

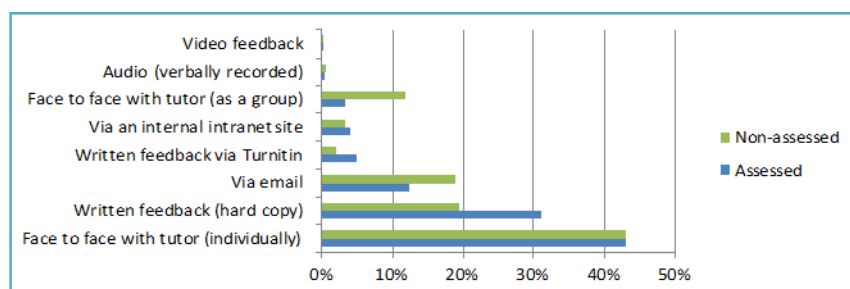
About PEP

The Postgraduate Experience Project was one of 20 projects funded through HEFCE's £25m Phase 1 Postgraduate Support Scheme that was designed to test ways of supporting progression into taught postgraduate education in England. A full description of PEP can be found in Briefing Paper 1. This briefing paper reports the headline learning and teaching findings of 1,235 PGT STEM respondents across 11 UK universities from the Entry to Study Survey (Sept/Oct 2014). The final report containing the detailed findings will be published late October 2015.

Prior learning and teaching experience

The survey asked students about their preferred method for receiving academic feedback for assessed and non-assessed work in their previous studies. The most preferred way of receiving academic feedback for assessed work was *face to face with the tutor (individually)* followed by *written feedback (hard copy)* (see Figure 1). These two ways of receiving academic feedback were also the most favoured methods for non-assessed work, followed by *feedback via email* in third place.

Figure 1 Preferred academic feedback methods for assessed and non-assessed work



Of the respondents, 94.3% stated that they always collected and read the academic feedback provided; of these, 96.8% used it to improve future assignments. When asked if they had ever approached a tutor to discuss the academic feedback provided, only 73.2% of the respondents stated that they had and of these, the majority had wanted more feedback on how to improve their mark (75.6%). Male respondents were more likely to have approached a tutor than females. UK domiciled respondents were also more likely to have approached a tutor to get more feedback on how to improve the mark compared to EU domiciled students.

The National Student Survey, on an annual basis, highlights that good academic feedback is a major area of dissatisfaction amongst UK students. However, a common concern amongst academics is that students very often do not read the feedback they provide because the mark is more important to them. This suggestion was found in the Entry Study Survey. Of the 26.8% students who had not approached a tutor, the most cited reasons were: *I got the grade I expected/I was happy with my grade* (61.4%) and *I understood the feedback* (53.5%). Worryingly, respondents also stated that *I did not feel comfortable asking about the feedback* (28.6%); *I never thought of asking about the feedback* (23.7%) and *I prefer to discuss academic problems with fellow students* (21.3%). Female respondents were more likely never to have thought of asking about the feedback.

Current learning and teaching experience

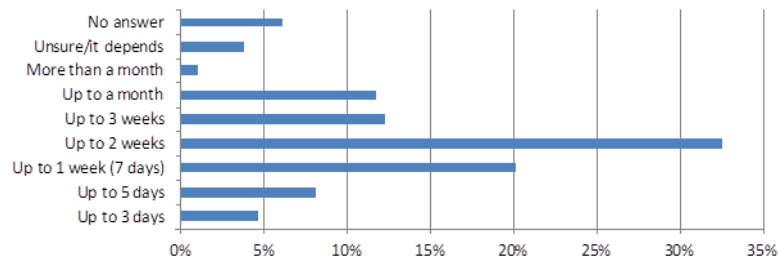
Students were asked if they had an expectation of how to study at PGT level. Only 62.2% stated that they did. Respondents who were 2nd generation (parent/parents had been to university) were more likely to have an understanding of what to expect at PGT level in comparison to 1st generation (first in the family to go to university) even though they had experienced university at undergraduate level. Respondents who did have an expectation of how to study at PG level were asked if they intended changing their behaviour from their previous study. Respondents stated that they aimed to improve their time management skills; study more independently (autonomous learning); interact more often with tutors and peers and to engage in career focused learning (e.g. linking studies with industry requirements, demands and opportunities).

Academic Feedback

Respondents were asked what they expected from their PGT academic feedback activities and what was most, and least, important to them. The most important activities were: *getting regular feedback*; *telling me what I did not do well and how to improve*. The least important were: *telling me what I did correctly* and *receiving academic feedback that is encouraging and raises my confidence*. Discussing feedback with fellow students, within and outside of class, were middle ranking activities. Respondents were asked how they wanted to receive their academic feedback. The most important ways of receiving feedback on academic work were: *face to face with tutor (individually)* followed by *written feedback (hardcopy)*. The least important were: *audio (verbally)* and *face to face with tutor (as a group)*.

After handing in an assessed assignment, the most common expected timeframe in which to receive academic feedback was *up to 2 weeks* (32.5%) and *up to one week* (20.1%) (see Figure 2). Some differences were found when considering domicile status, mode of study and route into study of the respondents. UK domiciled respondents were significantly more likely to expect feedback *up to 2 weeks* (38.9%) in comparison to overseas domiciled respondents (20.5%).

Figure 2 Expected timeframe in receiving academic feedback

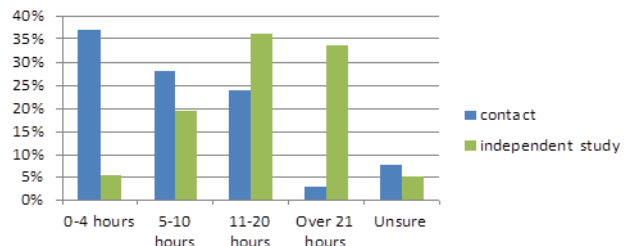


Part-time respondents were significantly more likely to expect to receive feedback *up to 2 weeks* (43.7%) in comparison to full-time respondents (30.3%). Respondents coming straight from university were significantly more likely to expect to receive feedback *up to a month* (17.1%) than respondents coming straight from work (8.4%).

Contact hours and independent study

Respondents were asked to state how many contact (with teaching staff) and independent (by themselves or with other students) study hours they expected to undertake per week on their course and why. There was an inverse relationship between expected contact hours and independent study (Figure 3). In general, respondents expected to have less contact hours and more independent study at postgraduate level.

Figure 3 Expected contact and independent study



Study and assessment methods

Respondents were asked to select a study method that most represented how they would prefer to study on their course. The most preferred type of study for half of the sample was a mix of independent and group study followed by independent study (Figure 4). When analysing different demographic variables of the students, independent study was the most preferred method for respondents coming from a Russell Group university and part-time respondents were more likely to prefer to study independently than those who were full-time. Female respondents were more likely to prefer to study independently and males were more likely to study in group. Of the respondents, 50.2% preferred to undertake individual assessments and 40.5% preferred a combination of individual and group-based assessments (Figure 5). Part-time respondents were more likely to prefer individual assessments compared to full-time respondents. Respondents preferring group-based assessments were more likely to be full-time, male and straight from university.

Figure 4 Preferred study method

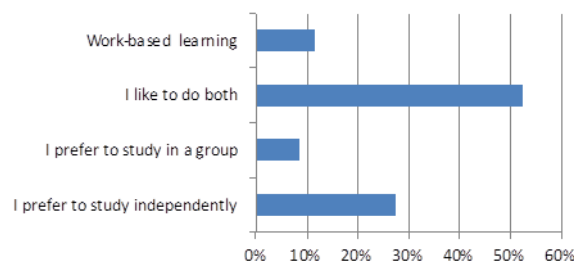
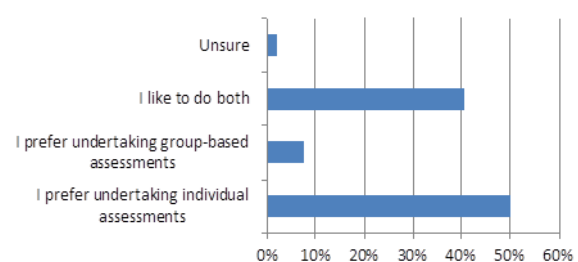


Figure 5 Preferred assessment method



Perception of skill base

Respondents were asked for their perception of their current skill base. The *very strong* and *strong* responses are combined in Table 1. There were student demographic differences. Part-time respondents were significantly more likely to be confident about literacy skills. Respondents under 25 years old were significantly more likely to be confident about their knowledge of the subject compared to those in the older age groups, as were respondents who had studied in the same place. Female respondents were significantly more confident about their literacy skills (67.6%) and their ability to organise independent study. However, male respondents were significantly more confident than females counterparts about their quick assimilation of ideas (66%), study skills (62.4%), and knowledge of the subject (50.7%).

Table 1 Very strong and strong responses

SKILLS	% (N)
ability to organise my study independently	65.1% (793)
numeracy skills	63.4% (772)
literacy skills	63.2% (771)
quick assimilation of ideas	60.7% (740)
study skills (e.g. critical analysis)	59.7% (725)
knowledge of the subject I will be studying on this postgraduate course	48.1% (584)

Issues for further consideration

This briefing paper has highlighted a number of areas that could benefit from further research when improving the learning and teaching experience of PGT students. They include exploring and comparing learning experiences and expectations in Russell Group and non-Russell Group Universities and further research into how universities can support different students' learning expectations, particularly part-time students and students coming straight from work.

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