begin to genuinely see the difference between people heading toward success and people who aren't, and a further layer beneath that: the people who are heading toward something closer to extraordinary success.

One JMC student's version of this same point, much shorter:

> **[JMC]** *No matter how far behind you feel, you can always pull it back.*

> **Key takeaway:** A genuine growth mindset isn't about constantly proving you're smart, it's about deliberately choosing difficulty when you don't strictly have to, because that difficulty is what actually develops you. The compounding effect of consistently choosing to act, rather than just talk, is what quietly separates people who look identical at 18 from people who look completely different by 25.

Chapter 20: Why Some First Years Are Cracked From Day One

When I joined uni as a fresher, I was genuinely confused about where my life was going. I didn't know exactly what to do. It felt like there were 100 + x choices available to me, with x representing the unknown number of choices I knew existed somewhere but had no real awareness of. You get placed into an environment with near-infinite independence to do whatever you want, and every so often you notice a peer who's already got their life properly together. I want to break down exactly what that actually looks like, and how you can replicate it, since my time as a fresher is long gone, and you're the one reading this now.

1) They leverage AI properly, without becoming dependent on it

Every first year I meet now feels genuinely more capable and more advanced than I was in their position at the same stage. Part of that comes down to AI making learning far more accessible, letting people perform functions without needing years of prior qualification just to get started. I'm not suggesting you replace everything with AI, unless you actively want your brain to end up as smooth as a bowling ball, but rather that you leverage it to make everything in your life faster to learn and improve at. You still want to be the one making the important decisions, retaining the core capability and knowledge of what's actually happening, so your own critical thinking stays sharp. But you absolutely can, and should, use AI to automate the more redundant, repetitive parts of your life, and if you don't currently know how to do that, treat it as an opportunity to teach yourself. Being self-sufficient, able to tackle unfamiliar problems, achieve goals, and work efficiently are all genuinely prized traits, not just for a "cracked" first year, but for anyone at any stage of life. Building this early, even before uni, compounds and pays off considerably further down the line.

2) They put themselves in the right environment

A lot of the sharpest, most ambitious first years I know, I meet through career events, entrepreneurship events, and similar spaces. They're simply in the right rooms, so naturally I end up meeting the most driven, most switched-on people through them. You want to follow the same pattern, put yourself in unfamiliar environments even when you don't fully know what you're doing yet. Go and network, go and ask questions. As a first year specifically, nobody's going to look down on you for trying to learn something new, and it's even better if you're already reasonably proven in that particular area.

3) They have clear goals in mind, or find them quickly

Unlike most students, who drift fairly passively through the education system, relying on the built-in structure and hand-holding of sixth form, secondary, and primary school, genuinely "cracked" students tend to be forward-thinking, take their future seriously, and keep it consistently at the front of their mind. They don't need to know their exact end destination, and even when they think they do, it often changes anyway, they're still young with relatively limited real-world experience. But they usually have a general goal, lifestyle, or direction they're aiming toward, or they find one relatively quickly through some genuine reflection and an honest assessment of their current skillset.

This is genuinely implementable within a day or a week of properly thinking about what you want, what interests you have, and then systematically trying them out, creating or joining opportunities within those interests, and being deliberate about noticing what actually sticks versus what doesn't, and what you genuinely enjoy versus what you don't. Knowing your direction early on consistently drives strong compounding success, since you simply start aiming earlier, and the hours you put in early never

disappear. Your objective should be to start earlier, or at minimum, begin moving in a general direction sooner rather than later.

I'm still not entirely certain what I want to do long term, but I have a rough sense that I want to be genuinely pushed, in a highly technical field, with real financial upside. That rough direction has pushed me through finance, a brief stint in consulting, research into innovative technologies like nuclear fusion, and now AI engineering, alongside a growing interest in deep tech and startups. That direction is also what's pushed me to keep joining societies, attending events, and trying new things, building up my range and becoming more of a genuinely well-rounded person as a result.

A growth mindset matters here too, as covered earlier in this manifesto. Notice the lessons every experience actually teaches you, good, bad, intended or not, and what you can genuinely take away from it. Even a low paying job at 16 can teach you consistency, patience, time management, and a real drive to earn more, alongside how to actually work at something and interact with colleagues and customers. Viewed through that lens, even fairly mundane experiences become genuinely worth doing, purely for the lessons embedded in them. It's better to approach new things consciously, actually knowing what skills you intend to build from them going in. For me, that's part of why I want to properly pick up basketball, to better understand and develop myself within high-pressure team dynamics. That might sound a bit extra, maybe even performative to some of you, but it's genuinely how I think about it, and it doesn't take away from just enjoying the sport and finally fulfilling a childhood desire to play it properly.

4) They get a mentor

One thing I've consistently noticed across smart, successful people is the presence of a mentor somewhere in their life, a father, a family member, a connection, a genuinely proactive teacher invested in their growth. It's a fairly hidden factor that doesn't get talked about enough. A mentor acts as a genuine bridge between the working world, a specific industry, or the lifestyle you're aiming for, and where you currently are as a young student. You get to learn from their real, invaluable experience, learn from their actual mistakes rather than repeating them yourself, hear advice that isn't publicly available anywhere else, and, importantly, **learn how to speak confidently with people in senior positions**, elders, and people more qualified than you, at least on paper. That specific skill alone, being comfortable and articulate around people well above you in experience or seniority, is something a mentor relationship builds naturally, in a way that's genuinely hard to develop any other way.

Having a mentor is good for your character, good for your network, and good for your goals. Like most things covered in this manifesto, it's simply better to have one than not. A reliable contact who's more experienced than you, whether that's in industry, university life, business, family matters, or sport, is genuinely valuable. Most people who become mentors, officially or unofficially, genuinely want to give back, it tends to feel good for them too. Your status as a student also gives you real leeway here, people are generally far more willing to help a student than they are once you've become a "grown adult" in the working world. That's not necessarily good or bad, it's simply how perception and the world tend to work, so take genuine advantage of your time as a student while that leeway still exists.

A Materials Science student described this same pattern from the other side:

> **[Materials Science and Engineering]** *A load of opportunities will be thrown at you from day one. The main challenge and skill to develop is choosing the most effective and appropriate ones to attend as you progress through the degree. Prioritise your time properly.*

> **Key takeaway:** None of these four things require exceptional talent, they require deliberate action. Leverage AI without becoming dependent on it, put yourself in rooms with ambitious people, get honest with yourself about a rough direction within a week rather than drifting indefinitely, and find a mentor, someone who can teach you not just what they know, but how to hold yourself confidently around people more senior than you. Students who look "naturally cracked" from day one are almost always just doing these four things earlier and more deliberately than everyone else.

Chapter 21: Knowing, or Not Knowing, Your Future Goals

Simply put, knowing your goals and general direction as early as possible is better, that's not really up for debate. But finding that direction is genuinely difficult straight after finishing sixth form and stepping into university, that's completely normal too.

We're increasingly living through a real job crisis for students, which means knowing your career direction earlier has become a genuine competitive advantage, since it lets you start compounding sooner than everyone still figuring it out. So start earlier, be proactive as early as possible, which, if you're reading this, is right now. Move and decide with genuine intention and conviction, don't drift mindlessly, and try to always have some kind of goal in place, even a rough one.

My own goal evolution, as an example of this being completely fine

I was initially drawn to banking and the corporate world in first and second year. I've still got my masters year left, so who knows, I may still end up in a corporate role at some point down the line regardless. But in third year, I pivoted away from that entirely, toward working more for myself, picking up entrepreneurship, working on my own projects, and doing content creation, which I'm hoping will eventually supplement and help build my own personal brand, a bit like Floyd Mayweather did in boxing (an ultra niche reference boxing fans specifically will get). I've also developed a much stronger interest in my actual course and in big tech generally. That's a genuinely big pivot, and I want to be clear that this is completely fine.

Pretty much everyone I've known at university has gone through at least one major pivot in their interests or goals during their time here, and that's a sign you've genuinely tried and explored a path already, take it as a good thing, not a failure. Don't be anxious about starting a new direction either, once you dedicate real hours to it, and draw on skills you already have alongside genuine passion for it, you'll find yourself properly settled into the new pivot faster than you'd expect.

Why the "pick one path forever" mentality doesn't hold up anymore

I think our parents' generation was subconsciously conditioned to pick one path and stick with one company for decades, and personally, I don't think that's the wisest approach anymore. Back then, the rewards from that kind of loyalty genuinely compounded and were worth the commitment. Nowadays, companies simply don't reciprocate that same loyalty the way they used to. You only get one life, and I genuinely believe you should explore multiple avenues rather than boxing yourself into a single track early on. That's just my own mental frame though, I've always leaned toward being a jack of all trades rather than a master of one, but that doesn't mean you shouldn't niche down into something specific either.

On spreading yourself too thin

I think it is genuinely possible to spread yourself too thin at times. You can't do everything simultaneously, so sometimes it makes sense to split things into focused blocks, by month or by season, where you concentrate on one or two things at a time, then shift focus to something else the next season. That's one way to combine genuine depth and expertise in something specific, while still moving on to the next project or interest to keep your broader curiosity alive, if, like me, you want to be a genuinely multifaceted person.

That said, I don't want to take anything away from people who want to become a true expert within one single field either, that's just as valid a route to success, arguably more so in some cases, since nobody else can easily replace or outcompete you in that lane, unless of course you've poured all your hours into something AI ends up automating anyway.

> **Key takeaway:** Pivoting isn't a sign you got it wrong the first time, it's usually a sign you actually engaged seriously enough with a path to learn it wasn't the right one. Whether you end up a generalist or a specialist, the actual mistake is drifting with no direction at all, not changing direction once you've genuinely tried something.

Chapter 22: Final Reflections, Audit Yourself

One final thing I'd genuinely recommend during your time at Imperial, or wherever you end up studying, is to audit yourself regularly. Journal your experiences every so often, there are different ways to approach this. Some people sort their journalling into specific topics, fitness, sleep, projects, and so on. Others just write whatever's on their mind that particular day. It can be done on paper, or just as easily in a notes document on your laptop. It's a genuinely good way to release mental baggage, and to compare yourself against your past self, your attitudes, your beliefs at the time, and actually track the change, hopefully growth, that's happened since.

You should also properly audit yourself and set out some goals, they don't have to be career focused at all, they can be as general or as niche as you want. Make them varied, and make some of them genuinely ambitious too, since your overall trajectory depends heavily on how high you actually aim. A lot can change within a single year, so don't let your current circumstances be the thing that dictates your future goals. Some people prefer breaking their goals down into small, actionable daily steps. Others prefer more flexibility, giving themselves room to move toward the goal in whatever way feels right at the time, without a rigid daily structure. Both approaches work, it's about knowing which one actually suits how you operate.

The point, ultimately, is this: by the time you graduate, you want to have genuinely changed as a person. That's really all any of us can ask for when it comes to living through this particular stretch of the journey.

Chapter 23: What Imperial Students Actually Say

Everything so far in this guide is my own experience. This chapter isn't. I surveyed 56 current Imperial students, across Materials, Physics, Medicine, Computing, Chemical Engineering, JMC, and more, and asked them what nobody tells you before you arrive, what they're actually proud of, what advice only they could give, and how they'd honestly rate their time here. This is what they said, largely unedited.

What Nobody Tells You Before You Arrive

[Materials] *It's quite lonely at times and everyone is super accomplished.*

[Maths] *At least for maths you don't really get a chance to "settle in" and mess around for a few weeks, you kinda have to be on it from day 0.*

[Biological sciences] *You are now surrounded by people who think they need to put no effort in to achieve high grades and you need to realise you will only be happy when you seek independent fulfilment, instead of aligning with whatever your peers do.*

[JMC] *The workload is ridiculous and over the top, not even Oxbridge students get this much work.*

[Electronic & Information Engineering] *Getting in is the easy part, at least that's how it feels for the first two years.*

[EEE] *Time management is a skill that you only develop by throwing yourself in the deep end. Put more things on your plate and watch how you adjust.*

[Chemistry] *The step up from A-Level is way bigger than expected. I knew it would be a big jump but it actually felt like a massive step up. Imperial can humble you very quickly.*

[Material Science and Engineering] *Imposter syndrome comes in many shapes and sizes, someone might genuinely be leagues ahead of you when it comes to crunching numbers, but that may not define the final outcome.*

[Maths] *Imposter syndrome is real; the independence you need is plenty. You're expected to fall behind.*

[Civil Engineering] *All the buildings are chopped compared to other London unis and there's not that much to do for fun inside Imperial specifically.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *Everyone is really nice even though they can be antisocial, once you talk to them they'll be the nicest person ever. The workload is crazy but you need to get involved in societies if you want to feel like a real engineer.*

[MSc Finance, Materials undergrad] *You have to work hard to make friends to start with, but it's absolutely worth it. After you graduate, you realise the people who had a full social life and a fun extracurricular life also got Firsts and had a great time too. It's not one or the other, but you have to put in effort to get the momentum going.*

Proudest Achievements & Mindset Shifts

[Maths] *Maybe it's controversial, but I think the best thing I've learned about getting to somewhere like Imperial is how bland it actually is. People put it up on such a pedestal, I definitely did before coming. Now that I've achieved it, I no longer put "getting in" to places like this on a pedestal.*

[BSc Medical Biosciences] *Realising that most people are willing to teach you something. So reach out to people you aspire to and opportunities will follow.*

[Biotechnology] *The biggest thing I've achieved is keeping up and thriving while managing so many other responsibilities, including working 30 hour weeks during term. What I've learned is that no two people have it the same, so don't waste time getting lost in comparison, it's a broken metric.*

[Physics] *Mindset shift for sure. Things will get difficult and it may make you hate your circumstances. But remember this is a subject you genuinely are passionate about, you once prayed for this opportunity. The degree is supposed to consume a large share of your time, but it is a privilege you should appreciate.*

[Computing] *The main thing I learned was to stop working hard and start working smart. A lot of people put in a lot of hours learning content, which is good but not the best use of time, especially if you need things like jobs. Switching from studying to applications and interview technique was the main takeaway.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *I've learnt the importance of friendships and work-life balance. There are a lot of people at this uni who tend to focus purely on studies and don't socialise with anyone, and others who just go out and never make any friends on the course. Pacing yourself and finding a balance is ideal. You're not going to find your people in the first week, but it will happen.*

[Chemistry] *I am probably most proud of my mindset shift. I really disliked terms one and two during my first year. I was seriously considering dropping out. I then realised I chose this degree and this university for a reason and just decided to lock in. I'm not by any means a Dean's list student, but my latest set of results have been my best yet.*

[Biochemistry] *I wasn't sure if I wanted to stay in academia because I thought it might be boring, but being exposed to real researchers teaching us what they're passionate about made me consider staying for a PhD. Imperial made me much more confident as a scientist, I used to think I'm just good at bullshitting, but the coursework training us to think like scientists means I can now converse confidently about concepts I might not be familiar with.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *I've learnt that it's very easy to get caught up in cycles of "hype" where it seems necessary to be working on a start-up or constantly building something. I've learnt to try a lot of different things, overcommit and overdeliver, then strip back from there, otherwise you'll never know your limits.*

Advice Only They Could Give

[Biochemistry] *Utilise the Outlook calendar to timeblock everything. It's so useful that the schedule's on an online calendar, you can add your own events, see where you have free time, and schedule study sessions around it. Please timeblock.*

[Chemistry] *Don't compare yourself to other students on your course.*

[Biotechnology] *Don't get lost in validation-bait or comparisons. Things that measure how well you're doing, like grades, are important, but getting lost in them means straying from what and who you actually want to be, and ultimately wasting time.*

[Electronic & Information Engineering] *If you want to max out your grade, it's probably optimal to take a gap year and start indirect prep for some of the modules during that year. The main thing is to be exposed to something before studying it, that's how this degree becomes easy from the get-go.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *It's easy to feel lesser than or not as clever as the majority of students there. But just remember, you made it to Imperial too, and a lot of people are all talk, no show.*

[Physics] *Immerse yourself into the lifestyle. Treat university like a 9-5 and you'll get your work done and still have time for your other interests. If you try to do the bare minimum, it may not work out in your favour.*

[Biochemistry] *Remember you live in London. Explore the city, most museums here are free, there's student discounts for concerts and galleries. There's so many cool people in this city and you will regret not exploring enough once you graduate.*

[Computing] *Don't spend all your time in the library, you'll probably burn out. Enjoy first year as much as you can.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *Do so much that you yourself question it. Explore so much that you find a calling. Everyone says to take first year easy because you can, but it's actually a perfect moment to push, because you can.*

[Biochem] *Doesn't matter what you do or where you are, your network is one of your strongest assets.*

[Efds] *Genuinely do what you enjoy and have a passion for. There's no point doing something, or not doing it, because others have had a good or bad experience with it. Choosing a field that aligns with your own strengths will take you much further than just doing what everybody else does.*

How They Actually Rate Their Experience

Out of 56 responses, on a scale of 1 to 5: 1 person gave it a 1, nobody gave it a 2, 8 gave it a 3, 31 gave it a 4, and 16 gave it a 5. That's an average of roughly 4.1 out of 5, and worth noting: the ratings and the reasons behind them are rarely simple. Most of the 4s and 5s still come with a real caveat attached.

[Physics] *1 - Personal struggles made it unreasonable to enjoy first year.*

[JMC] *3 - Made the best memories ever and so many good times living in London and hanging out with mates. But then also the most trauma ever, dissertations, exams, coursework. My day was either a 5/5 or 1/5, so it averages out to a 3.*

[Medicine MBBS] *3 - I feel like Imperial has much more to offer than I have taken advantage of, so the lower rating is of my own shortcomings rather than Imperial's.*

[Mechanical Engineering] *3 - I wish I would've taken my own advice more and my grades are much lower than I want them to be, but I have had some really fun moments.*

[Materials Science and Engineering] *4 - Generally a good uni, exam marking and teacher strikes can be a huge pain though, hence minus one.*

[Chemistry] *4 - I think I've made good use of my time here. Probably could've applied myself more academically, especially in my first two years, but overall quite pleased with what I've achieved.*

[Biochemistry] *4 - Even if it's exhausting and stressful at times, I've made great friends, studied cool things, yes some boring stuff too, and joined societies I wouldn't have expected.*

[EEE] *4 - I gave it a four because it's a good institution with a lot of flaws. The outcome is good because it's up to you to make it good, and the outcome has worked out for me.*

[Computing] *4 - Uni has opened a lot of doors and opportunities that you wouldn't get in other places without going to Imperial. I feel the job search would be a lot harder otherwise.*

[JMC] *5 - I have spent my time exceptionally, I have achieved well academically, socially, and with respect to employability.*

[Economics Data Science and Finance] *5 - I'm a product of Imperial and I'm successful.*

[Biomedical Engineering] *5 - Opportunities, great people, world class.*

> **Key takeaway:** There's no single, tidy answer to "is it worth it" here, the honest responses are almost all mixed, even the high ratings come with real caveats attached. What comes through consistently, though, is that the people who rate their time highest are the ones who describe actively using what Imperial gives them, the people, the opportunities, the resources, rather than just attending the degree. That's the pattern worth taking from this chapter.

A Final Word

That's everything I've got on actually living through university, the good years and the rough ones. If this was useful, the third guide in this series, Careers, Internships & Entrepreneurship, covers everything I've learned about breaking into competitive industries, building your CV, and building something of your own.

Kind regards,

Khuselee