About the Peer Coaching Group (PCG)

A space for academic and non-academic staff at higher education institutions (HEIs) to learn and exchange experiences, insights, and strategies for fostering safer, more inclusive environment for students

- **When:** April – June 2024

- **Format:** six online meetings on Tuesday mornings, 8:30 – 10:00

- **Participants:**
  - 12 staff members from European HEIs
  - 1 facilitator
  - 3 UNICOMM representatives

- **Goals:**
  - Empowering HEI staff
  - Sharing experiences, insights, and strategies aimed at creating safer, more inclusive spaces for all students
  - Developing infographics
  - Establishing a community

Peer Coaching Group

Meeting 1 – Intro, introducing ourselves, small groups: goals, expectations

Meeting 2 – Reflection in groups: your 2-3 best experiences from your work with students from the past year

Meeting 3 – Empowerment, story sharing and identifying topics

Meeting 4 – Well-being and stress management: theory and practice

Meeting 5 – Developing infographics in groups

Meeting 6 – Presentations, final reflections and summary of PCG

Infographic 1: Let's engage! Building community around extracurricular activities

The first infographic:

- Presents practical strategies for creating and sustaining a vibrant extracurricular community

- Is designed as a pathway, illustrating the step-by-step journey of building an engaging community

- Includes additional practical tips

Infographic 1 full size - link
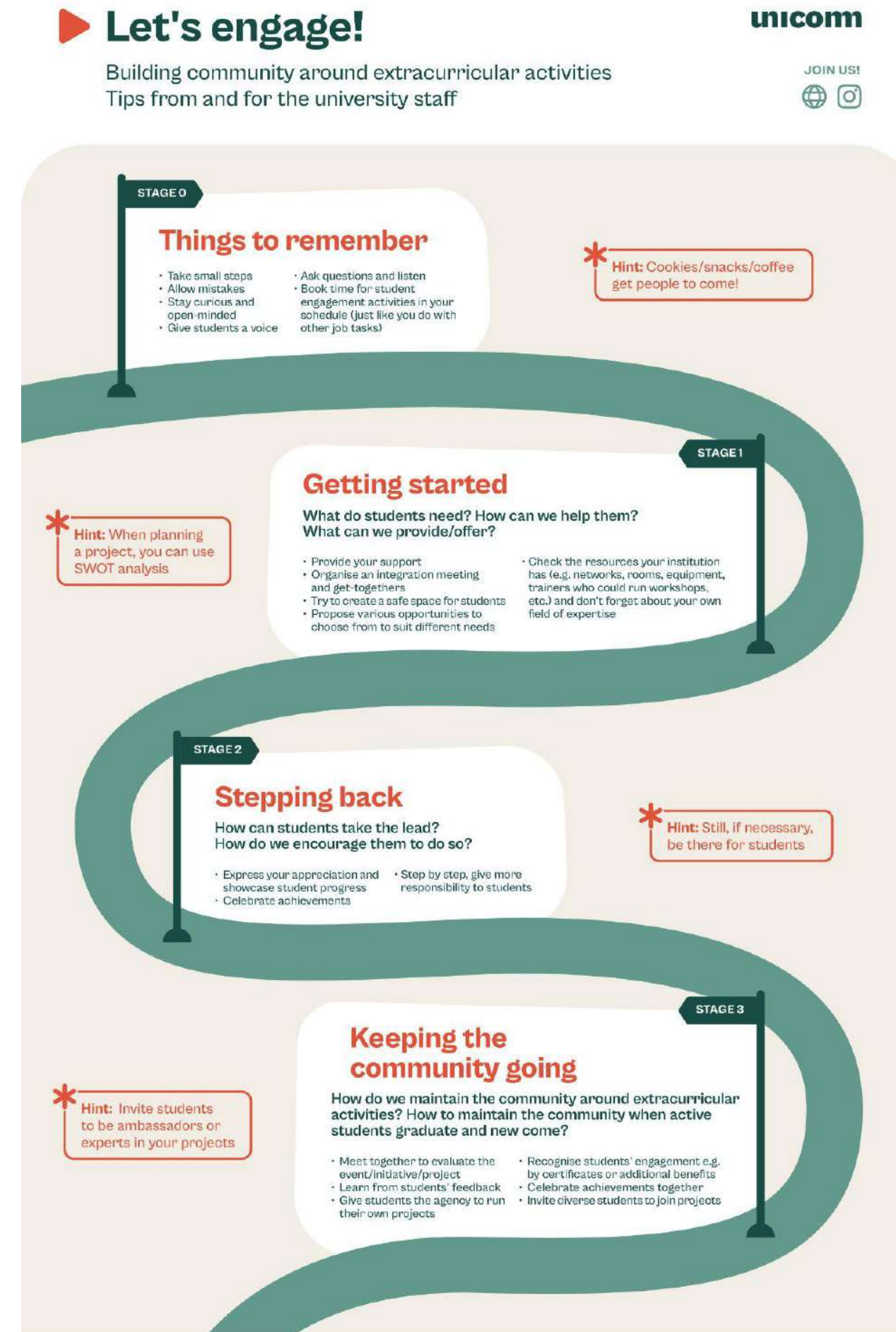
Infographic 2: Boost your self-confidence and self-care to support student engagement better

The second infographic:

- Shares powerful tips on enhancing self-confidence and self-care to better support student engagement

- Is designed in the shape of a head, symbolising the internal and external aspects of self-confidence and self-care, and highlighting how both mental and social strategies contribute to improved student interaction

- Includes two exercises to quickly calm the mind and body and reduce frustration

Infographic 2 full size - link
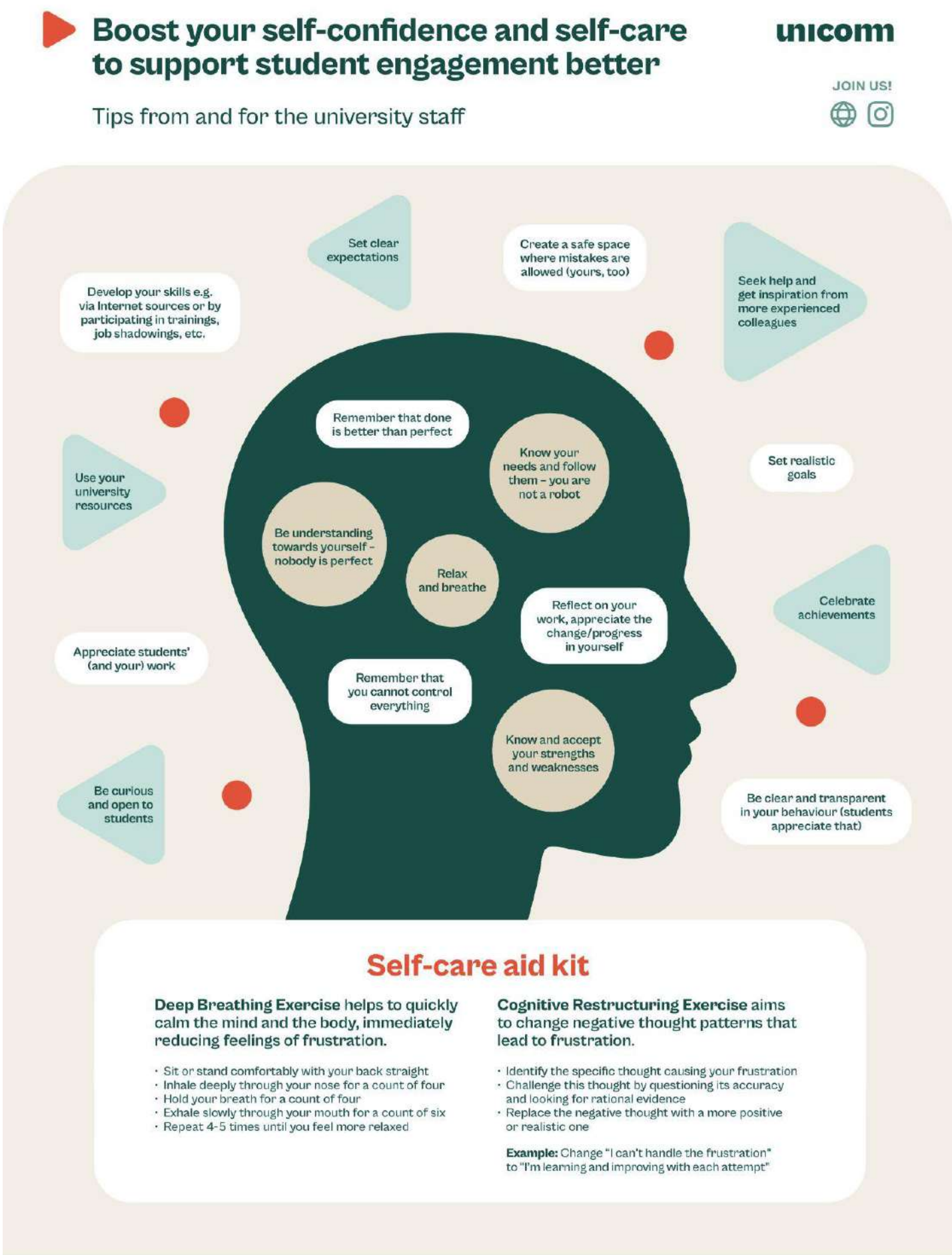
Infographic 3: Useful skills and competencies of university staff supporting student engagement

The third infographic:

- Highlights essential skills for university staff aiming to support student engagement effectively

- Depicts these skills as extensions of an octopus's arms, symbolizing their diverse and adaptable nature

- Each arm presents a different skill, along with a brief definition and practical ways to develop it

Infographic 3 full size - link

Quotes

*(...) I really felt like we were **enriching each others' work***

*(...) it was a **great focal point of the week***

*It was a great experience(...) to have a **safe space** to share ideas and concerns*

*I also really enjoyed the session (...) about our **mental health** at work*

*(...) I didn't think it would be possible to create such a **good atmosphere**, a sense of safety and still get the job done in such a short time.*

*The workshops were good, **a bit too early** to start my day with a workshop. I personally found that it was **difficult to speak out** because some colleagues took most of the time speaking and not listening.*

***amazing leadership**, felt safe, got support, will miss those meetings*

*(...) I **reflected** on my own practice **in a new way***

That's not the end

PCG is still ongoing!

- Online meetings every second Tuesday of the month
- Rotating facilitators, external experts
- Structured and unstructured sessions

We meet to:

- Discuss current achievements and challenges related to enhancing student engagement
- Reflect on our work
- Learn from each other
- Boost our motivation
- Create a sense of belonging
- Start the day on a positive note
- Practise public speaking
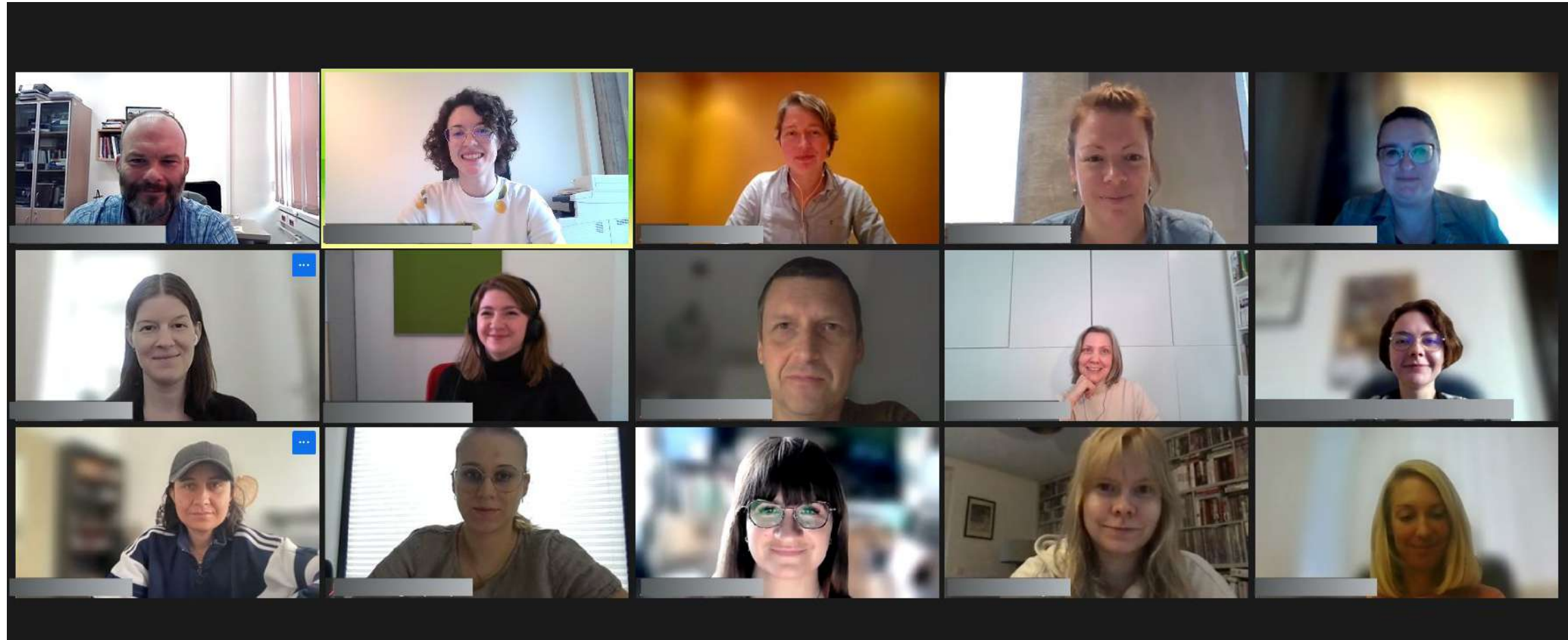
Enhancing engagement – multi-vector learning

Other examples from the UNICOMM Project

Masterclass Workshops on Community Building

- workshops: team building, NVC, selfcare and digital hygiene
- **student experts** experienced in student union representation, activism, volunteering, and running their own NGO, who were invited to talk about their experience balancing active engagement with student life
- **working together** on solutions for creating open and friendly "spaces" for engagement and participation in HEI

Summer Academy on Student Participation

- for 5 days **staff and students** from the consortium member institutions worked **side by side**
- module led by ESU student representatives was one of the highest-rated ones
- a welcoming atmosphere that made **each participant feel they had an impact on the outcomes of the workshops**
- it is important to **treat students as partners in our initiatives, not just passive 'recipients'**

9

Technical know-how

- Topic
- The 'why' question → goals
- **Mode:** online vs offline
- Date, time, duration and frequency
- **Status:** open to new members, occasional open calls, or permanent members only
- **Format:** ready-to-go structure vs organisational meeting to discuss the shape of the PCG
- **Meetings:** structured vs unstructured vs mixed
- **Facilitator:** one, rotating, or guest facilitators
- Ground rules for cooperation
- **Tools:** shared drive/documents, forms
- **Other considerations:**
  - sending reminders
  - generating links / booking a room
  - taking notes from meetings
  - sharing news & inspirations

PCG contract

- **Confidentiality:** All discussions within the group should remain confidential unless explicit permission is given to share information outside the group.
- **Respect:** Each member should respect the opinions and ideas of others, even if they disagree. Everyone's perspective is valuable.
- **Active Participation:** Each member should actively participate in discussions and activities. This includes being prepared for each meeting and completing any agreed-upon actions.
- **Constructive Feedback:** Feedback should be constructive, specific, and kind. It should be aimed at helping the individual improve, not criticize them.
- **Commitment:** Members should commit to attending all sessions and participating fully. If a member cannot attend a session, they should notify the group in advance.
- **Open-mindedness:** Members should be open to new ideas and willing to take on board feedback and suggestions from others.
- **Equality:** All members are equal, regardless of their background or experience. Everyone's voice should be heard.
- **Goal-Oriented:** The group should have clear, shared goals that everyone is working towards.

Reflections & thoughts

- Safe and welcoming community
- Shared common ground
- Horizontally organised network
- Non-directive approach
- Voluntary participation
- Diversity and inclusion
- Co-creation and shared responsibility
- Safety and trust built over time
- Questioning the status quo – nothing is taken for granted
- **Give it a go!**

UNICOMM HintBook: Building Stronger Communities in Higher Education.Tools and Ideas for Navigating Student Engagement in a Changing World (Hint 6 and Hint 8)