

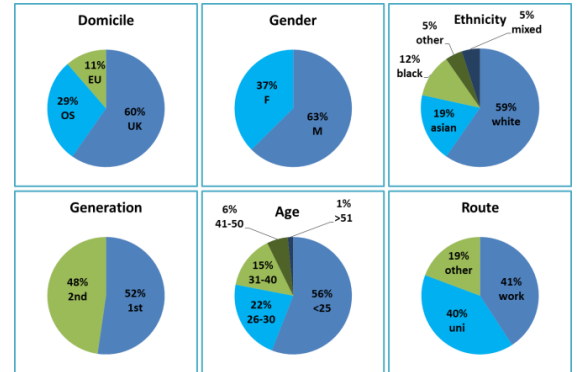
**About PEP**

The Postgraduate Experience Project was one of 20 projects funded through HEFCE’s £25m Phase 1 Postgraduate Support Scheme which was designed to test ways of supporting progression into taught postgraduate education in England. A description of PEP can be found in Briefing Paper 1. This briefing paper reports the headline findings of the motivations of students in undertaking PGT STEM study and their expected outcomes as reported in the Entry to Study Survey undertaken in September/October 2014. The final report containing the detailed findings will be published late October 2015.

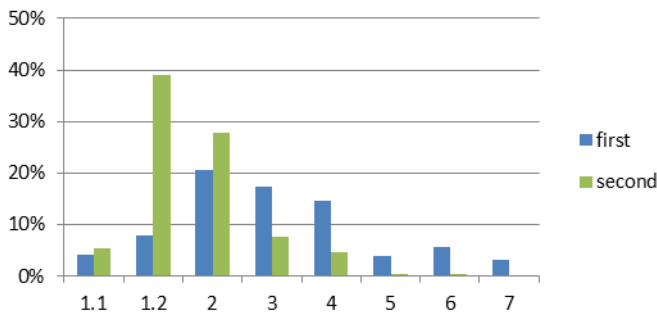
**Introduction to the Entry to Study Survey**

The demographics of the valid 1,235 respondents who fully completed the Entry to Study survey are highlighted in Figure 1. Of those who were entering ‘straight from university’, 55.1% were studying at the same institution. For those entering from ‘work’ this figure was 20.6% with 46.6% achieving their highest qualification prior to 2011. This suggests that the longer the student is out of study, the less likely they are to return to their old university (see Briefing Paper 11). In terms of entry qualifications, a BSc/BA/BEng undergraduate degree was the highest qualification for 84.3% of the respondents, an MSc for 5.7%, an MPhil/Res/PhD for 0.6% and 0.6% for both an MA and MBA. Only 0.7% of respondents held a science integrated qualification and, although it is unclear on a national scale, the extent to which participation in integrated degrees impact on Master’s courses this finding strongly suggests it may have an effect (see Briefing Paper 9). In terms of social class and generational status, students who had a parent or parents with a university education (called 2<sup>nd</sup> generation students) were mainly situated in the top two social classes (see Figure 2). First generation students (1<sup>st</sup>) do not have parents with HE experience.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2** Social Class by Generational Status



NS-SEC analytic classes

1.1 - Large employers and higher managerial and administrative occupations
1.2 - Higher professional occupations
2 - Lower managerial, administrative and professional occupations
3 - Intermediate occupations
4 - Small employers and own account workers
5 - Lower supervisory and technical occupations
6 - Semi-routine occupations
7 - Routine occupations
8 - Never worked and long-term unemployed

**Motivations**

A key aim with the Entry to Study Survey was to explore the motivations of why new students decided to undertake PGT study and the decisions they made in terms of choice of university and study mode.

Reasons for undertaking PGT STEM study

The top 3 reasons selected for undertaking PGT study out of the 21 options were: 1) *to improve my employment prospects* (70%); 2) *I was interested in the subject* (66.7%) and 3) *to develop a more specialist set of skills* (61%). The focus groups undertaken in the 9E universities explored these findings in more detail. For many respondents, a PGT STEM qualification would help them ‘stand out from the crowd’ and some stated that they needed it in their profession in order to progress.

*‘I was looking for jobs, and nobody wanted to take me on because it seems that degrees are ten a penny now, but when I was younger degrees meant something; that I was really, really clever. Now there are thousands of people doing degrees and so the next step has to be doing a Master’s’.*

*‘(...) since getting my Bachelor’s, I have been working in industry for about 9-10 years and wanted something else to differentiate me from other engineers in my field; something to help my career’.*

*‘I looked for work after my Bachelor’s, but there was a lot of competition and they have really high requirements. They want experience, and this and that, so I thought having a Master’s would equip me with those skills.....give me something extra’.*

Only 23.8% of the respondents had undertaken an undergraduate degree that contained some element of work experience. Reasons given by those who had not undertaken incorporated work experience included: *it was not available for my course* (47.7%); *I did not think about it as an option* (33%); *I couldn’t afford to undertake a longer period of study* (11.9%) and *it would delay entry into the workplace* (5.8%). It appears that a PGT qualification is viewed by students as a method of correcting this situation.

### Choice of university

The top 3 reasons cited by respondents for choosing their university out of the 22 options available were: 1) *the course content* (50.8%); 2) *location of the institution* (49.3%) and 3) *reputation of chosen subject area*. However, respondents at the only Russell Group University participating in the project cited different reasons with: 1) *overall reputation of the university* (80.2%); 2) *reputation of the subject area* (64.5%) and 3) *course content* (56.2%). Location was not an important factor and subject and university reputation was considered more important than the course content. *Location of the institution* was also cited more commonly as the first reason by those respondents who were part-time, entering study straight from work, 1<sup>st</sup> generation, UK domiciled, male respondents and those above 26 years of age.

### Choice of study mode

The reasons cited by respondents in choosing their study mode choice are listed in Table 1. *Completing the course as quickly as possible by undertaking full-time study* was cited more by 1<sup>st</sup> generation respondents, those above 25 years of age and those who were UK and EU domiciled. Those undertaking part-time study because they *'could not afford full-time study'*, was cited more frequently by respondents coming straight from university.

Table 1

Reasons for studying full-time	Reasons for studying part-time
It would allow me to concentrate on the subject (50.5%)	I had a job and wanted to continue working (58.7%)
I wanted to complete it as quickly as possible (49.4%)	I couldn't afford full-time study (27.2%)
It was the most appropriate way to study the course (43%)	I am in FT work and was allowed day release (25.7%)
I only got funding for full-time study (9.6%)	I have family commitments/caring responsibilities (19.9%)

### Expected outcome of undertaking postgraduate study

Respondents had a number of expected outcomes as a result of obtaining a PGT STEM qualification. Firstly, they expected the qualification to furnish them with a range of skills including the development of research skills, better preparation for employment, practical experience, provide confidence in tackling problems and provide employer networking opportunities. There was a higher expectation amongst full-time respondents (compared to part-time) that they would obtain these skills. However, what came out of the focus groups across 9E Group universities was the frustration felt by some respondents that there had not been as much practical experience and networking opportunities as originally hoped or that they felt had been promised.

Secondly, there was a high expectation amongst the respondents that they would find a job that was appropriate to their level of skills and knowledge immediately after graduation (see Figure 3). Respondents who were in full-time study and under the age of 25 years of age were more likely to have this expectation. Thirdly, the majority of respondents expected that the future impact of their PGT qualification would result in them being able to enter a specialist role and earn more money (see Figure 4). The future impact findings from the Entry to Study Survey were reflected in the Finance Survey which PGT STEM students in the later stages of their studies were invited to complete in June 2015.

Figure 3

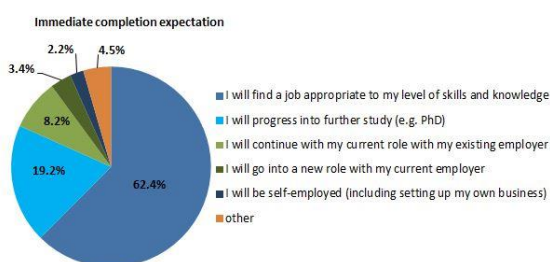
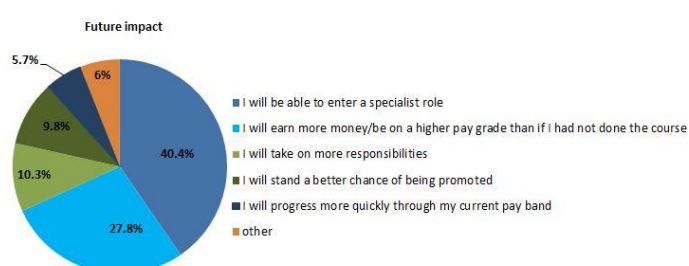


Figure 4



### Issues for further consideration

This briefing paper has highlighted a number of areas that could benefit from further research when considering PGT students motivations for undertaking this level of study. They include:

- Further examination of whether the factors for choosing a university between the 9E and Russell Group are reflective across the sector and the impact it may have on marketing and recruitment strategies;
- Further research on motivations of graduates under the £9K a year scheme entering PGT STEM study;
- Further research on social class and generational status as part of the widening participation debate.

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