

### 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 Integrated Survey undertaken by undergraduate STEM Masters students in March 2015. The final report containing the detailed findings will be published late October 2015.

### Rationale for the integrated research

Examining motivations for undertaking an integrated degree was not part of PEP's original remit, but it was added after some discussion in the national media which suggested that students were undertaking this qualification to circumvent Master's funding issues and universities were validating non-traditional integrated Master's courses in order to secure funding. The Entry to Study Survey also found that very few of the respondents held an integrated qualification thus raising the question of whether these students would pursue further PG study in the future.

### Description of an integrated degree

Integrated Master's degrees (e.g. MEng, MMath, MPhys, MPsych, MSci, MChem, MBiol, MGeol, MPlan, MLaw, MDes, MArt) are a combination of an undergraduate and Master's level degree. The first three years of study are often the same as a Bachelor's degree, followed by an additional year of study at Master's level. With many courses, a placement or sandwich year can also be undertaken. The degree is only conferred at the end of study as a full Master's; an intermediate Bachelor's degree is not awarded.

### Integrated growth

Data from HESA highlights that between 2002/3 and 2013/14, enrolments on integrated Master's degrees across all disciplines in England grew by +122%. However, the growth in integrated enrolments is not reflective of undergraduate enrolments in England which has experienced a decline of -11.8% between 2011/12 and 2013/14. Integrated enrolments in STEM disciplines such as engineering and computer science have experienced steady growth reflecting the general increase in undergraduate and postgraduate participation (up to 2011), but others such as biological sciences (MBioSci) and subjects allied to medicine (MPharm) have expanded dramatically, especially in OS enrolments. When the enrolment figures for all HEIs are examined by domiciled status, there has been noticeable growth amongst EU students in biological, mathematical and computing sciences and for overseas students in the areas of allied to medicine and physical sciences.

### Reasons for growth

As well as the suggestion for growth as highlighted at the start of this briefing paper, and the reason for this research, it is argued that the popularity of integrated degrees is in part due to the following factors: firstly, successive governments committing resources and support for them (because of the value placed upon them by business and industry) and secondly, the benefit from the knowledge and skills (especially work-ready skills as a result of placement opportunities) that students' with these qualifications possess. It is also argued that for UK students, the increasing popularity of integrated degrees is due to the recognition that the degrees provide a critical route for professional recognition such as chartered status. A reason contributing to the explanation for the increase in MPharm enrolments includes the removal of the restriction of only twenty-three institutions being able to run courses resulting in a number of new schools of pharmacy being established and accredited by the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) and thus allowing greater student participation.

### The Integrated Survey

The aim of the Integrated Survey was to start exploring the reasons for the increase and to draw out general themes that could be investigated in more detail at a later date. The survey was deliberately kept short in order to encourage student completion. Respondents were not required to answer demographic questions as part of the survey as their university already held this information. By completing the survey, they provided permission to access and use their personal data in the analysis. The survey contained 8 questions relating to funding and their motivations for undertaking integrated study. It was distributed to 'science' (STEM/MPharm) integrated degree students across all levels of study at 8 of the English PEP institutions. Of the 3,231 possible respondents, 609 valid surveys were received which provided an 18.8% return rate. The respondents were fairly evenly spread over the four years of study and comprised of MPharm 55%, MEng 25%, MPharmSci 8%, MChem 6%, MComp 5%, MSci 0.8% and MMaths 0.3%. The findings reported below are those of the aggregate sample, but the final PEP report will provide more detail of discipline specific findings. Of the sample, 46.5% (283) of the respondents were female and 53.5% (326) male. The figures generally represented the traditional participation of males and females in certain disciplines, such as high female participation in pharmacy and high male participation in computing and engineering disciplines. The sample was predominately UK domiciled with 95%. The remaining 5% was equally split between EU and OS respondents. The respondents reported 60 different nationalities with 56 of the respondents who were UK domiciled. Of the sample, 23.2% (141) stated that English was not their first language and of these, 114 were UK domiciled. Fifty six languages were cited as a first language demonstrating the multicultural nature of education in English HEIs. In terms of age, 87.8% (325) of the sample were below 25 years of age, 47.3% (175) were in the 18-21 age category and 40.5% (150) in the 22-25 age group.

### Funding of the course

When asked how they were funding their course, for 87.6% of UK, 72.2% of EU and 12% of OS domiciled students a *student loan* was cited as the primary method of paying for their course, followed by *parents/guardians* with 7.4% and 16.7% for UK and EU respectively. For overseas respondents, 70.8% were relying on *parent/guardian support* followed by some type of *scholarship* with 12.3%. It is important to remember that a student's domiciled status does not always equate with the fees they pay hence the difference between reported domiciled status and funding methods.

### Finding out about the course

The top 3 reasons cited by the respondents on how they found out about the course were: 1) *the UCAS subject search facility* with 36.5% (222); 2) *told about it via parents and friends* with 21.5% (131) and 3) *found out about it from the university prospectus* with 15.5% (94). Respondents finding out about the course via *teachers/careers advisors and admission or open days* only accounted for 9.2% (56) and 7.6% (46) respectively.

### The reasons for choosing the course

When asked about the reasons for choosing an integrated course, of the 13 options available, the top 3 most cited for reasons 1, 2 and 3 are highlighted in Table 1. One of the options least cited was *it enabled me to apply for a student loan whilst studying for a Master's degree*. Of all respondents, only 2% (12) cited this for reason 1 with 9 respondents being in year 4; 3.9% (19) for reason 2 with 10 respondents being in year 4 and 5.3% (30) for reason 3 with 10 respondents being in year 4. All respondents were UK domiciled. It is noticeable that this option increases slightly in citation between reason 1 and 3. Of the respondents who were in years 1 to 3 and were of UK/EU domiciled status (398) (and thus studying under the £9K a year fee regime), the percentage was less per reason than the overall sample with 1% for reason 1, 3.3% for reason 2 and 5.1% for reason 3 respectively. The findings show that undertaking an integrated degree because funding covers Master's degrees was not a motivation for students in undertaking an integrated degree especially those in years 1-3. Also, reasons such as *wanting to delay going into the workplace*, *parental expectations* and *wanting to study at university for a substantial period of time* were similarly not cited as significant reasons for undertaking an integrated degree.

**Table 1** \*IM=Integrated Masters

Rank	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3
1	Attracted to depth of study of an IM compared with a Bachelor's <b>29.2% (177)</b>	Attracted to depth of study of an IM compared with a Bachelor's <b>20.9% (122)</b>	Liked the sound of it <b>17.1% (96)</b>
2	Liked the sound of it <b>20.6% (125)</b>	Wanted to undertake an M level course <b>17.9% (105)</b>	Wanted to undertake an M level course <b>15% (84)</b>
3	Didn't have a choice as needed it for my chosen career 14.2% (86)	Liked the sound of it <b>14.5% (85)</b>	Attracted to depth of study of an IM compared with a Bachelor's <b>12.1% (68)</b>

### Benefits of an integrated degree

Integrated degrees are often promoted by institutions and professional bodies as providing added value and benefits compared to a Bachelor's degree, but it is unclear from existing research whether applicants are aware of this when they apply for the course. Of the respondents in this survey, 87.7% stated that they had thought about the benefits this type of degree would provide when they applied for the course. Of the remaining 75 who had been unsure about the benefits when they had applied, only one respondent felt that there was still no added value (year 4) with 10 still being unsure (9 in years 1-3). When analysed by discipline, there was no difference in attitude towards value of an integrated degree. When asked what the 'expected benefits of the qualification after graduation, the top 3 responses in rank order for reason 1 were: *I feel it will provide better job and career prospects after graduation* followed by *I feel it will give me some added knowledge and skills that a Bachelor's degree would not* and then *I feel it will provide a more straight forward route towards my professional registration*. Earning a high salary after graduation was cited very low by respondents as an expectation and of those that did, all were in the 18-21 age group. There were no discipline or gender differences.

### Further study

The Entry to Study Survey highlighted that of the 1,235 STEM Master's respondents across 11 universities, only 10 reported that their highest qualification was an integrated degree thus raising the question of whether the increase in integrated enrolments impacts on the level of Master's. In this survey, 31.6% stated that they would consider further study. Reasons cited for this included *wanting to move into research; undertaking a business related course; desire to specialize their knowledge; to stay ahead of upcoming graduates* and *to develop themselves*. When analysed by age, respondents in the age groups 26-30 and 31-35 were more likely to consider undertaking further study compared to the 18-25 age group, but due to the sample size, the significance could not be tested. Of the 68.4% of respondents who stated they had no intentions of going onto further study, reasons included *further qualifications are not needed for their chosen career; one Master's degree is enough; an integrated degree is superior to an MSc* and they are *tired of studying*. Financial reasons were cited by only one respondent. PEP's research suggests that students with an integrated degree are far less likely to progress on to further high level study.

**Authors: Michelle Morgan, Principal Investigator and Project Lead for PEP and Ines Direito, Lead Researcher for PEP**  
**Centre for Higher Education Research and Practice (CHERP), Kingston University**  
**E: [michelle.morgan@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:michelle.morgan@kingston.ac.uk)**  
**E: [I.Direito@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:I.Direito@kingston.ac.uk)**

