



## **Individual Project Report**

**Understanding prior feedback experiences of new postgraduate taught (PGT) STEM students' and their expectations and attitudes towards PGT level study at a 1992 institution.**

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## **Executive summary**

### **Background and aims for the project**

In the past 15 years, there has been a dramatic expansion in the postgraduate taught (PGT) student body in the UK. Although there is an increasing body of literature looking at the postgraduate student experience, there is a lack of research and knowledge in understanding PGT students' prior learning experiences (and how that might affect the PGT study level), their attitudes and the expectations they have of studying at PGT level. This research project aims to correct this deficit by providing valuable data and insight into this nationally and internationally neglected area.

### **Intended audience**

The research findings will be of value to a range of staff, across higher education institutions, who are involved in the delivery of postgraduate taught courses. This includes policy managers; education managers; academics that plan and teach postgraduate courses; recruitment and marketing colleagues; international advisors and support staff. The findings will also be of benefit to researchers and practitioners interested in improving the student experience of postgraduate taught students.

### **Data collection and analysis**

The collection of data took place over three stages. Stage one used a hard copy questionnaire during the welcome and orientation sessions for new PGT students in a Post-1992 institution, within the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing, in September 2012. The data was inputted into SPSS and appropriate tests were run on the dataset. Data collection in stage two utilised a semi-structured interview guide in a focus group of seven interviewees. Areas for exploration were generated out of the survey findings. Stage three was the discussion generated from the dialogical conference held at the institution where the research was undertaken.

## Headline results

### Summary: key findings from the survey

#### Entry route in to PGT study

Of the respondents who classified themselves as first generation (first in the family to go to university), the most popular entry route was *'straight from work'*. For second generation respondents it was *'straight from University'*. Of the sample who classified themselves as *'UK domiciled'*, 17 of the respondents had previously studied at a FE college rather than university. This comprised of 13 first generation and 4 second generation respondents. Of the sample, just over four fifths possessed an undergraduate degree and ten per cent a 'PG' qualification, which were all integrated masters degrees, undertaken at undergraduate level.

#### Reasons for undertaking a PGT qualification

*'Improving knowledge of the subject'* was the most cited reason for undertaking PGT level study. The second most cited reason was providing *'more career options'* followed in joint third with *'improving chances of getting a graduate job'* and *'required for chosen career'*.

#### Reason for choosing a university at which to study a PGT qualification

*'Course content'* followed by *'cost of fees'* then *'teaching reputation'* were the three main most cited reasons provided by the respondents as important when choosing a university at which to undertake PGT level study. The *'university's research reputation'* was not a significant factor.

#### Fee levels

Fee levels were *'very important'* or *'important'* for over half the sample. They were slightly more important for first than second generation respondents in this study. Fee levels being rated as *'not important'* or *'not important at all'* were higher amongst second generation respondents.

#### Funding

Of the sample, the primary method of funding PGT level study for two fifths was parental assistance. Of these, just over half were coming straight from university and one quarter from work. Respondents from all age groups were receiving parental assistance although the percentage declined as the groups got older. Second generation students received significantly more assistance than first generation respondents. UK domiciled respondents

were less likely to receive parental support compared to those who classified themselves as EU and Non-EU.

### **Quality of study**

A significant number of the sample expected a higher level of service, value for money and an individualised study experience at PGT level than at undergraduate. Expectation levels increased with age and first generation respondents tended to have higher expectations in academic and non-academic spheres, than those who were second generation. UK domiciled students were more likely than EU and Non-EU respondents to understand what to expect at PGT level and that they would be required to study more independently than they had at undergraduate level. Approximately one fifth of the sample did not know what to expect at PGT level.

### **Academic Feedback**

Respondents understood what was meant by the term '*feedback*' on their academic work and the majority appeared to be aware of when it was being provided. Approximately one quarter of all respondents did not approach a tutor in their previous studies regarding feedback. Women were slightly more likely to approach a tutor for feedback. '*Embarrassment*' and '*not thinking about asking for feedback*' were reasons cited for not approaching a tutor. First generation respondents were less likely to approach a tutor in their previous studies compared to those who classified themselves as second generation. Feedback preference for respondents at PGT level were '*face to face*' followed by '*paper*' then '*email*'. Of the sample, four fifths expected to get feedback within two weeks of submission.

### **Contact hours and independent study**

Of the sample, four fifths were unsure about the amount of contact hours they would have and in terms of independent study, around forty per cent expected to undertake 11-20 hours a week and just over a third expected 21 hours or more.

### **Anxiety levels**

Of the sample, just over seventy per cent were '*anxious or very anxious*' about their PGT studies. Anxiety levels were highest amongst those coming straight from work and in females within the sample. There were no significant generational differences in terms of anxiety levels. '*Coping with the standard of work*' was the primary anxiety for respondents followed by '*managing money*' and the '*demands of travelling to university*'. Anxiety levels for EU and Non-EU respondents in non academic areas such as '*managing money*' and '*making friends*' were noticeably higher than for UK respondents.

### **Perceived study strengths**

The majority of respondents stated that their academic skills were '*strong*' rather than '*very strong*'. In contrast to males and second generation students, women and first generation respondents were less likely to state that their skills were '*very strong*'. The areas where women stated that they had strong skills were in '*study skills*' and their '*ability to organise*'. Second generational females were more confident than their first generation counterparts in the areas of '*assimilation of ideas*' and '*knowledge*'.

### **Value of a PGT qualification**

Of all the respondents, over four fifths stated that they believed employers did value a PGT level qualification more than an undergraduate one and just over ninety per cent believed it would enhance and develop the key skills that employers valued.

### **English as a first language**

Of the sample, just over four fifths stated that English was their first language. Of all UK domiciled respondents, forty per cent stated that English was not their first language. Of the EU and Non-EU respondents, one tenth and two fifths respectively stated that it was their first language.

### **Last University of study**

Of the UK domiciled respondents, who stated that they were first generation students, just under a quarter had previously studied at either an EU or Non-EU university compared to just over a third of second generation students.

## **Summary: key findings from the focus group**

### **Reasons for undertaking a degree**

The reasons provided by the interviewees reflected the quantitative findings. Career options and improving their chances of getting a graduate job were the main reasons cited.

### **Workload**

All except one of the interviewees felt that the workload had turned out to be much greater than anticipated.

### **Course content**

The majority of the respondents expected the course content to be more diverse than it turned out to be in terms of practical experience and theoretical knowledge. The mix of student skill base and disciplines within each module was cited by some of the interviewees as creating difficulties in their learning.

### **Feedback**

All the interviewees stated that obtaining feedback in a timely manner had proven difficult and it had impacted on their studies. All stated that the mark was more important than the feedback, but they would like both.

### **Postgraduate characteristics**

When the interviewees were asked to 'define' a postgraduate student, most of the responses were statements describing emotions (e.g. stressed, exhausted, and lonely) rather than characteristics (e.g. mature and higher skill base).

### **Peer/friendship**

All of the interviewees stated that they had no university friends. Reasons provided to explain this included: they were '*only here for a year so it didn't matter*'; they had '*their own friends*' and they '*didn't have time to make friends*'.

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

The study has provided valuable baseline data and a research framework that could be replicated in other institutions. There is a strong case for further research across the sector.

## Section 1      Background to the project

### Rationale for the research

There has been a dramatic expansion in the 'taught' postgraduate (PGT) student body in the UK in the past 15 years. Extensive research has been undertaken in the field of the student experience and learning and teaching at undergraduate level (e.g. Tinto, 1988; Woodrow, 1998; Thomas, 2002; Hatt et al., 2005; Morgan, 2011). However, there is a limited, albeit a growing body of research, in the area of PGT study (Wakeling, 2005; Green, 2005; HEFCE 2006; Stuart et.al, 2008). The Higher Education Commission commented in 2012 that '*Postgraduate education is a forgotten part of the sector*' (Higher Education Commission, 2012:17)

The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is at the forefront in investigating the Postgraduate (PG) student experience through their annual 'end of course' Postgraduate Taught and Research Experience Surveys. They have also funded a number of notable research projects. In 2008, '*Widening participation to postgraduate study: decisions, deterrents and creating success*', led by Professor Mary Stuart, was published (Stuart et al., 2008). The research was quantitative and qualitative in nature and explored the intentions to study at PG level of final year undergraduate students at two Post-1992 universities. No other research to date has been undertaken in this area. In the same year, Tobbell and colleagues published their report on '*Exploring practice and participation in transition to postgraduate social science study*'. Their research was qualitative, undertaken across five institutions and involved 39 student and staff participants (Tobbell et al., 2008).

Wakeling, a key commentator in the postgraduate student experience field, has undertaken wide-ranging research exploring the social barriers of engaging and succeeding in postgraduate study as well as research into widening participation at postgraduate research level. His latest research report co-authored with Hampden-Thompson and funded by the HEA is entitled '*Transitions to higher degrees across the UK*' (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). It is the first comprehensive research undertaken examining PG growth within the UK. Other valuable research includes that of Steve Machin who has been exploring the financial issues and implications of PG level study for all stakeholders (Machin and Murphy, 2010).

There is no readily available published research into understanding PGT students' prior academic experience at postgraduate level and how it might affect their expectations of and attitudes to studying at this level. This knowledge is essential if the PGT student experience is to be managed and improved. Literature strongly suggests that previous learning, teaching, assessment and feedback experiences at undergraduate level can have an impact on students' ability to engage



and succeed in their studies, especially if they are from non-traditional or widening participation backgrounds (Bamber and Tett, 2000; Richardson, 2003). However, the extent to which this is the case at postgraduate level is unclear. Neither is there any research available that looks at student expectations before they start their postgraduate studies. The aims of this research were to provide valuable data on, and insight into, these specific areas which have been neglected both nationally and internationally.

This research has come at an appropriate time as the UK Government appears committed to supporting STEM subjects in higher education as well as to the continued expansion of the postgraduate taught student body (Higher Education Commission, 2012). With the recent changes in the UK higher education landscape, if institutions are to sustain expansion, the findings from this research may form important contributions to the PG debate especially in helping to deliver a high quality student experience.

### **Background to the research project**

The initial research was originally undertaken in an Engineering Faculty, within a Post 1992 institution, in September 2010. The Faculty's management team was acutely aware that its postgraduate taught (PGT) student body had dramatically increased in recent years and reflected the national pattern of growth in the PGT student body. Within the Faculty, the PGT student experience had not been treated as a '*bolt on*' activity, and equal attention had been paid to developing UG and PGT orientation and induction activities. However, evidence from PGT Faculty student meetings, module feedback activities and course representatives suggested that a greater understanding by all staff of new PGT students' previous learning and teaching experiences and of their expectations of studying at PGT level, would further improve the postgraduate student experience across both academic and non-academic activities. The sample size in the first year of the survey was small, but the data collected represented 66% of the intake for that year. The research was undertaken by the Faculty's Learning and Teaching Coordinator who had been the primary researcher on the HEA funded Stuart et.al study.

When the Faculty merged with the Faculties of Computing and Science in 2011 (to create the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing (SEC)), the research was repeated. The sample size accounted for approximately 38% of the new PGT intake in September 2011. The findings from both years were disseminated via a Higher Education Academy funded STEM seminar and at the STEM Annual Conference in 2012. The small scale research generated discussion and points of interest so it was agreed that the research could be repeated across all schools within the SEC

in September 2012 if an HEA grant was obtained. A proposal was submitted and an Individual Grant awarded in August 2012.

### **Aims and objectives of the project**

The research in this project extended beyond the remit of the previous research by including questions on previous feedback experiences and expectations. The aims of the research were twofold: firstly, it wanted to explore the prior feedback experiences of the new PGT cohort to determine whether it may contribute in shaping their attitudes towards feedback at PGT level study and secondly, it wanted to investigate the expectations of new PGT students studying and accessing support at postgraduate level across academic and non-academic (e.g. financial and health advice) spheres. The objectives were: to identify any particular issues that appeared to affect successful engagement; to determine what interventions or activities could be put in place to manage student expectations and improve the postgraduate taught student experience.

### **Confines of the research**

The research was conducted over a one-year period at the Post-1992 institution. Whilst considerable data was collected, the findings are based on the limitations that such a time and financially limited project can offer. The findings in this report only relate to the September 2012 intake of new postgraduate taught students within SEC.

Although it is a small research project (the area has not been investigated in any depth nationally or internationally), the findings do contribute to the UK sector's understanding of the previous feedback experiences and the expectations of new students studying at postgraduate taught (PGT) level. As the university in which the research was undertaken is a post 1992 institution, further research in other UK HEIs (with different student demographics and course offerings) would provide valuable comparisons.

## **Section 2     Setting the scene**

### **What is ‘taught’ postgraduate study?**

Postgraduate study can be described as *‘consisting of programmes that are more advanced than undergraduate study, usually undertaken by those who already hold undergraduate degrees. It is something of an umbrella term, encompassing a diverse array of provision – from short certificate courses, to four year PhD research projects, to Professional Doctorates studied largely in the workplace’* (Higher Education Commission, 2012:19).

Broadly speaking, postgraduate qualifications at present can be classified into two groups: those that are substantially taught such as Masters by Coursework; and those with a significant research component such as Doctorates by Research (Smith et al., 2010).

Masters by Coursework are degrees used to extend an individual’s knowledge in a particular area, used as a conversion to a new discipline or are vocational in nature and can prepare an individual for a particular profession. They can also be used as an interim qualification leading to a PhD/DPhil often achieved by completion of a dissertation (Smith et al., 2010).

In the SEC Faculty ‘postgraduate taught study’ (PGT) consists of Masters by Coursework qualifications. Although Integrated Masters degrees are undertaken in the Faculty (consisting of a 3 year undergraduate degree combined with a year of studying at Masters Level), they are an ‘undergraduate’ qualification. For the rest of this report, Masters by Coursework will primarily be referred to as Taught Masters.

### **PG student numbers in UK HEIs**

There has been a dramatic expansion in the PG student body within the UK in the past 15 years, with the primary growth being in Taught Masters’ and Taught Doctoral Degrees (Bekhradnia, 2005). For consistency in comparing national and the Post-1992 institution statistics, full-time, part-time and PGT and PGR numbers are provided where possible. Statistics from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) show that in 2003/4, the number undertaking a PG qualification in the UK totalled 532,828 (FT= 220,393: PT= 303,435) (HESA, 2005). The qualification composition is listed in Table 1.

**Table 1** PG qualification by aim for students in UK HEIs 2003/4

	<b>Research</b>	<b>Taught</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	56,650	116,743	47,000
<b>Part-time</b>	54,190	145,950	103,295
<b>Total</b>	<b>110,840</b>	<b>262,693</b>	<b>150,295</b>
<b>Overall total</b>	<b>532,825</b>		

Source: HESA, 2005a

Between 2003/4 and 2010/11, the overall increase in numbers participating in PG study grew by 10.5% to 588,725 (FT= 310,015: PT=278,710) (HESA, 2012a). The qualification composition is listed in table 2.

**Table 2** PG qualification by aim for students in UK HEIs 2010/11

	<b>Research</b>	<b>Taught</b>	<b>Other</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	74,305	197,690	38,020
<b>Part-time</b>	28,950	147,610	102,150
<b>Total</b>	<b>103,255</b>	<b>345,300</b>	<b>140,170</b>
<b>% change on 2003/4</b>	<b>-6.8%</b>	<b>+31.4%</b>	<b>-6.7%</b>
<b>Overall total</b>	<b>588,725</b>		

Source: HESA, 2012a

The PG qualification that experienced the largest growth between 2003/4 and 2010/11 was the 'Taught' qualification with 31.4%. During this period, the number undertaking a Research Degree decreased by 6.8% with the part-time Research mode experiencing a dramatic decline of 46.6%.

### **PG student numbers at the Post 1992 institution**

The increase in the PG student body at the post 1992 institution had been more dramatic than at national level. In 2003/4, there were 4,395 (FT= 1345: PT=3050) students enrolled on PG courses with 91.5% participating in 'Taught' or 'Other courses' and 8.5% in 'Research' (HESA, 2005b).

By 2010/11, the postgraduate student body had increased by 57% to 6,895 (FT=3575: PT=3320) with 92.2% participating in 'Taught' or 'Other' courses (HESA, 2012b). The percentage participating in 'Research' slightly declined on the 2003/4 figure. The HESA figures record that by 2010/11, full-time (FT) study had replaced part-time (PT) study as the most popular mode of study at the Post-1992 institution.

In 2011/12, although overall UK PG figures continued to increase, PG numbers at the Post-1992 institution declined across all subject areas with part-time study at the university once again

becoming the most popular mode (HESA, 2013; Post-1992, 2012). The Arts and Social Sciences were particularly affected although most faculties saw a decrease in PG student numbers across 'Research' and 'Taught' courses in 2011/12.

## **Expansion and retraction in Science, Engineering and Computing**

### **PG student numbers**

The statistics used in examining the expansion and retraction of student numbers in science, engineering and computing at national and institutional level are derived from the subject classification by HESA (see appendix 1) and the Post 1992 Institution's Student Return Check Documentation for HESA. It is important to note that within the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing, the disciplines cover broader subject areas which are classified in other subject groups by HESA. For example, 'science' subjects within the Faculty include chemistry and physics but HESA group them under 'physical sciences and biology'. Sports science is also a subject taught within the Faculty, but HESA groups it under 'biological sciences'. Although HESA group subjects such as maritime technology and polymers and textiles, these are not taught within the Faculty. As a result, these statistics should be viewed as a broad overview rather than accurate comparative statistics.

When the statistics are examined, the increase in national and institutional student numbers enrolled on PG *Computing, Engineering, and Technology* and *Mathematical Science* courses was similar to the overall growth in UK PG participation. However, in 2011/12, Computing and Engineering saw a decrease in student numbers in these disciplines at both national and institutional level. These statistics are examined in more detail below. The statistics of those enrolled on PG research degrees within the institution are in brackets to highlight PGR participation.

### *Computing*

Within the discipline of '*Computing*', student enrolment numbers continued to increase between 2006/7 and 2008/9, both nationally and institutionally. However, in 2011/12, the numbers of students nationally registered on PG '*Computing*' courses decreased by 15.2% on the 2010/11 figures and this is reflected in the Post-1992 institution with a slightly higher decrease of 20.5% (see table 3).

**Table 3** National and Institutional Computing enrolments between 2006/7 and 2011/12

	<b>National 2006/7</b>	<b>National 2010/11</b>	<b>National 2011/12</b>	<b>Institutional 2010/11</b>	<b>Institutional 2011/12</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	13,070	16,335	13,460	220 (45 PGR)	156 (44 PGR)
<b>Part-time</b>	10,010	6,145	5,615	155 (19 PGR)	142 (15 PGR)
<b>Total</b>	23,080	22,480	19,075	375 (64 PGR)	298 (59 PGR)

Source: HESA, 2008a,b; 2013a,b

### *Engineering and Technology*

The enrolments on *Engineering and Technology* courses, both nationally and institutionally increased between 2006/7 until 2010/11 (see table 4). However, in 2011/12, the national enrolments on *Engineering and Technology* courses decreased by 6.3% on the 2010/11 figure. The fall in the institution's enrolment figures in this discipline was more dramatic with a decrease of 30%.

**Table 4** National and Institutional Engineering enrolments between 2006/7 and 2011/12

	<b>National 2006/7</b>	<b>National 2010/11</b>	<b>National 2011/12</b>	<b>Institutional 2010/11</b>	<b>Institutional 2011/12</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	22,990	31,705	29,690	348 (50 PGR)	202 (36 PGR)
<b>Part-time</b>	17,770	13,250	12,305	237 (19 PGR)	208 (11 PGR)
<b>Total</b>	40,760	44,955	41,995	585 (69 PGR)	410 (47 PGR)

Source: HESA, 2008a,b; 2013a,b

### *Mathematical Sciences*

National enrolments onto '*Mathematical Science*' courses had declined by 2010/11 (see table 5). The discipline is not offered within the institution at PGT level, but in 2010/11 there were 2 PGR enrolments. In 2011/12, national enrolments on courses in this subject area actually increased by 1%. In 2011/12, in the 1992 Institution, 5 were registered on PGR degrees.

**Table 5** National and Institutional Mathematical Science enrolments between  
2006/7 and 2011/12

	<b>National 2006/7</b>	<b>National 2010/11</b>	<b>National 2011/12</b>	<b>Institutional 2010/11</b>	<b>Institutional 2011/12</b>
<b>Full-time</b>	3,550	4,395	4,605	2 PGR	4 PGR
<b>Part-time</b>	2,625	1,470	1,320	-	1 PGR
<b>Total</b>	6,175	5,865	5,925	2 PGR	5 PGR

Source: HESA, 2008a,b; 2013a,b

## Reasons for the expansion and retraction

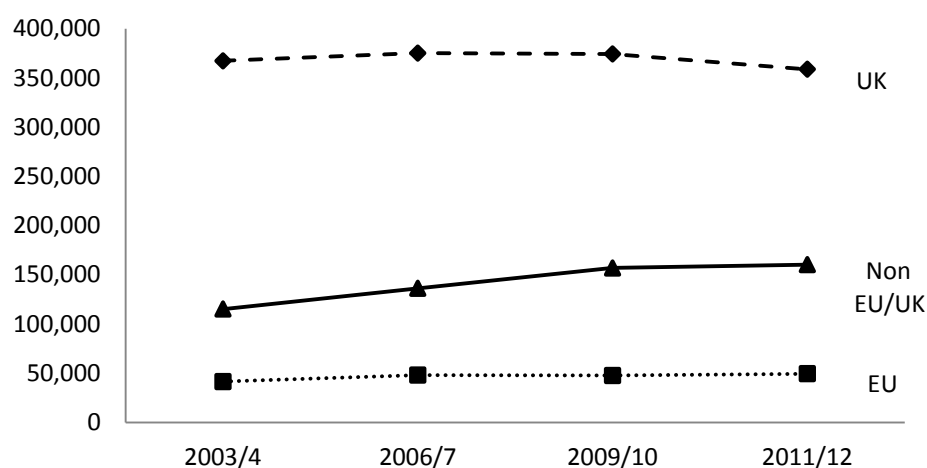
There are a number of possible contributing factors that could help explain the growth in PG study and the recent retraction.

### *Explanations for expansion at PG level*

Evidence suggests that Postgraduate study is increasingly undertaken for career advancement rather than self-fulfilment (Anderson et. al., 1998; Barber et. al., 2004, Stuart et. al., 2008; Park and Kulej, 2009). It is also suggested that there are financial benefits for the individual in undertaking Postgraduate level study. A report in 2010 for the Sutton Trust by the Centre for Economic Performance, using Higher Education Statistic Agency's destination data, illustrated that someone who held a postgraduate qualification generally earned more as a starting salary and over a life time than an undergraduate (Machin and Murphy 2010). Also, there may have been a change in the perceived value of the UG degree within the employment market. Wolf (2002) suggests that one possible reason why the postgraduate population has increased in recent years is that '*as the bachelor's degree becomes ubiquitous, its relative advantage in the labour market is diminishing*' (cited by Wakeling 2005, p. 506).

It is also argued that UK government policies and strategies have been specifically aimed at improving the global market of higher education (DfES, 2003). When the domiciled status of the student body is examined, increasing Postgraduate numbers in recent years have been due to the EU and Non-EU markets (see figure 1).

**Figure 1** Growth in postgraduate numbers in the UK



Source: HESA 2008b; 2012b; 2013a,b

In 2011/12, HESA statistics showed that students classified as being from the European Union (EU) and those outside of the European Union (Non-EU) made up 57% of all FT postgraduate numbers (HESA, 2013). The statistics also show that EU and Non-EU participation in part-time study was minimal with 87.2% being UK domiciled (HESA, 2013).

#### *Explanations for retraction in Science, Engineering and Computing enrolments*

There are a number of possible reasons that could explain the retraction in student numbers. The fulltime domiciled market which has decreased the most between 2010/11 and 2011/12, is that of the UK domiciled category (see Table 6).

**Table 6** Domiciled status participation of FT students in UK HEIs

	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>2011/12</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>UK</b>	375,030	358,800	-4.5%
<b>EU</b>	49,795	49,465	-0.7%
<b>Non EU</b>	163,890	160,245	-2.3%

Source: HESA (2012)

Some HE commentators (e.g. Russell Group) argue that the decrease in UK domiciled postgraduate participation may be due to the lack of a funding model enabling potential students to participate in PG level study. It is also suggested that debt levels incurred at undergraduate level by students is acting a deterrent for many potential applicants thinking about studying at PGT level. Although anecdotal, there appears to be a questioning of the value of PGT study within the media and amongst potential students. What the HESA statistics clearly show is that there has been a dramatic decline in the number of students coming from Non-EU countries, such as India and Pakistan, who have traditionally participated in Science, Engineering and Computing subjects with UK HEIs (see table 7). Some attribute this decline to the changes in visa requirements by the UK Border Agency.



**Table 7** Top ten non-EU countries of domicile in 2011/12 for HE students in UK HEIs

Country of domicile	2010/11	2011/12	% change
China	67325	78715	16.9%
India	39090	29900	-23.5%
Nigeria	17585	17620	0.2%
United States	15555	16335	5.0%
Malaysia	13900	14545	4.6%
Hong Kong	10440	11335	8.6%
Saudi Arabia	10270	9860	-4.0%
Pakistan	10185	8820	-13.4%
Thailand	5945	6235	4.9%
Canada	5905	6115	3.5%
All other non-EU countries	101915	103205	1.3%
Total non-EU domicile	298110	302680	1.5%

Source: HESA 2013d

## Conclusion

After years of growth, the recent national decline in student numbers in the Computing, Engineering and Technology, and Mathematical Science disciplines, which is reflected in the institutional figures, is a worrying pattern. The research attempted to explore some of the drivers behind the expansion and retraction and these are reported in the next section. However, further research at institutional and national level is required to fully explore this.

## **Section 3     Methodology and approach**

### **Methodology**

The research in this project was undertaken in three phases. Phase one was quantitative in nature, phase two adopted a qualitative approach and phase three was the dissemination process.

#### **Phase 1- July 2012 to February 2013**

##### *Quantitative data collection*

Phase one was where the primary source of data collection occurred. The questionnaire was designed to collect demographic variables, information on prior feedback experiences, and the expectations of new PGT students relating to their upcoming academic studies. The questionnaire was distributed as a hard copy survey to maximise completion rates. This data collection method had proven extremely successful in the previous research. The questionnaire included closed (e.g. those using a five-point Likert-type scale) and open ended questions (see appendix 2 for questionnaire). The questions for inclusion were developed from the findings from the past two year's surveys and the limited literature available. The questionnaire went before the Faculty' Ethics Committee. The questionnaire was developed between July and September 2012 with feedback from key staff and PGT Faculty Course Representatives.

The questionnaire was distributed and completed during the Orientation period in September 2012. Students were informed about the purpose of the survey, and that it was anonymous and voluntary, in the general 'Welcome session'. They were informed that the survey had two aims: firstly, to provide the Faculty with data to contribute to understanding and improving their experience; secondly, to act as a personal development activity for new PGT entrants as they would be asked to reflect on how they had previously learnt and how they wanted to, or expected to, learn at postgraduate level. The basic findings of the survey, along with advice and guidance in the areas students had highlighted as potential problems, were published for students and staff within 3 weeks of the Welcome and Orientation sessions (see appendix 3).

Students were encouraged to complete the survey during their school specific sessions and incentivised through a prize draw for Amazon vouchers which took place in the school specific session. There were 50 book vouchers of £20 allocated across the seven schools. The survey was completed by 233 new PGT students, which accounted for approximately 90% of those who attended the September Orientation event, and that represented 54% (435) of the total September cohort.

### *Data analysis*

The data collected was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and a range of tests was run on the data (frequencies and Chi Square). Due to the sample size, the results were not weighted to take into account the non-participation bias of the small percentage that did not complete the survey.

## **Phase 2- March 2013**

### *Qualitative data collection*

One focus group took place before the Easter vacation in 2013 (Mid March). This period was six months into their studies (so enough time would have elapsed for them to shape opinions about their experience) and it was just before the key assessment period. A semi-structured interview guide was used to enable areas to be explored which were generated out of the quantitative research. Within the Faculty, there are PG student representatives for each course. The course representatives undergo significant training to equip them with the skills to ensure that the voices of the students they are representing are heard in a collective, constructive, reflective and unbiased way. It was decided to ask these students to participate in the focus group. Participants were asked to reflect on their expectations and experiences and suggest what interventions, if any, would have assisted their engagement in their studies. Participants were given a £20 voucher and refreshments.

## **Phase 3 – May 2013**

### *Dissemination phase*

The one day dialogical conference took place at the Post-1992 institution where the results were shared with policy makers and practitioners within the institution and the wider academic community. The dialogical conference enabled practitioners and policy makers to come together to discuss the findings in their own context. This was an important part of the methodology and the dissemination strategy in providing important links into the wider academic community.

The dialogical conference provided delegates with the opportunity to discuss:

- Factors concerning successful engagement at postgraduate taught level in feedback across the STEM subjects;

- Whether there were distinct postgraduate taught student feedback characteristics, expectations and experiences across STEM subjects and if so, what they were;
- Solutions concerning the negative experiences of postgraduate taught participants;
- The impact of these findings on present and future institutional and national HE policies.

This report will be widely circulated through conference attendance and the Higher Education Academy publications section.

The dissemination process aims to:

- Raise awareness of the issues of the postgraduate taught experience with senior policy makers within institutions relating to learning, teaching, assessment and feedback;
- Engage colleagues in HE who teach postgraduate taught students and inform them of the issues relating to the postgraduate taught academic student experience;
- Support the development of student support policy at institutional and national level.

## Section 4 Quantitative findings

This section reports the quantitative findings and starts off with providing the basic demographic data for the sample. The findings reported in this section generally report only the significant findings, but in some questions non-significant findings have been reported to illustrate the similarities across different variables such as gender, domiciled and generational status, age and ethnicity.

### Demographics of the sample

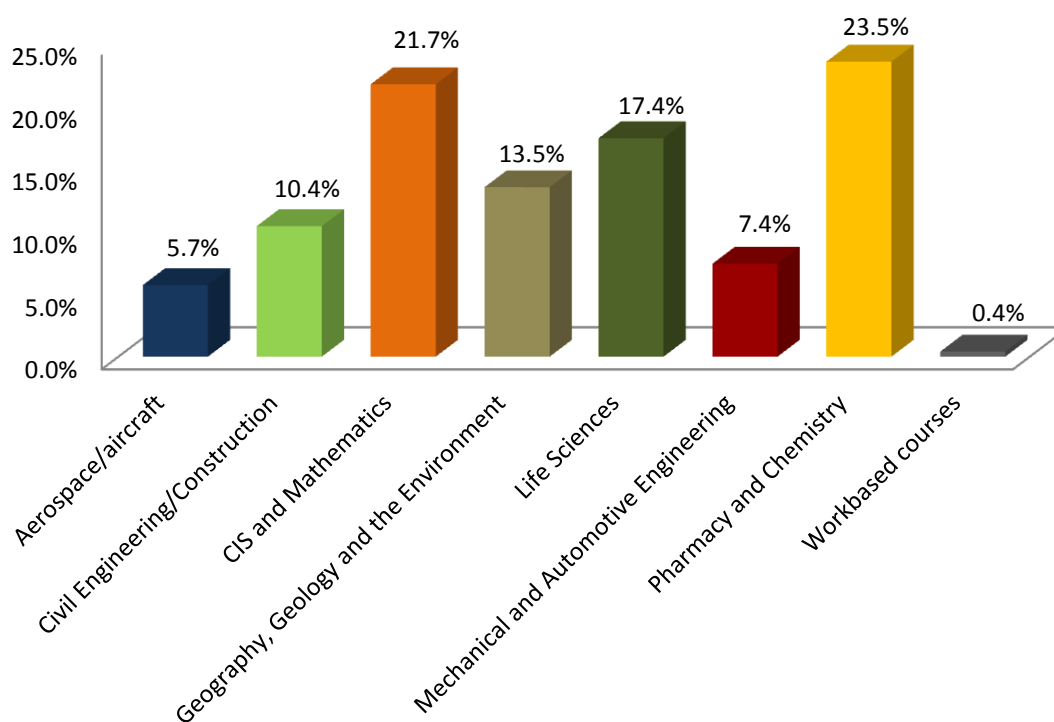
The Faculty consists of eight schools, but only seven deliver Taught Masters courses.

The sample was representative of the total September cohort across the schools (see figure 2).

#### School

Figure 2

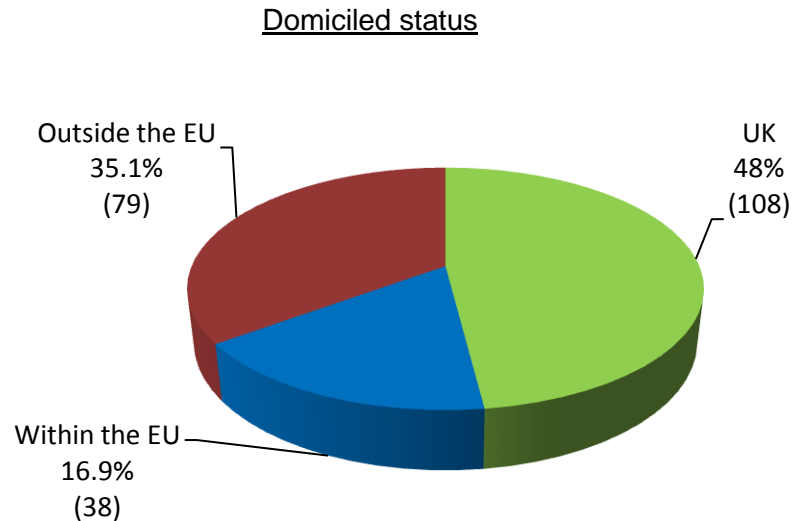
Survey completed by respondents by school



#### Domiciled status

Of the sample who declared their domiciled status (225), the majority of respondents were UK and Non-EU domiciled (see figure 3).

Figure 3



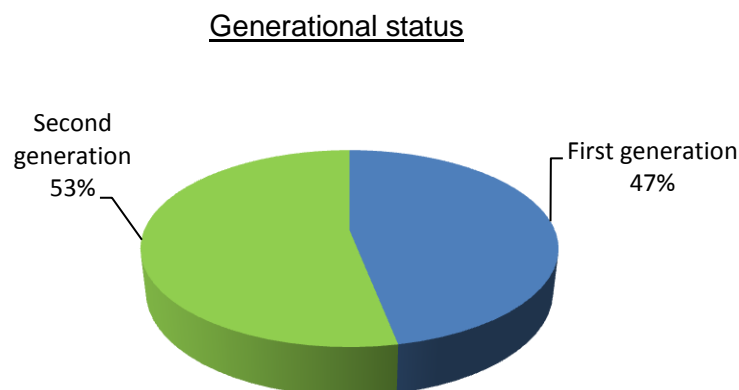
The September cohort (410) comprised of 55.1% (226) UK domiciled, 16.4% (67) EU domiciled and 28.5 % (117) Non-EU domiciled. Within the sample, there was a larger proportion of UK domiciled students than in the September cohort because of late arrivals, who were mainly Non-EU students. This was due to visa and accommodation issues.

When ethnicity and domiciled status was examined, of the sample who classified themselves as White, only 47.2% (42) were UK domiciled with 38.2% (34) being EU domiciled and 14.6% (13) Non-EU. Of those who classified themselves as belonging to Mixed and Black ethnic groups, 75% (6) and 67.6% (23) respectively stated that they were UK domiciled.

### **Generational status**

Of the sample who declared their generational status (232), 46.9% (109) classified themselves as '*First generation*' (first member in the family to go to university) and 53.1% (123) '*Second generation*' (parent had been to university) (see figure 4). Of all UK domiciled respondents, 50.9% (55) classified themselves as first generation students. For those who were EU and Non-EU domiciled, this figure was lower with 40.5% (15) and 46.8 % (42) respectively.

Figure 4

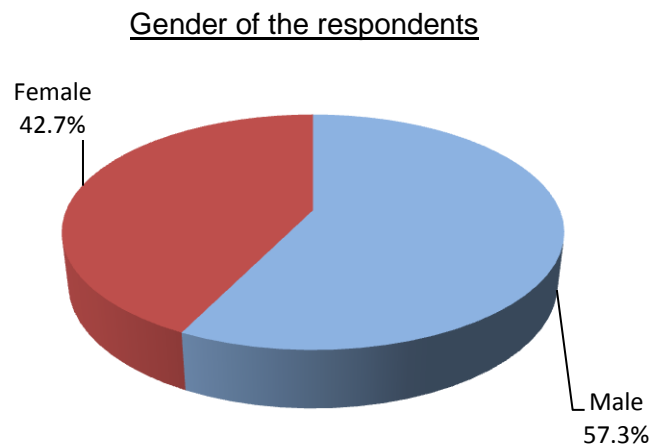


When ethnicity and generational status was examined, approximately three fifths of those who classified themselves as Mixed, White or Black were second generation students compared to only two fifths of Asian respondents.

### Gender

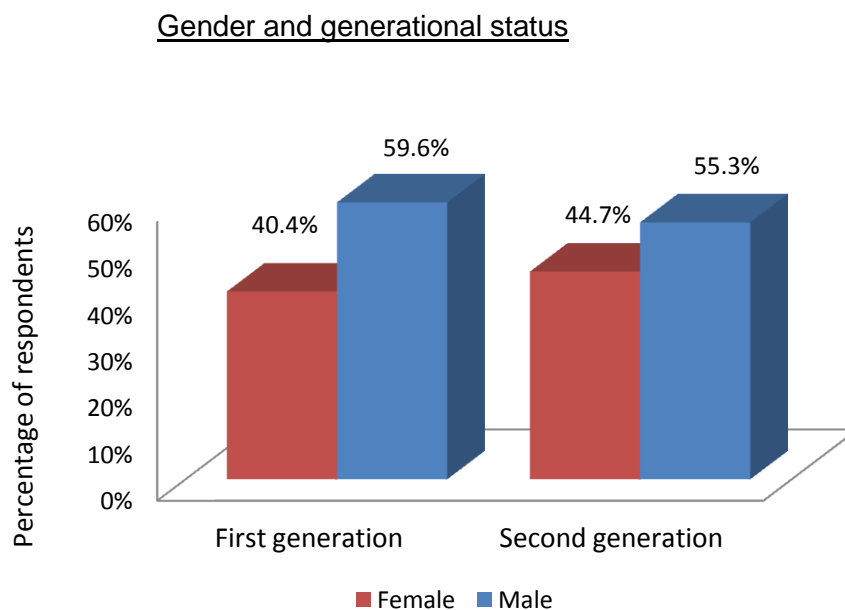
Of the respondents, 42.7% (99) were female and 57.3% (133) male (see figure 5). The September cohort split was 40% female and 60% male. The disciplines within the Faculty tend to attract a high proportion of males.

Figure 5



Of the first generation sample, female respondents constituted 40.4% (44) of the group and males 59.6% (65). However, within the second generation group, the gap between the genders was smaller with females accounting for 44.7% (55) of the group and males for 55.3% (68 (see figure 6).

Figure 6

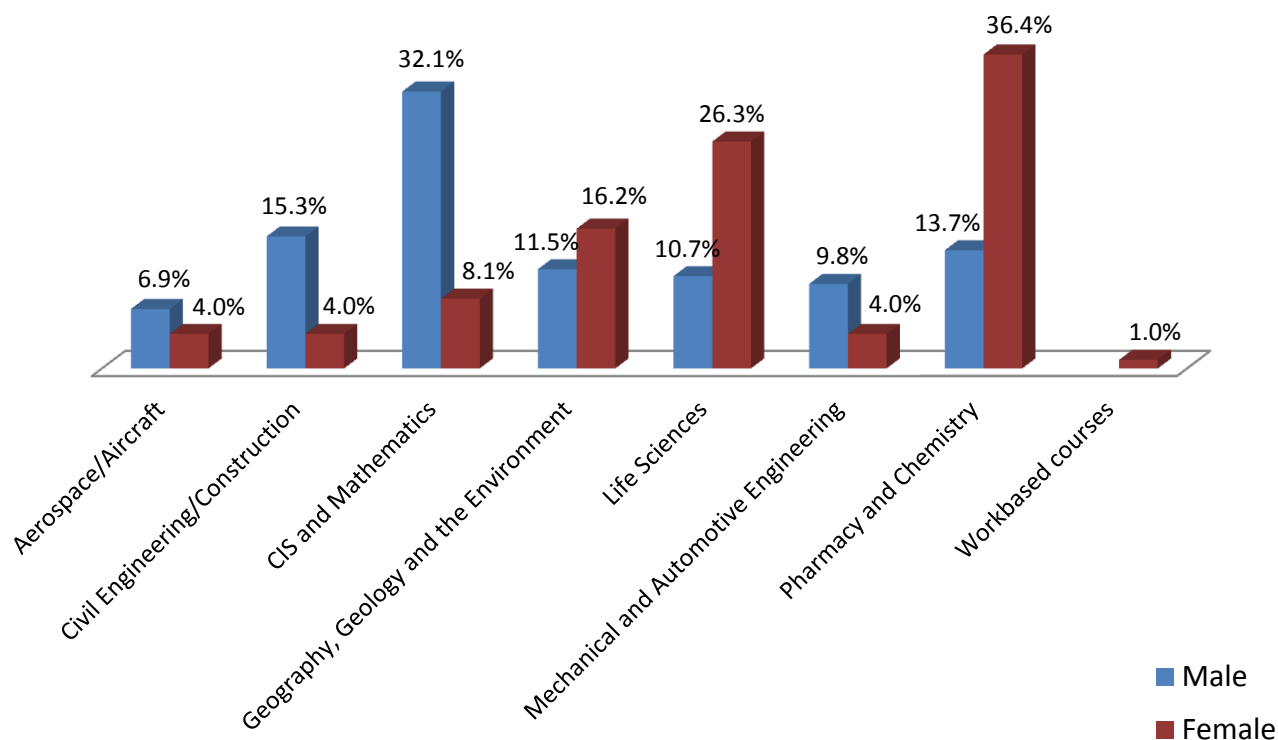


There was little difference between domiciled status and gender within the second generation group. However, there was a noticeable gender difference between domiciled and first generation status within the sample. Within the UK domiciled samples, there were significantly fewer first generation females than in the EU and Non-EU sample. Of the first generation respondents who classified themselves as UK domiciled, 67.3% (37) were male and 32.7% (18) female. Of those who were EU domiciled, 40% (6) were male and 60% (9) were female. For Non-EU respondents, 56.8% (21) were male and 43.2% (16) female.

Where the respondents' gender and school was analysed, male participation was most prominent in Civil Engineering and Construction and CIS and Mathematics (see figure 7). Female respondents were most prominent in Life Sciences and Pharmacy and Chemistry.

Figure 7

Gender and school

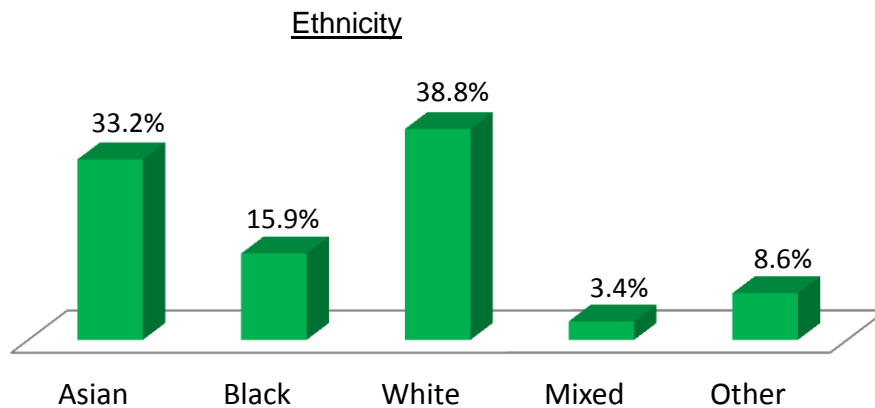




## Ethnicity

Over two thirds of the sample classified themselves as belonging to two Ethnic groups: Asian and White (see figure 8).

Figure 8



When Ethnic groups were examined on a generational basis, there were more first generation Asian respondents than second generation (see table 8). Of those who classified themselves as White, there were more second than first generation respondents.

Table 8

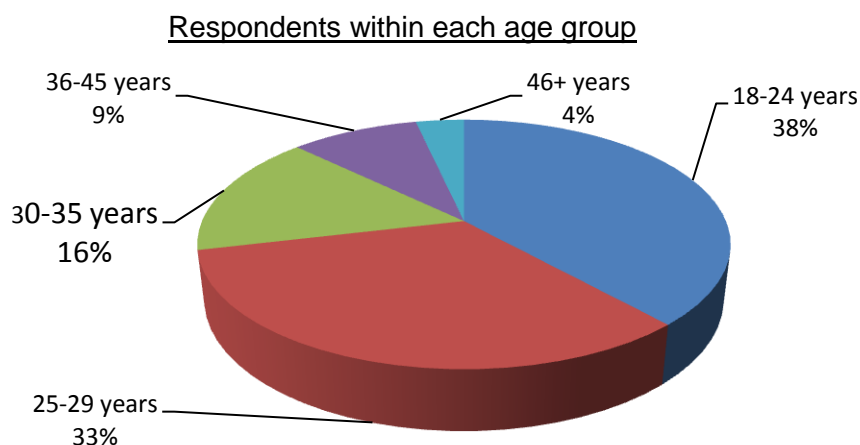
Generational and ethnicity relationship

	First generation	Second generation
<b>Asian</b>	<b>40.4% (44)</b>	<b>27.6% (34)</b>
Black	13.8% (15)	17.9% (22)
<b>White</b>	<b>33.8% (37)</b>	<b>42.3% (52)</b>
Mixed	2.8% (3)	4.1% (5)
Other	9.2% (10)	8.1% (10)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (109)</b>	<b>100% (123)</b>

## Age

Within the sample, there were respondents within each age category. The age groups where respondents were mostly clustered were in the 18-24 and 25-29 age categories (see figure 9).

Figure 9



When the age of the respondents was examined, there were noticeably more second generation respondents in the 18-24 year old age group than first generation but slightly more first generation respondents than second in the 30-35 year old age group (see table 9).

Table 9 Age groupings

<b>Age</b>	<b>First generation</b>	<b>Second generation</b>
18-24	33.0% (35)	43.3% (52)
25-29	34.9% (37)	30.8% (37)
30-35	18.9% (20)	13.3% (16)
36-45	8.5% (9)	10.0% (12)
46+	4.7% (5)	2.5% (3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (106)</b>	<b>100% (120)</b>

When age and ethnicity is examined, respondents who classified themselves as Asian or White were significantly more likely to be in the age range of 18-29 with 74.1% (57) and 81.6% (72) respectively. For Black respondents this figure was 48.6% (17), for Mixed, 62.5 % (5) and for Other 60% (12).

## Examination of interactions between variables

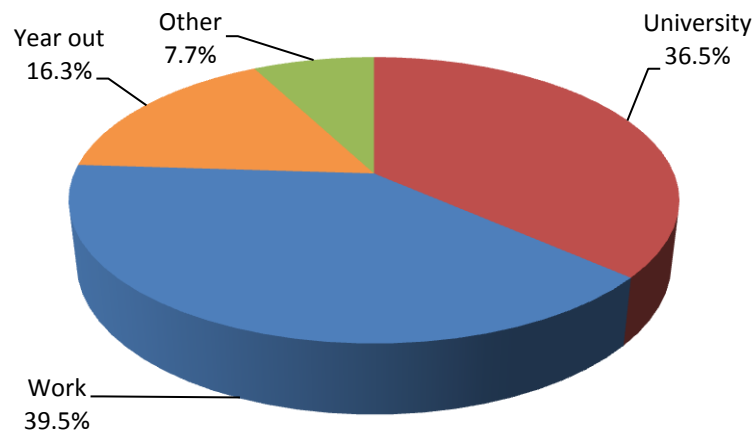
### Starting university

#### 1. Entry route into PGT study

Of the sample, 39.5% (92) of the respondents were coming '*straight from work*' into study, 36.5% (85) '*straight from university*', 16.3% (38) from having '*taken a year out*' and 7.7% (18) who classified themselves as '*other*' (see figure 10).

Figure 10

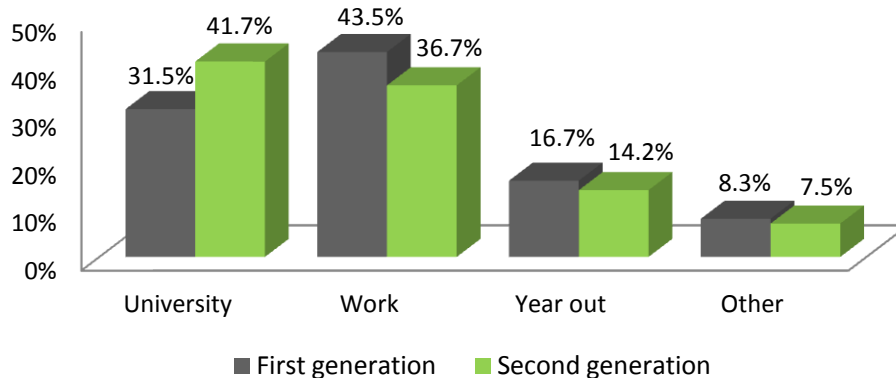
Entry route into PGT study



First generation respondents accounted for 46.9% (109) of the sample and second generation for 53.1% (123). There was little generational difference between those entering PGT study from the '*year out*' and '*other*' categories (figure 11). However, amongst the first generation respondents, those coming from '*work*' accounted for the largest number with 43.5% (47) whereas for second generation respondents it was from '*university*' with 41.7% (50).

Figure 11

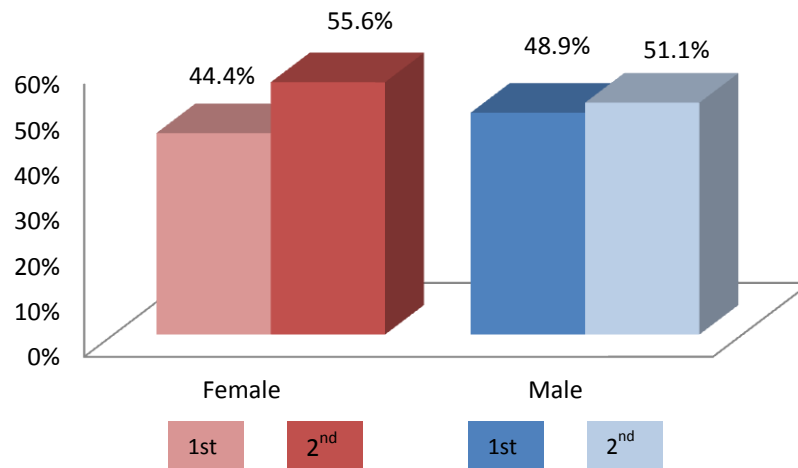
Generational entry route



When gender was analysed with generational status, within the female sample, first generation participation was 44.4% (44) compared to 55.6% (55) for second generation females (see figure 12). Amongst males only, 48.9% (65) were first generation students and 51.1% (68) were second generation. For both males and females, there were more second generation respondents than those who classified themselves as first generation.

**Figure 12**

**Generational status and gender**



## **2. What are your reasons for undertaking a Postgraduate qualification?**

Respondents were asked to cite their top three reasons for undertaking a postgraduate taught qualification. Respondents were given 11 options from which to select including an ‘other’ category. The most popular response cited was to ‘*improve their knowledge of their subject*’ with 68.7% (160). The second most cited reason with 55.2% (111) was to provide ‘*more career options*’ and joint third with 26.5% (43) was to ‘*improve their chances of getting a graduate job*’ and ‘*required for chosen career*’.

There were no significant differences between the variables when looking at the top three reasons for undertaking PGT study and the responses reflect the sample findings. Table 10 below shows the top 3 reasons cited by respondents.

Table 10

Top three reasons for undertaking PGT level study

Primary reason	Reason 1	Reason 2	Reason 3
<b>Improve knowledge of subject</b>	<b>68.7% (160)</b>	1% (2)	-
<b>Provides more career options</b>	21.5% (50)	<b>55.2% (111)</b>	0.6% (1)
<b>Improve chances of getting a graduate job</b>	3.4% (8)	20.8% (42)	<b>26.5% (43)</b>
Delay going into the job market	1.7% (4)	1% (2)	5.6% (9)
Desire to remain in HE	0.9% (2)	7% (14)	12.3% (20)
<b>Required for career</b>	2.6% (6)	3% (6)	<b>26.5% (43)</b>
Encouraged by university staff	0.4% (1)	-	0.6% (1)
Family expectation	0.8 (2)	5% (10)	3.1% (5)
For the enjoyment of studying	-	3.5% (7)	11.7% (19)
Gain exposure to the research environment	-	3.5 (7)%	12.3% (20)
Other	-	-	0.8% (2)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (233)</b>	<b>100% (201)</b>	<b>100% (163)</b>

### 3. What was important to you when choosing a University for your postgraduate study?

Respondents were asked to state what had been important to them when choosing at which university to undertake a postgraduate taught degree. For the sample, 'course content' was the primary reason cited with 70.1% (164). The second reason with 33.5% (73) was the 'cost of fees' and the third reason, the 'university teaching reputation' with 24.9% (51).

The 'university's research reputation' was not a significant factor for the PGT sample even when examined on a school basis, although in two schools it held more importance than in the others (see tables 11 and 12).

Table 11

Primary reason for choosing a university at which to study PGT

School code	A&A	CE&C	CISM	GGE	LS	M&AE	P&C
<b>Course content</b>	<b>84.6% (11)</b>	<b>50% (12)</b>	<b>82% (41)</b>	<b>86.7% (26)</b>	<b>69.2% (27)</b>	<b>76.5% (13)</b>	<b>57.4% (31)</b>
University research reputation	-	-	6% (3)	3.3% (1)	7.7% (3)	11.8% (2)	5.6% (3)
Cost of fees	7.7% (1)	8.3% (2)	8% (4)	6.7% (2)	15.4% (6)	-	3.7% (2)
University teaching reputation	-	16.7% (4)	-	3.3% (1)	-	-	9.3% (5)

A&A=Aerospace and Aircraft; CE&E = Civil Engineering and Construction; CISM= Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics; GGE= Geography, Geology and the Environment; LS= Life Sciences; M&AE= Mechanical and Automotive Engineering; P&C= Pharmacy and Chemistry

**Table 12** Second reason for choosing a university at which to study PGT

School code	A&A	CE&C	CISM	GGE	LS	M&AE	P&C
Course content	-	26.1% (6)	8.5% (4)	4% (1)	7.9% (3)	12.5% (2)	13.5% (7)
University research reputation	<b>25% (3)</b>	13% (3)	10.6% (5)	12% (3)	13.2% (5)	<b>31.3% (5)</b>	17.3% (9)
Cost of fees	<b>25% (3)</b>	<b>21.7% (5)</b>	<b>53.2% (25)</b>	<b>32% (8)</b>	<b>47.4% (18)</b>	<b>18.8% (3)</b>	<b>21.2% (11)</b>
University teaching reputation	16.7(2)	30.4% (7)	14.9% (7)	24% (6)	23.7% (9)	18.8% (3)	28.8% (15)

A&A=Aerospace and Aircraft; CE&E = Civil Engineering and Construction; CISM= Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics; GGE= Geography, Geology and the Environment; LS= Life Sciences; M&AE= Mechanical and Automotive Engineering; P&C= Pharmacy and Chemistry

There were no dramatic generational or gender differences. However, when the reasons for choosing a university are examined by domiciled status, some interesting findings arise. Although the reasons cited are the same as for the whole sample, course content is noticeably more important to those who declared themselves as EU or Non-EU domiciled compared to UK domiciled respondents (see table 13).

**Table 13** Primary reason choosing a university at which to study PGT

Reason 1	UK domiciled	EU domiciled	Non-EU domiciled
<b>Course content</b>	<b>57.4% (62)</b>	<b>86.9% (33)</b>	<b>79.2% (61)</b>
University research reputation	6.5% (7)	2.6% (1)	5.2% (4)
Cost of fees	10.2% (11)	5.3% (2)	3.9% (3)
University teaching reputation	7.4% (8)	-	3.9% (3)
Campus facilities	2.8% (3)	-	1.3% (1)
Where I studied as an UG	2.8% (3)	-	1.3% (1)
My home town university	6.5% (7)	2.6% (1)	3.9% (3)
Reputation for social life	1.9% (2)	-	-
Student grant/scholarship available	0.9% (1)	-	-
Other	3.6% (4)	2.6% (1)	1.3% (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (108)</b>	<b>100% (38)</b>	<b>100% (77)</b>

The cost of fees was the second cited reason by all domiciled groups, but they were noticeably more important for the EU respondents than those classified as UK or Non-EU (see table 14).

Table 14

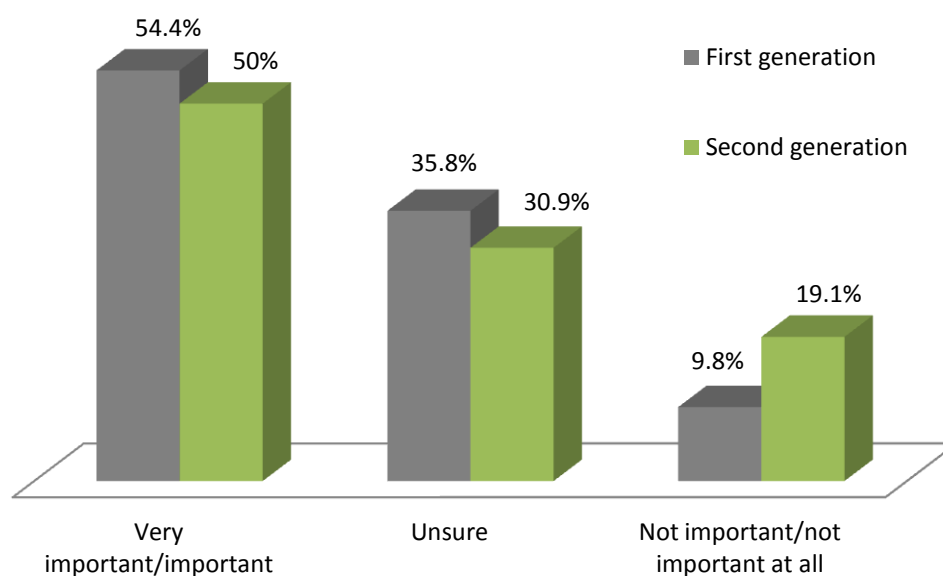
Second reason choosing a university at which to study PGT

Reason 2	UK domiciled	EU domiciled	Non-EU domiciled
Course content	16.5% (17)	-	8.7% (6)
University research reputation	12.6% (13)	16.2% (6)	18.8% (13)
<b>Cost of fees</b>	<b>33% (34)</b>	<b>48.6% (18)</b>	<b>29% (20)</b>
University teaching reputation	20.4% (21)	16.2% (6)	29% (20)
Campus facilities	3.9% (4)	8.1% (3)	2.9% (2)
Where I studied as an UG	4.9% (5)	2.7% (1)	1.4% (1)
My home town university	5.8% (6)	2.7% (1)	2.9% (2)
Reputation for social life	-	5.4% (2)	-
Student grant/scholarship available	1% (1)	-	2.9% (2)
Other	1.9% (2)	-	4.3% (3)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (108)</b>	<b>100% (38)</b>	<b>100% (77)</b>

**4. How important were the fee levels in making your postgraduate course choice?**

Respondents were asked to state how important the levels of fees were in their decision making process. Of the sample, 52.3% (114) stated that the fee levels were '*very important*' or '*important*' with 33.5% (73) being '*unsure*'. There was little difference between the generational groups, but fee levels '*not being important*' or '*not important at all*' was more prevalent amongst the second generation respondents (see figure 13).

Figure 13

Importance of fees

## 5. How are you funding your postgraduate studies?

The respondents were asked to provide their top 3 methods of how they were funding their postgraduate studies. Of the sample, 41.2% (96) stated that their *'parents'* were their primary source in helping them fund their studies (see table 15). The second most cited method was *'savings'* with 31.7% (38) followed in third place by *'salary'* with 23.4% (18).

Table 15 The top three funding methods

Method	Primary	Secondary	Third
Overdraft	3% (7)	10% (12)	6.5% (5)
Loan	13.3% (31)	15.0% (18)	6.5% (5)
<b>Parents/guardians</b>	<b>41.2% (96)</b>	9.2% (11)	18.2% (14)
<b>Salary</b>	12.4% (29)	12.5% (15)	<b>23.4% (18)</b>
Spouse/partner	6.9% (16)	15% (18)	7.8% (6)
<b>Savings</b>	15% (35)	<b>31.7% (16)</b>	22.1% (17)
University scholarship	1.3% (3)	4.2% (5)	7.8% (6)
Employer	0.9% (2)	2.5% (3)	2.6% (2)
Sponsorship	3.9% (9)	-	3.9% (3)
Other	2.1% (1)	-	1.3% (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (233)</b>	<b>100% (120)</b>	<b>100% (77)</b>

It is intuitive to assume that those coming straight from *'university'* would likely be the ones receiving assistance from parents and this assumption is reflected in the sample findings. Of the respondents who stated that their parents were helping them fund their studies, 53.7% (51) were coming *'straight from university'*. However, 25.3% (24) who were coming *'straight from work'* and 13.7% (13) who were coming from a *'year out'* also stated that they were receiving parental support.

When the age of the respondent, and how they were funding their PGT study was examined, a significant pattern emerged. The younger the student, the more likely they were to receive parental help.

However, the dataset illustrates that financial assistance was not restricted to these age groups, but continued through the different age groups although it did decrease in percentage within each group (see table 16). It is an important finding that a quarter of all 30-35 year olds were in fact relying on parental support to fund their PGT study.



**Table 16** Parental assistance as primary source of funding by age group

<b>Age group</b>	<b>Primary source within each age group</b>
18-24	60.5% (52)
25-29	44.6% (33)
30-35	22.9% (8)
36-45	4.8% (1)
46+	12.5% (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (95)</b>

When the relationship between generational status and the funding of PGT study was examined, another interesting finding appeared. A noticeably higher percentage of second generation respondents than first generation were receiving support from parents (see table 17).

**Table 17** Primary method of funding fees

<b>Primary method</b>	<b>First Generation</b>	<b>Second Generation</b>
Overdraft	4.6% (5)	1.7% (2)
Loan	12.0% (13)	15.0% (18)
<b>Parents/guardians</b>	<b>35.2% (38)</b>	<b>47.5% (57)</b>
Salary	13.0% (14)	11.7% (14)
Spouse/partner	10.2% (11)	4.2% (5)
Savings	16.7% (18)	13.3% (16)
University scholarship	0.9% (1)	1.7% (2)
Employer	-	1.7% (2)
Sponsorship	4.6% (5)	1.7% (2)
Other	2.8% (3)	0.8% (1)
<b>Total</b>	<b>100% (108)</b>	<b>100% (109)</b>

When gender, generational status and funding method were examined, the picture is further complicated. Within the first generation sample, 41.9% (18) of females stated that they were getting help with funding from parents compared to 30.8% (20) of first generation males.

Within the second generation sample, the parental help provided to females was similar to first generation females with 40.7% (22). However, parental contribution for second generation males was substantially higher than first generation males with 53% (35). Parental funding for females regardless of generation status appeared to be similar. However, for males, a second generation student was more likely to receive parental funding than their first generation counterparts.

In terms of domiciled status, respondents who declared themselves as EU or Non-EU domiciled were noticeably more likely to receive parental assistance with funding for PGT level study. For UK domiciled respondents it was 33.6% (36), for EU domiciled 55.3% (21) and for Non-EU it was 48.1% (37). There were no significant differences between the ethnic groups in terms of parental funding.

#### **6. Do you intend undertaking paid work during your postgraduate studies and what will the mode be?**

Respondents were asked to state whether they intended undertaking paid work during their studies. There were no dramatic generational or gender differences when examining the respondents' intention to work during their studies (see table 18). Of the sample, 55.2% (128) intended '*working throughout the year*' with 82.1% (138) stating that it would be on a part-time basis. Of the sample, 17.9% (30) intended working fulltime, but many of these respondents were studying part-time and working full-time.

Table 18

Mode of work

<b>Work mode</b>	<b>Responses</b>
Not at all	29.3% (68)
Only during term time	7.3% (17)
Only during vacations	8.2% (19)
Throughout the year	55.2% (128)

For those who stated that they '*did not intend working at all*', 32.9%(25) classified themselves as Non-EU domiciled which is a category that has have work restrictions, 47.4% (18) as EU and 19.6% (21) as UK domiciled. There was no relationship between intention to work and age.

## **Postgraduate Study Expectations**

### **7. Quality of study**

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they ‘agreed’ or ‘disagreed’ with a range of statements to determine whether they viewed postgraduate study differently compared to undergraduate (see table 19). In table 19, the ‘strongly agreed’ and ‘agreed’ responses have been combined. Of the sample, 90.1% (209) ‘strongly agreed/agreed’ that they expected a higher quality of delivery and service at PGT level than at undergraduate and 21.6% (50) did not know what to expect.

**Table 19** Quality of Study statements

Quality statements	Strongly agree/agree		
	First generation	Second generation	Sample responses
<b><i>My expectations in terms of the quality of delivery and service at postgraduate level will be higher than at undergraduate level</i></b>	94.5% (102)	85.7% (102)	<b>90.1% (209)</b>
<b><i>Should be treated in a manner that Reflects my academic achievement</i></b>	<b>71.1% (76)</b>	<b>59.3% (70)</b>	<b>64.4% (148)</b>
I expect to learn in a more independent manner	77.6% (83)	77.3% (92)	76.2% (94)
I will be less tolerant of poor quality learning and teaching at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level	65.7% (69)	64.4% (76)	64.5% (147)
<b><i>I expect more value for money at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level</i></b>	<b>74.1% (80)</b>	<b>68.9% (82)</b>	<b>70.7% (164)</b>
I expect a more individualised study experience at postgraduate level	86.0% (92)	79.8% (95)	83.1% (192)
I do not know what to expect when studying at postgraduate level	21.3% (23)	21.2% (25)	21.6% (50)

First generation students had higher expectations in terms of the quality of learning and teaching they expected, how they felt they should be treated and in receiving value for money at PGT level in comparison to the second generation respondents.

When gender and statement responses were analysed, there were only two statements where there were noticeable differences. Of the male respondents, 75.9% (114) ‘strongly agreed/agreed’ with the statement that they ‘expected a higher delivery and service’ compared

to 93.8% of all women (91). In the female sample, 58.1% (54) '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they would be '*less tolerant of poor quality L&T at PGT level*' compared to 69.4% (91) of men.

When the statements were examined by domiciled status, other interesting findings arose. Of all UK domiciled respondents, 86.7% (91) '*strongly agreed/agree*' that they '*expected to learn in a more independent way*' compared to 65.8% (25) of all of EU domiciled and 68.9% (53) of Non-EU domiciled respondents. Of all UK domiciled respondents, 74% '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they would '*not tolerate poor quality L&T compared*' to 54.9% (22) of EU domiciled and 57.4% (46) of Non UK-EU domiciled respondents. It appears that UK domiciled respondents were more likely to '*know what to expect at PGT level*' with only 15.1% (16) '*strongly agreeing/agreeing*' with the statement that they '*do not know what to expect*' compared to 29% (11) for EU domiciled and 27.6% of Non-EU domiciled respondents.

When the dataset was examined within each age group, the '*strongly agreed/agree*' responses appeared to increase with age. This was noticeable in statements relating to '*service delivery*' and '*value for money*' (see table 19).

**Table 20** Age and quality of statements

	18-24	25-29	30-35	36-45	46+
Expectations of service delivery will be higher at PG level than UG level	87.1% (75)	89.2% (66)	94.3% (33)	95.0% (19)	87.5% (7)
I expect more value for money at PG level than UG	70.9% (61)	68.9% (51)	71.5% (25)	80.0% (16)	87.5% (7)

Regardless of age, domiciled status and gender, a substantial number of respondents did not appear to fully understand what to expect at PGT level:

- significantly less men than women '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they expected to get a higher quality of delivery and service;
- more men than women '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they would be less tolerant of poor quality L&T at PGT level;
- respondents domiciled in the UK were significantly less likely to tolerate poor quality L&T compared to EU and Non-EU respondents;
- respondents domiciled in the UK were more likely to know what to expect at PGT level than those classified as EU and Non-EU.

## **Your previous learning experiences**

### **8. Briefly state what you understand by the term feedback**

Respondents were asked what they understood by the term '*feedback*'. Generally, most of the respondents, regardless of domiciled status, appeared to understand what the term feedback meant. Only a small handful provided confusing answers and of these, there was no correlation between the responses given and domiciled status (i.e. not understanding the question).

### **9. In your previous studies, how did you receive your feedback for any of the work you submitted and which did you prefer?**

'*Paper feedback*' was cited as the most common method of providing feedback in the respondents' previous studies with 77.1% (182). The second most cited method was '*face to face feedback*' with 71.3% (77) and third, '*email*' with 28.4% (67). Second generation respondents reported a higher level of receiving feedback via '*email*' and the '*intranet*' than those classified as first generation.

There were no generational differences in terms of previous feedback preference. The method preferred by the majority of the sample was '*face to face*' feedback followed by '*paper*'. The only gender difference in terms of feedback preference was with '*intranet feedback*' where 22.1% (25) of males cited it as their preferred method compared to 16.1% (14) of females.

### **10. In your previous institution of study, did you ever approach a tutor to discuss the feedback given to you about your work?**

Respondents were asked to state if they had ever approached a tutor in their previous institution of study to discuss the feedback they had been given. Of the sample, 73.1% (171) stated that they had but 26.9% (62). There were no significant generational, domiciled status or gender differences when examining who approached a tutor to discuss feedback in their previous study. The responses indicated that women were slightly more likely to approach a tutor to discuss feedback than males (see table 21).

**Table 21**                      **Approaching a tutor to discuss feedback**

Male		Female		Sample responses	
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
71.2% (94)	28.8% (38)	76.3% (74)	23.7% (23)	80.0% (68)	20.0% (17)

**11. If yes, under what circumstances did you approach your lecturer to discuss feedback?**

Respondents were asked to state under what circumstances they had approached their lecturer to discuss feedback in their previous studies. Where there were generational or gender differences, these are highlighted below. There were no domiciled differences. The findings below highlight that in the respondents' previous studies, a significant proportion did not appear to seek assistance when they received feedback, even when they failed.

*I passed but was dissatisfied with my grade*

Of the sample who responded to this statement (147), 41.5% (61) '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they had approached their tutor because, even though they had passed, they were dissatisfied with their grade.

*I passed but wished to improve my grade*

Of the sample who responded to this statement (153), 72.5% (111) '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they had approached their tutor even though they had passed as they had wanted to improve their grade. For first generation respondents, this figure is 75.7% (53) compared to 70.1% (56) of second generation respondents.

*I failed and did not understand the content of the feedback*

Of the sample who responded to this statement (136), 26.5% (39) '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that they had approached their tutor as they had failed and did not understand the feedback. For first generation respondents, this figure was 21% (13) compared to 30.6% (22) for second generation respondents.

*I failed and did not understand why*

Of the sample who responded to this statement (141), 27.7% (39) '*strongly agreed/agreed*' that if they failed, and did not understand why, they approached a tutor to discuss the feedback. For first generation respondents this figure is 21.9% (14) and for second, 31.1% (23).

Only one gender difference was highlighted by the respondents and this related to wanting clarification on their feedback. Of all female respondents, 71.2% (47) compared to 57.5% (50) of males, stated that they did seek feedback even though they had passed because they wanted clarification.

## 12. If no, why did you decide not to approach your tutor?

The reasons cited by the respondents for not approaching their tutor included: embarrassment (26% 16); they got the grade they expected (45.9% 32); they did not think about asking for feedback (18.3% 21). Only 5.2% (3) of the sample stated that they did not approach their tutor because they '*did not agree with the feedback*'. Of the first generation respondents, 29.6% (8) stated that they did not approach their tutor because they were '*too embarrassed*' to ask. This figure was slightly lower for second generation respondents with 25.9% (8).

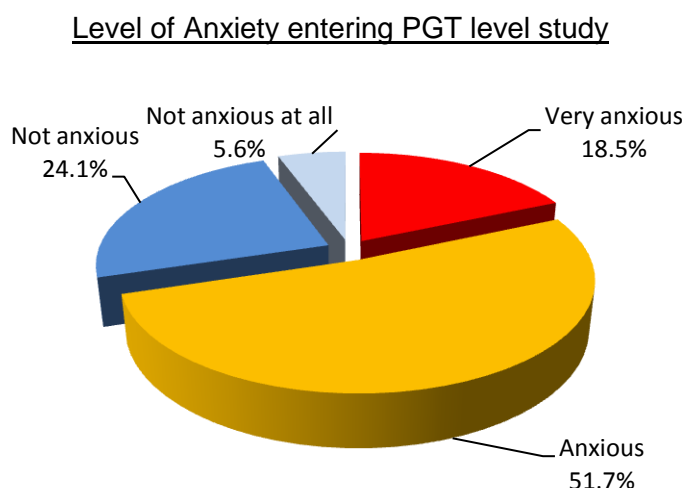
There was a noticeable generational difference in asking for feedback if the respondent '*received the grade they expected*'. Of all first generation students, 85.2% (23) stated that they did not approach their tutor if they received the grade they expected, compared to only 53.1% (17) of second generation respondents.

Of the first generation respondents who answered this question, 25.9% (7) stated that they did not approach their tutor as they '*did not think of asking for feedback on the feedback*'. The figure for second generation respondents was higher with 45.2% (14).

## 13. How anxious overall are you entering University as a postgraduate student?

Respondents were asked to rate their overall anxiety level in starting PGT study. The anxiety level for the sample was quite high with 70.2% (163) stating that they were '*anxious*' or '*very anxious*' (see figure 14).

Figure 14



When the dataset was analysed on a school basis, Civil Engineering and Construction respondents were the least anxious with 54.2% (13) stating that they are '*anxious*' or '*very anxious*'. The highest levels of anxiety were amongst the respondents from Pharmacy and Chemistry with 79.6% being '*anxious*' or '*very anxious*'. The other schools ranged between 59-

77%. There were no generational differences in terms of anxiety levels but there were gender and entry route differences. Of the female respondents, 78.6% (77) stated that they were 'very *anxious*' or '*anxious*' compared to 63% of males (82).

Of the respondents coming '*straight from university*' into PGT study, 64.2% (54) stated that they were '*very anxious/anxious*'. Anxiety levels were highest amongst those who classified themselves in the '*other*' category with 82.4% (14). Of those coming '*straight from work*', 72.9% (67) stated that they were '*anxious*' or '*very anxious*' and for those who had taken a '*year out*', it was 71.1% (27).

#### 14. Attitudes towards coping with different aspects of PGT level study

Respondents were asked to rate how they felt about a number of aspects regarding starting university at PGT level study (see table 22). In this question, the '*not anxious*' option was removed and replaced with '*slightly anxious*' in order to ascertain more accurately the respondents' level of anxiety.

The '*anxious and very anxious*' responses are the most critical responses. When these are combined, coping with the '*standard of work*' was the primary concern of the respondents. However, 28.5% (61) of all respondents were concerned about '*coping with the travelling to university*' and 39.7% (85) '*managing their money*'. These two aspects are commonly cited in explaining student withdrawal at undergraduate level.

**Table 22**      **Level of anxiety for aspects of PGT level study**

	<b>Not anxious at all</b>	<b>Slightly anxious</b>	<b>Anxious</b>	<b>Very Anxious</b>
Coping with the standard of work	9.3% (20)	37.0% (80)	39.8% (86)	13.9% (30)
Getting involved in Uni life	53.1% (45)	22.1% (47)	21.1% (45)	3.8% (8)
Making friends	54.2% (115)	19.3% (41)	20.8% (44)	5.7% (12)
Managing my money	33.6% (72)	26.6% (57)	25.2% (54)	14.5% (31)
Finding accommodation	75.2% (158)	3.8% (8)	12.9% (27)	8.1% (17)
Looking after myself	70.8% (150)	12.7% (27)	13.7% (29)	2.8% (6)
Coping with the travelling to university	54.7% (117)	16.8% (36)	21.5% (46)	7.0% (15)

There were no generational differences when combining the '*anxious and very anxious*' responses, but there were gender differences. These are highlighted in Table 23 below.



The female responses suggest that they were more concerned about '*coping with the standard of work*', '*getting involved in university life*' and '*managing money*' than males. Males cited being more concerned about '*looking after themselves*' than females.

**Table 23** Anxious and very anxious gender responses

	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
<b><i>Coping with the standard of work</i></b>	41.8% (51)	<b>62.2% (56)</b>
<b><i>Getting involved in Uni life</i></b>	21.6% (26)	<b>32.6% (29)</b>
Managing my money	39.4% (48)	43.1% (38)
Managing my money	39.4% (48)	43.1% (38)
<b><i>Looking after myself</i></b>	<b>17.3% (21)</b>	12.6% (11)

The domiciled status respondents' anxiety differences are highlighted in Table 24. The EU and Non-EU domiciled respondents did not report any higher levels of anxiety regarding '*coping with the standard of work*' or '*travelling to University*' than UK domiciled respondents. Anxiety levels relating to non-academic issues such as '*making friends*', '*finding accommodation*' and '*getting involved in university life*' for EU and Non-EU respondents were noticeably higher though than for UK domiciled respondents.

**Table 24** Anxious and very anxious domiciled responses

	<b>UK domiciled</b>	<b>EU domiciled</b>	<b>Non-EU domiciled</b>
Getting involved in Uni life	16.1% (16)	34.3% (12)	38.3% (28)
Making friends	19.2% (19)	29.4% (10)	35.3% (24)
Managing my money	32.3% (32)	51.5% (18)	46.3% (40)
Finding accommodation	3.1%	21.1% (7)	20.6% (14)
Looking after myself	11.2% (11)	25.8% (9)	17.3% (12)

## **15. Specific help or information to assist in PGT studies**

The respondents were asked to suggest what specific help or information would help reduce their anxieties in their studies. The respondents' suggestions fell into four broad themes: learning and teaching, communication, information and support with learning and teaching being the most populated theme.

### *Learning and teaching*

Good lecturers

Access to all lecture notes and slides

Access to published journals

Copies of lecture notes  
Availability to lecturers  
Face to face time with lecturers  
Face to face feedback  
Full reading list  
Module information before the course starts  
Good supervisor for the project  
Completion of coursework feedback in a timely manner  
Hard copy lecture notes  
Get study information well in advance of starting  
Short tests to show development and progress  
Study skill advice and support

*Communication*

Clear communication from all staff  
Friendly atmosphere  
Being informed about expectations  
Assignment requirements

*Information*

Direction on where to find any information  
Information earlier on all aspects of study  
Information on how the academic year works

*Support*

Advice on what support is available  
Good one to one support  
Support on how to study in a different language  
Assistance in finding work during studies and after  
Help with language support

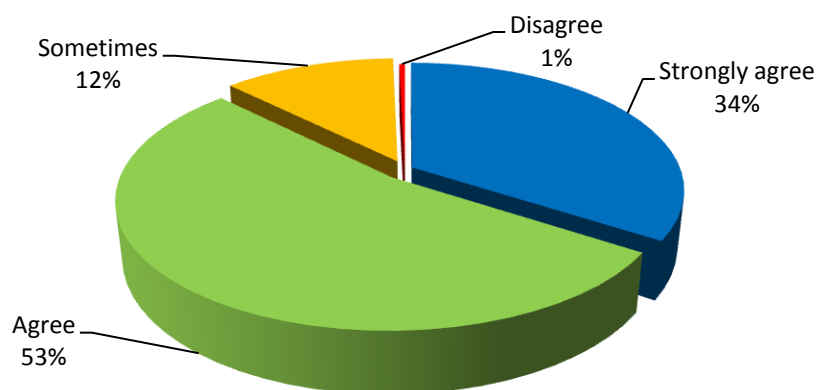
## Current learning expectations

### 16. Awareness of when feedback is being given

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of when feedback was being provided. Of the sample, 87.4% (198) stated that they felt they were *'aware'* when feedback was being given. Less than 4% (5) stated that they *'did not feel the need'* to read feedback (see figure 15). Of the respondents, 96% stated that they would use to the feedback at PGT level to help them in other assignments.

Figure 15

Awareness of when feedback is being given



### 17. Preferred feedback method at PGT level

For each feedback method, respondents were asked to rate their preference by selecting either *'most preferred method'*, *'an acceptable method'* or *'least preferred method'*. The findings in Table 25 cite the *'most acceptable method'* provided by the respondents. For the sample, *'face to face'* was the most popular method followed by *'paper'* then *'email'*. *'Audio'* was the least most preferred method.

Table 25

Feedback preference at PGT level study

Method	Most preferred method
Paper	45.9% (100)
Email	42.4% (92)
Intranet	19.4% (39)
Audio	3.4% (7)
Face to Face	66.7% (148)

When the data was analysed on a gender and generational basis, there are a number of findings worth noting (see table 26). *'Face to face'* feedback was the most popular method for first generation male and females and second generation males, but not for second generation females. *'Paper'* feedback was the lowest *'most preferred'* preference of second generation males.

**Table 26** Feedback preference at PGT level study by generational and gender status

	Male		Female	
	First generation	Second generation	First generation	Second generation
Paper	50.8% (30)	34.8% (23)	47.4% (18)	50.9% (27)
Email	44.3% (27)	39.3% (24)	35.9% (14)	50.0% (27)
Intranet	23.2% (13)	21.1% (12)	13.9% (5)	18% (9)
Audio	6.7% (4)	1.7% (1)	-	4.1% (2)
<b>Face to Face</b>	<b>75.0% (48)</b>	<b>73.8% (13)</b>	<b>68.3% (28)</b>	<b>48.1% (26)</b>

Although the figures are small, there are some differences between respondent's feedback preference and the school within which they were studying (see table 27). More respondents' in the School of CISM preferred *'intranet feedback'* and in the School of M&A, *'face to face'* feedback was a noticeably more preferred method compared to other schools.

**Table 27** Most preferred method of feedback by school

	A+A	CE&C	CISM	GGE	LS	M&A	P&C
Paper	36.4% (4)	52.2% (12)	49.2% (21)	50.0% (14)	55.3% (21)	43.8% (7)	40.8% (20)
Email	58.3% (7)	28.6% (6)	45.8% (22)	27.6% (8)	36.1% (13)	60.0% (9)	50.0% (26)
Intranet	27.3% (3)	14.3% (3)	30.2% (13)	7.1% (2)	24.2% (2)	25.0% (4)	13.3% (6)
Audio	-	10.0% (1)	-	3.6% (1)	5.7% (2)	6.3% (1)	2.2% (1)
Face to face	69.2% (9)	68.2% (15)	68.8% (33)	63.3% (19)	56.4% (22)	87.5% (14)	66.0% (33)

A+A= Aerospace and Aircraft; CE&C=Civil Engineering and Construction; CISM=Computing Information Systems and Mathematics; GGE= Geography, Geology and the Environment; LS= Life Sciences; M&A= Mechanical and Automotive Engineering; P&C= Pharmacy and Chemistry.

When the feedback preference was examined on whether a respondent had come *'straight from work'*, *'university'*, *'other'* or *'year out'*, there was little difference in terms of feedback preference, apart from the use of the *'intranet'* where 23.3% (17) of those *'coming straight from*

*university*’ stated that this was their most preferred method of receiving feedback compared to 12.2% (10) coming from *‘work into study’*.

### 18. Expectation of receiving feedback after handing in an assignment

The respondents were asked when they expected to receive feedback after handing in an assignment. Of the sample, 80.7% (188) stated they expected to get their feedback *‘within 2 weeks’* of handing in their assignment, 18.9% (44) *‘within 4 weeks’* and 0.4% (1) *‘within 6 weeks’* (see table 28). It is important to note that a substantial percentage of the sample are undertaking courses where modules were delivered in a 1 week block style which may have influenced the responses. Alternatively, they may have been aware of the university’s feedback policy of feedback within 3 weeks of submission.

**Table 28**                      Generational attitude towards the return of written feedback

	<b>First generation</b>	<b>Second generation</b>
Within 2 weeks	77.8% (84)	83.7% (103)
Within 4 weeks	22.2% (24)	15.4% (19)
Within 6 weeks	-	0.8% (1)

### 19. Expected contact hours (face to face) with tutors

The respondents were asked to state how many contact hours they expected to have each week. Of the sample, 42.9% (100) were unsure and when this was examined on a generational basis, the percentage for first and second generation respondents was 46.3% (50) of first and 39.0% (48) respectively. Non-EU students expected less contact time a week than UK and EU students, age, and gender did not impact on expectation.

### 20. Expected hours of independently study

When respondents were asked about engagement in independent study, the majority of respondents expected to undertake more than 10 hours of independent study each week (see table 29). UK respondents significantly expected to undertake more independent study than those who were EU and Non-EU. Age and gender did not impact on the responses.

**Table 29**                      Expectation of independent study hours

Amount of time	Percentage of sample
5-10 hours	9.4% (22)
11-20 hours	39.5% (92)
21 plus	34.8% (81)
Not sure	16.3% (38)

## 21. Perceived study strengths of respondents

Respondents were asked to rate their skills in terms of ‘*very strong*’, ‘*strong*’, ‘*weak*’ or ‘*very weak*’. For the sample, the majority of respondents stated that their skills were ‘*strong*’. When the data is examined, the generational, gender, domiciled status and discipline variables provide interesting patterns.

### *First and second generation and gender*

When the ‘*very strong*’ and ‘*strong*’ responses were examined on a generational basis, significantly more second generation respondents felt that their skill base was ‘*strong*’ or ‘*very strong*’ compared to those who were first generation (see table 30). Only in the ‘*quick assimilation of ideas*’ and ‘*study skill*’ statements are first generation responses higher.

**Table 30**      Generational ‘very strong’ and ‘strong’ responses for skills

	<b>First generation</b>	<b>Second generation</b>	<b>Sample responses</b>
Quick assimilation of ideas	83.0% (98)	71.9% (104)	83.8% (192)
Ability to organise my study independently	58.9% (94)	81.7% (98)	84.3% (193)
My study skills	76.2% (90)	66.7% (94)	81.9% (186)
Knowledge of subject studying at University	65.1% (82)	84.0% (100)	80.6% (183)
Literacy skills	58.9% (79)	75.2% (91)	73.9% (170)
Numeracy skills	58.9% (87)	86.0% (104)	83.9% (193)

However, when the data was examined by first generation and gender status, and only the ‘*very strong*’ responses were considered, a number of interesting findings emerged (see table 31).

- First generation respondents were generally less likely to say their skills are ‘*very strong*’ compared to second generation respondents;
- Women, regardless of generation status, were less likely to say their skills are ‘*very strong*’ compared to men;
- The areas where women said they had ‘*very strong*’ skills, and that were higher than males, were in ‘*study skills*’ and ‘*ability to organise*’;
- Second generation women appeared more confident than first generation women in terms of the strength of their ‘*knowledge*’ and ‘*assimilation of ideas*’.

**Table 31**                      Generational and gender ‘very strong’ responses for skills

	First generation		Second generation	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Quick assimilation of ideas	25.0% (10)	7.0% (3)	16.4% (11)	11.1% (6)
Ability to organise my study independently	32.8% (21)	23.3% (10)	19.4% (13)	26.4% (14)
My study skills	12.7% (8)	4.8% (2)	9.1% (6)	14.8% (8)
Knowledge of subject studying at University	15.9% (10)	7.0% (3)	20.9% (14)	13.5% (7)
Literacy skills	17.2% (11)	11.6% (3)	23.9% (16)	25.9% (14)
Numeracy skills	26.6% (17)	16.3% (7)	31.3% (21)	20.4% (11)

When the data was examined by domiciled status, literacy, numerical skills and the ability to organise study independent study were cited the highest as being ‘*very strong*’ by the respondents (see table 32).

**Table 32**                      Domiciled very strong’ responses for skills

	UK Domiciled	EU Domiciled	Non-EU Domiciled	Sample responses
Quick assimilation of ideas	15.9% (17)	15.8% (6)	16.7% (13)	15.7% (36)
Ability to organise my study independently	29.6% (32)	23.7% (9)	21.8% (17)	25.8% (59)
My study skills	8.5% (9)	7.9% (3)	14.3% (11)	10.6% (24)
Knowledge of subject studying at University	14.2% (15)	23.7% (9)	11.7% (9)	15% (34)
Literacy skills	26.9% (29)	7.9% (3)	15.4% (12)	20% (46)
Numeracy skills	30.6% (33)	21.1% (8)	19.2% (15)	24.3% (56)

When the data was examined by school, looking only at perceptions of ‘*very strong skills*’ and combining ‘*very weak*’ and ‘*weak*’ statistics, a number of differences were highlighted:

- *Assimilation of ideas*- 29.5% of respondents from M&A and 26.1% of those from CE&C stated that they felt that they had ‘*very strong*’ assimilation of ideas skills. Other school responses ranged between 12.8% and 23.1%;

- *Ability to organise time-* the schools with the largest number of respondents stating that they had 'very weak' or 'weak' time management skills were CE&C with 34.8% and CISM with 20.4%, All other schools ranged between 7.5%-15.8%;
- *Study skills-* 26.1% of respondents from CE&C stated that they had 'very strong' study skills. Other schools ranged between 0-15.4%. The schools from which respondents stated they had 'weak' or 'very weak' study skills were A&A with 30.8% and M&A with 23.5%. All the others were in the range of 10.2%-22.6%;
- *Knowledge of subject to be studied at PG level-* 39.1% of CE&C respondents stated that their knowledge was very strong. All the others were in the range of 0-15.4%. Those who considered their skills to be 'weak' or 'very weak' were the Schools of A&A with 38.5%, GGE with 41.9% and M&A with 40.2%. All the others were in the range of 11.8%- 13%;
- *Literacy skills-* The top 3 schools where respondents stated that they had 'weak' or 'very weak' literacy skills were P&C with 41.2%, CE&C with 30.8% and GGE with 28.6%. The others were in the range 16.1%-26.1%.
- *Numeracy skills-* The top 3 schools where respondents stated that they had 'weak' or 'very weak' numeracy skills were GGE with 25.8%, P&C with 22.7% and CISM with 18.4%. Other schools ranged between 0-12.5%.



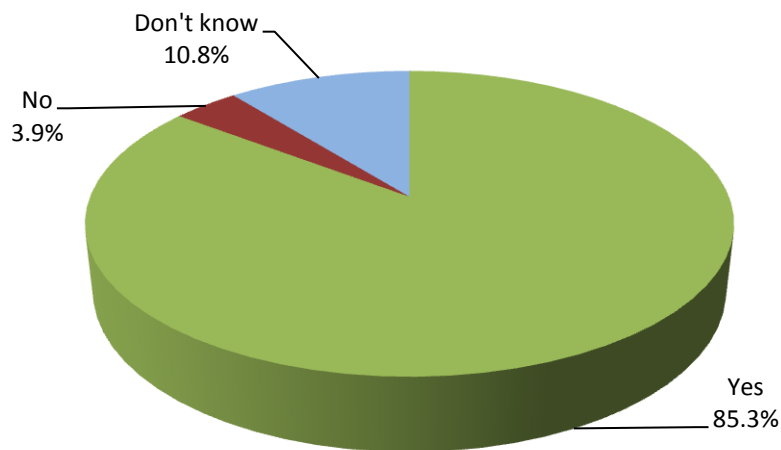
## **Attitudes to postgraduate study**

### **22. Value of a postgraduate qualification to employers compared to an undergraduate degree**

Respondents were asked whether they thought employers valued a postgraduate qualification more than an undergraduate degree. Of the sample, 85.3% (198) stated that they thought this was the case (see figure 16). The reasons provided include that the qualification helped enhance skills and knowledge and also helped develop a higher level skill set which employers wanted and expected.

**Figure 16**

**Value of a PGT qualification by employers**



### **23. Do you think your PGT qualification will enhance your skills in the following areas?**

Respondents were asked whether they thought that the postgraduate qualification they were undertaking would enhance their skill base in the following areas:

- self-management
- team working
- business awareness
- problem solving
- communication
- numeracy
- IT
- leadership

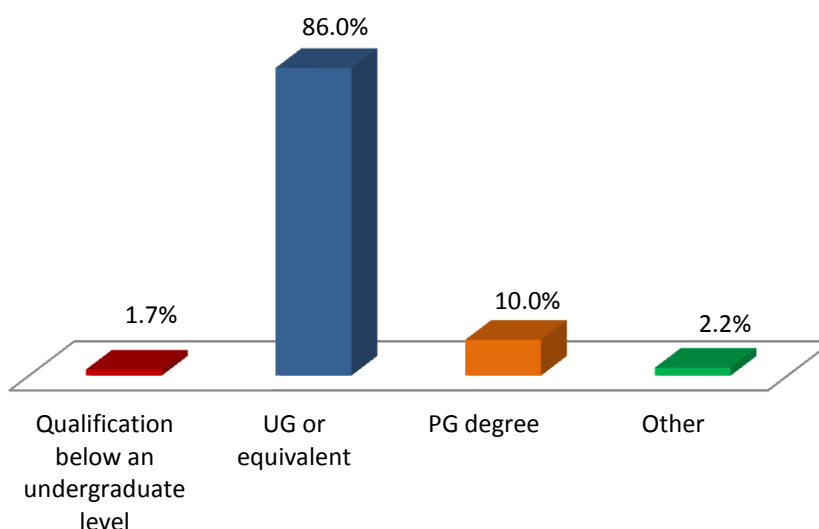
Of the sample, 93.5% (216) of the respondents felt that the PGT qualification would enhance their skill base.

## **Other factors**

### **24. Highest qualification on entry to the postgraduate course**

Respondents were asked what their highest qualification on entry to PGT study was. Of the sample, the majority of respondents possessed an undergraduate degree (197) or an equivalent qualification (see figure 17).

**Figure 17** Entry qualifications to PGT level study



### **25. What is the distance you travel from home to Kingston University?**

Respondents were asked the distance they had to commute to get to university. A substantial percentage of the sample commuted more than 5 miles to university. A slightly higher percentage of first generation respondents compared to second generation commuted more than 16 miles (see table 33).

**Table 33** Distance travelled to University

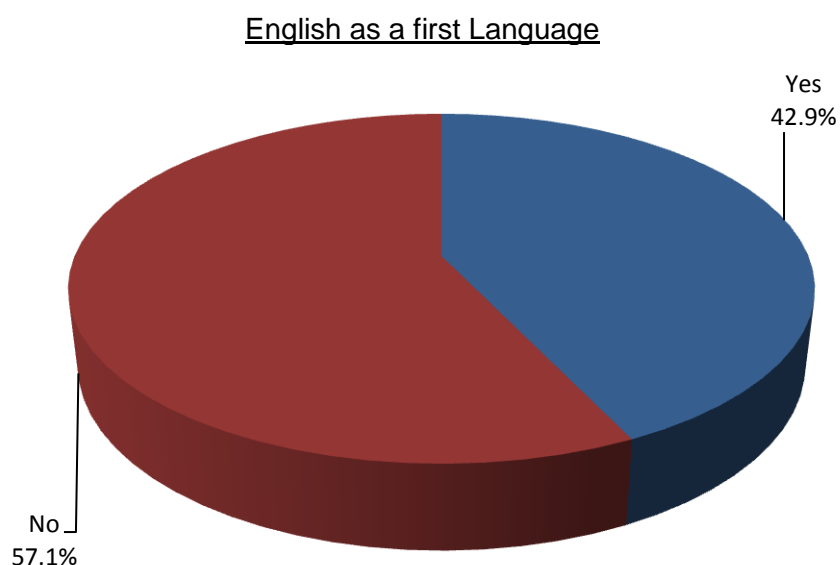
Distance	First generation	Second generation
Under 5 miles	25.5% (26)	38.3% (46)
6-15 miles	35.3% (36)	32.5% (39)
16-25 miles	14.7% (15)	13.3% (16)
26-35 miles	10.8% (11)	5.8% (7)
Over 35 miles	13.7% (14)	10.0% (12)

When ethnicity is examined, significantly more respondents who classified themselves as White lived within 15 miles of the university with 77.3% (69). For Asian and Black respondents the figure was 57% (41) and 57.2% (20) respectively, and for Mixed and Other, 63.5% (5) and 67% (13). In table 16, it had been reported by 28.5% (59) of the sample that they were 'anxious' or 'very anxious' about coping with the travelling to and from university.

## 26. English to be your first language

Respondents were asked if they considered English to be their first language. Of the sample, 42.9% stated that *English **was** their first language* (see figure 18). When domiciled status was examined, of respondents who classified themselves as UK domiciled, 40.8% (42) stated that *English **was not** their first language*.

Figure 18



Of the respondents who classified themselves as EU and Non-EU domiciled, 10.8% (4) and 37.7% (23) respectively stated that *English **was** their first language*. Within the sample, 42 different languages (excluding English) were reported as a first language (see table 34).

Table 34

First languages

Albanian	1	German	2	Punjabi	1
Amharic	2	Greek	13	Romanian	1
Arabic	6	Gujarati (India)	2	Singhalese	1
Bahasa	1	Hindi	2	Sinhala	1
Bangla	1	Igbo	1	Spanish	6
Bengali	2	Italian	4	Swahili	1
Bulgarian	2	Kazakh, Russian	1	Tagalong(Filipino)	1
Cantonese	1	Krio	2	Tamil	4
Danish	1	Kurdish	2	Thai	1
Daxi	1	Malay	2	Tigrinya	1
Dutch	2	Norwegian	3	Turkish	5
Farsi	8	Persian	1	Twi	1
Filipino	1	Polish	1	Urdu	5
French	5	Portuguese	5	Yoruba	1

When ethnicity was examined, there was no noticeable difference between those respondents who classified themselves as White and Asian with English as their first language. However, there were significantly more respondents who classified themselves as Mixed and Black whose first language was English.

## **27. Previous institution of study**

Respondents were asked to provide the name of the institution where they last studied. Of the sample who responded to this question, 7.3% (17) of respondents' last place of study was at a further education college rather than university. Of those who had declared their generational status, 13 first generation respondents had come from college compared to 4 second generation ones.

Of all the first generation respondents, 23.3% (10) who stated that they were UK domiciled had studied previously at either an EU or Non-EU university compared to 36.2% (17) of second generation respondents. Fractionally more first generation, UK domiciled respondents 11.6% (5) had previously studied at a Russell Group institution compared to 10.6% (5) of second generation respondents.

## **Conclusion**

The quantitative findings suggest that a number of variables could shape prior feedback experiences and expectations at postgraduate level study. These will be discussed in further detail in Section 6.

## Section 5 Qualitative analysis

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed using themes which had come out of the survey results. Current postgraduate Course Representatives were emailed and invited to participate in the focus group. The seven participants who volunteered were undertaking an MSc qualification. The demographics of each respondent are listed in Table 35 below. All the participants were within the 18-24 and 25-29 age groups. Ethnicity was not recorded as part of the demographics listed below as it had not been shown to be an important variable within the quantitative findings.

**Table 35** Interview participants demographics

Gender	Domiciled status	Generational status	Mode of study	School	First language
Female	UK	Second	FT	GGE	First
Male	EU	First	FT	CISM	Joint
Female	Non-EU	First	FT	P&C	Joint
Male	EU	Second	FT block	Civil	Second
Male	Non-EU	First	FT	P&C	Second
Female	Non-EU	Second	FT	Life Sciences	Second
Female	Non-EU	Third	FT	Life Sciences	First

### Reason for studying at Postgraduate level

The quantitative findings showed that career advancement and the qualification providing greater opportunities were two of the primary reasons cited for undertaking postgraduate study. These were also motivations cited by the interviewees. However, other factors were also cited, such as parental expectation and wanting to 'stand out' from the other graduates. The comments below are reflective of the group.

*More money and my parents expected it.*

*Getting a better job*

*My parents were my biggest motivation because they didn't go to university. They really wanted me to study and to go.*

*I wanted to do PG because I looked for jobs after my UG for a year and a half but I had no special qualification that stood me apart from anyone else. Um....and so thought Masters would give me that one upper hand.*

## **Expectations of studying at Postgraduate level**

The interviewees were asked whether their expectations of study at postgraduate level had been met. Comments were made in relation to a number of areas and these are reported below.

### Amount of study

The amount and type of study the participants expected they would engage in at postgraduate level differed from their actual experience. For 6 of the 7 interviewees, the workload was greater than expected; for one, it was much less.

*I expected postgraduate study to be 2 or 3 days a week but now I am doing 4 which I think is too much.*

*I agree with number 5. We are from the same school. Our workload is much more than I expected. I didn't think it would be as much as this and initially, I didn't realise what I was getting myself into. From now (Feb) until September, we do not get a break. We have back to back stuff and I cannot breathe. I cannot wait for September to come so it is over. So the workload is way more than expected.*

*I expected it to be more challenging and a bit more demanding than it has been up till now. I do study a week at a time so I see myself as having quite a lot of free time. It has been different from my expectations. The content is great so far and challenging, but I expected there to be more work.*

### Type of study

For 5 of the interviewees, the type of study they were undertaking differed to their expectations of the course and what it would entail. They had expected more variety in the activities they were required to undertake. The following comments are typical of the responses.

*The workload, especially the practical's, is not exactly what I expected. I had hopefully expected there to be outside experience, going out meeting managers and things like that. Interaction in general with managers because that's what we need.....because we are doing a management course..... Practical experience was very important in my decision. I was told to take this Master's if I*

wanted to work in my particular industry. And now that I am not getting the hands on experience, I am left thinking do I need to do work experience on my own like undergrads and working for free whereas I expected to get it as part of the degree.

I am definitely going to have to agree with number one on that. On my course, we only actually do 2-3 actual in labs a semester. Where I come from, I am used to doing 1 lab per week. Here I am getting no hands on laboratory experience what so ever. I thought there would be much more integration. A little bit of coursework, papers, research papers, a bit of lab work, a bit of interaction from the outside coming in and showing us things. So I was expecting to get my hands on a little bit of everything so I would be well rounded for future job prospects. I thought they would get people in to talk to us about the real world to say that 'we are doing this or we are doing that' but our programme is 95% just doing research papers. Paper, papers, papers. A lot of us are really down because it is papers, papers, papers. We just want to get hands on experience. The course was sold to me on the basis that this would happen. But that is not what has happened.

#### Difficulties caused by class skill base

The interviewees stated that they had not expected to share classes alongside students with such a varied skill base. They felt this had impacted on the learning ability of students, especially those who had weak knowledge in a certain subject.

Not everyone has the same degree as I do which is actually causing a huge problem with the background knowledge. There are a huge amount who have to read up a geography UG degree and there are only actually 2 of us who have a geography UG degree and the rest have come from social sciences so they have no background and are struggling hugely.

My first degree was pharmacology and I am doing pharmaceutical science now. And the degree I am doing now requires a lot of organic chemistry while I do not have any knowledge about organic chemistry at all. And I think that if they are accepting people from other courses, then they should have something similar or do short courses on organic chemistry because is something you cannot just learn by going

*to a Master's level organic chemistry lesson in a couple of days. You need a background knowledge. You need a strong base. The way lecturers are behaving as if they want students to fail. But there are some teachers who are really helpful and will do anything to help you.*

### **Academic feedback**

In the questionnaire, respondents stated that they expected timely feedback so they could use it to improve their work in future assignments. Interviewees were asked about their feedback experiences. All the interviewees stated that this was an area that had caused difficulties and confusion in their studies due to feedback not being timely, useful, clear or constructive.

### Feedback usefulness

All the interviewees had experienced late feedback. They stated that this had prevented them from correcting errors in future assignments.

*We had CW handed in end of November and we only got feedback now (Mid March) which is far too late regarding that. We sometimes don't get feedback for weeks and months on end. One lecturer gave us general feedback 2 weeks later and only gave us the lowest mark and the person who failed and the highest mark and the person who got the top mark. Then the mean average. He did that for the entire module before we found out our real grades. It was bad because no one knew who had failed apart from the person named which is really bad. They were so embarrassed. We were more concerned about the marks than the feedback.*

*I got my first assignment back and I was told that my English was poor. But then I went to S3 and I was told that my English is correct. So it was confusing me that the lecturers kept telling me that it was my English. I think they needed to pinpoint what was wrong like in my introduction or conclusion.*

*In the first semester, we had to do a lab report at the start of the semester, but we did not get the feedback before we had to submit one at the end of the semester. So for international students who have never had to do a KU lab style report, never got feedback to know what to do right for the second. We just didn't know what we were doing*



*right. The university policy's of getting it marked and graded and returned in 3 weeks has rarely happened on our course.*

### Feedback requirements

All the interviewees stated that feedback had to be timely so students could correct any errors, techniques or misunderstandings in upcoming assignments. It also had to be detailed enough to provide adequate and targeted guidance on where improvements could be made. The following comments are typical of the responses.

*It needs to be detailed because you need the good points then the bad points and how we can improve it. For the rest of the term we are going to continue doing the same thing and by the end of the term, we will be lucky to pass.*

*The level of detail should be of a level where you can understand it and improve yourself. It doesn't have to be very detailed. It is about pointing out things so it doesn't happen in the future.*

### Preference of mark or feedback

During the discussion, the issue of the importance of the mark and feedback was raised. All of the interviewees stated that the mark was the most important element, but they all expressed a need for feedback which they stated they always read. This also applied to examinations.

*Last semester, I got better marks than I expected in an exam. I was expecting 55 but I got 68. So I was confused as to what I was doing right. I didn't get feedback so I don't know what I did that was good.*

### **Postgraduate characteristics**

The interviewees were asked to identify key characteristics they thought described them as taught postgraduate students. Many of the characteristics cited described how the interviewees felt eight months into their studies such as being stressed, tired, anxious and heavily in debt. However, they were also reflective about how the course had developed them as individuals.

*Maybe we think it because we have only 1 year and we have to make the most of it whereas UGs have 3 years to have fun and play around. Um.... me personally the experience I had at UG has made me more committed. I had retakes at UG level and I don't want that to happen. So no, I am going to stick to my plan and pass everything first time. So maybe I learnt a lesson in a way. We want to stand out. We are competitive. We are competing with one another..... We actually get to meet people from around the world which is really interesting and we learn a lot. .... I am so tired and down but I sit in my room thinking that it soon be over.*

*That is hard to tell because everyone has their own idea, but generally they have higher motivation. We already have a degree and they are motivated to go for study in an area they may be experienced in. You are building on what you have already achieved..... PGs are supposed to take initiative.*

*Before when I was an UG I would listen to music. It doesn't matter what....it could be anything. But now I listen to good quality music which makes sense. So my taste and the way I look at things is changing.*

*Time management is a real challenge. I don't think it has taken away my personality forever, just for the time being.*

*I was in the library and there were some UGs relaxing and laughing. When I went to get a drink, I asked them how they were having such fun and they said it was because they were UGs. They were laughing and shouting and I had my sad face on and that is the difference. I feel as a PG it is intense and more serious. We know what has to be done. We know we have to do our own research if we want to get things done.*

Interviewees felt that the primary cause of how they felt was due to the intensity of the course being only one year in length. However, this length was still preferred over a two year degree course because of the cost and extra dedication required.

## Peers and Friendship

In the questionnaire, respondents did not cite friendships as a key requirement at postgraduate level study and this was reflected amongst the interviewees. Many of the interviewees cited having a 'lack of time' to make friends as a factor as well as postgraduate level study being one facet of a busy life and other responsibilities. Course mode and length were cited as reasons that were not conducive to making friends. The comments below are typical of all the responses.

*No. I haven't been able to make friends on my PG course. I don't know why. I don't understand.....at UG level, I had so many friends but at PG level..... I don't want to say they are weird....but it is like they are in their own zone. They are studying. As 7 said, they don't have time to go out. It is really hard to be friends with them. I really try hard.*

*Of the friends I have made, they are more mental friends than friend friends. We don't go to the cinema together, we don't go into town shopping, we don't take a train to London but we sit and have a coffee together or study together in the library. It's mental friends. Knowing that someone else you know will be sitting there in the library is helpful, especially when they are sitting there doing the same things as me and probably having the same difficulties.*

*I just have Uni friends and I have friends outside of university. I keep it separate.*

*For me because I do block modules in the evening, I don't see them very often (fellow students) and some of them are even PT so I barely see them. You just don't see people that much and they are focused on their course. Everyone knows they will be gone by September so there is no point in making friends. It's fine just having to get along with them for the year but after that.....you are away then. If it was a 3 year course then that is different.*

## Background of the student

In terms of background characteristics, parental influence (regardless of generational status) appeared to have the greatest impact on the interviewees in undertaking higher level study rather than variables such as domiciled status and gender. Family competition was also cited as another factor by three interviewees.

*Not doing a Masters wasn't an option neither was not going to university to do an UG degree. I had to go to university. Both parents have Masters. My grandparents never went to uni and my cousins haven't. And my parents want us to do better than my cousins. They are constantly moaning at me that they didn't go even when our grandparents offered to pay for everything for them to go....*

*I am a first generation, but my parents are really supportive and I don't think it has to do with being an international student. My siblings went to university before me so I wasn't the first really and I had an understanding of university life. Studying at university wasn't a problem here because I studied in an English school back home... American..... so I was used to the language from an early age. When I came here, the only problem I had was the accent. Lifestyle..... the weather..... seriously... that depresses me. Where I come from, there is sunshine everyday so that has affected me a lot.*

*I think being a second generation is helpful because my parents have an understanding what university life is like so they are quite supportive. They don't want me to worry about money and they are very supportive. They want me to focus on the course rather than a lot of different things. My parents just told me to do whatever I liked. If I wanted to go they would support me and if I didn't that was good.*

*As far as factors go, I still have an older brother who hasn't graduated from his UG degree and it looks like I will pass my PG before he does that (laughing). I feel like I will surpass him. That is a motivating factor for me. Competition .....*

### **Advice for new PGTs**

Recommendations by the interviewees for new students ranged from pre-entry advice such as getting work experience before starting PGT study, to reading advice and getting into an effective study pattern immediately.

*Look for a part-time job to keep your debt down*

*Get some work experience before you start your Masters. I think that is really useful because I can relate what I am learning now with what I did in the work place last year. I think it is an advantage for me because I had experience of relating to people in the work place.*

*From the first day at uni do study from day one. You don't have to do 2 hours a day but start off doing 30 minutes. You will be much more relaxed by the time you have to really get into it.*

*Start earlier rewriting your notes in a format that I like instead of the form of lecture notes. My own layout .....*

### **Conclusion**

The interviewees provided insightful and reflective responses in terms of prior feedback for experiences and expectations of studying at Postgraduate level. Some of their assumptions about what PGT level study would entail had been incorrect and some expectations had not been met, such as timely and helpful feedback. Some of these issues will be discussed in Section 6.

## **Section 6 Implications, considerations and conclusion**

This section of the report looks at broad implications and considerations for the Faculty, Institution and Sector arising out of the findings, and the dialogical conference.

### ***Route into PGT level study***

The findings illustrated that the majority of the sample had come either straight from university or from work. The two groups were approximately equal in size. The entry route is likely to impact on the students' skill base, prior experiences and expectations. For example, students coming from the world of work possess valuable skills that are transferable into the PGT learning environment, but that may need tailoring for academia. They may be proficient at writing reports in a business context, but not in producing academic or research based reports which require specific attributes such as referencing and citation skills. For the student coming straight from another university course, it may be assumed that they will be equipped with the relevant academic skills and possess the 'cultural capital' of being able to study in an HE environment at a higher level. However, it should not be assumed that this is the case because Postgraduate study is not just an extension of undergraduate study. Students studying at PG level are expected more to be self-motivated, independent learners who can develop an advanced skill set. For those students who have been out of study or the work place for while, and are using the course to reengage with study to provide a step towards future employment, PGT level study can seem very daunting. Therefore, students should be advised and shown how to study at this level.

The sample was made up of almost equal groups of first and second generation respondents which reinforced research that found, in contrast to undergraduate level study, generational status was not a barrier to participating in PGT learning (e.g. Stuart et al., 2008; Wakeling, 2009).

The findings suggest that the different backgrounds and entry routes of students into PGT study, as is the case at undergraduate level, can impact on expectations and experiences (e.g. Morgan, 2011 and 2013; Thomas, 2012). As a result, providing targeted interventions, advice and support, applicable to a student's previous experience and background, is important in helping them settle into their studies quickly and effectively. This should be considered when developing PGT orientation and induction programmes (such as offering bridging skill sessions) and when managing the PGT student experience which starts with the first contact and admissions stage.

### ***Reasons for undertaking a PGT course***

The findings in this research correlate with national findings that students are looking to obtain a PGT qualification to improve their chances of getting a graduate job or provide more career choices, and that they believe a PGT qualification is more valued by employers than an undergraduate degree (e.g. Stuart. et.al., 2008; Park, and Kulej, 2009; Wells, 2011).

In terms of students using the PGT qualification to improve their chances of getting a graduate job, or providing more choices, it is essential to understand what the student wants to do with the qualification as it is likely to affect their expectations, interactions and experiences with their course. For example, is the student wanting the qualification to round off their knowledge gained at undergraduate level thus making them 'knowledge rich' and attractive to employers? Is it to provide 'vocational' experience within a subject area and therefore prepare them for work? Or are they using it as a 'stepping stone' to a research or academic career? Does a student undertaking a vocational course, which is required for their workplace, need their studies to be grounded in academic rigor? For a student wishing to pursue a research degree or an academic career, this would be essential. The challenge is supporting students studying on the same course, but who have different motivations and expected outcomes. The sector's understanding of undergraduate students' motivation of going onto PGT study will be greatly furthered when the 'Intentions after Undergraduate Study' survey results are published in the Autumn of 2013. HEFCE, who worked closely with the National Student Survey team, have added a survey to the end of the Annual NSS survey. Of those entitled to complete the survey, the 'Intentions' survey was completed by 70 per cent of the respondents thus providing a large and valuable dataset (Millward and Creasey, 2013).

Research shows that postgraduate students believe that employers do value a PGT qualification more than an undergraduate one. However, a study by Connor et.al on behalf of the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE) for the Department of Business Innovation and Skills highlighted that although employers did value the analytical and problem solving skills with which a Masters degree provided students, they were concerned by the increasing number, and the perceived variable quality, of the PG courses available. Only 1 in 10 employers of PhD graduates, and fewer for Masters, felt that a PG qualification was a guarantee of a high quality candidate (Connor et.al., 2010). The study also reported that employers felt that although a PG qualification did enhance a range of the skills, it was no indicator of leadership potential or work wisdom that were two of the key skills they were looking for in Master and Doctorate graduates. (Connor et.al., 2010). Employers may view implementation skills and practical knowledge more essential in a business context than the ability to learn theory and execute academic rigor.

The Leitch Review highlighted the importance of postgraduates in driving innovation, entrepreneurship, management and leadership in business (Leitch, 2006), but it is unclear whether the growth in PGT education has been as a direct result of employer demand or whether employers are merely taking the opportunity to recruit from a higher qualified pool of graduates.

Each stakeholder has their own expectations of what they understand PGT study to encompass and deliver. As a result, it is important to manage those expectations and ensure that each one is aware of the other's perception. Activities that could help bridge student, business and institutional expectations and perceptions include:

- clearly defining the benefits of their PGT courses for students and employers;
- working with business and industry to ensure that they deliver the skills through curriculum and assessment to meet their needs and the demands of the student;
- offering more work based learning opportunities;
- obtaining professional body recognition and accreditation;
- demonstrating credibility and currency of course offerings;
- explicitly defining skills in any documents or a transcript that employers receive from the student (e.g. transcripts containing a skill matrix).

### ***Reasons for choosing an institution at which to undertake PGT study***

Course content and the University's teaching reputation were two of the top three primary reasons cited in choosing an institution by the respondents. These are areas which final year undergraduate students are asked to comment on in National Student Survey (NSS). It is not anticipated that the survey will be expanded to include PGT level study due to the 'Higher Education Academy's voluntary' Postgraduate Taught (PTES) and Research Experience (PRES) Surveys which perform a similar function to the NSS but are not compulsory. As many HEIs are already obtaining valuable insight into the Postgraduate Student Experience on an institutional and national level through their participation in PTES and PRES, this survey may become compulsory. Ensuring course content is current and applicable as well as enhancing the teaching quality is going to be increasingly critical in the management of student expectations and their experience. The other most cited reason for choosing an institution was the cost of fees which is considered in more detail below.

### ***Fee levels***

The fee level of a PGT course was the second most cited reason for choosing an institution at which to undertake PGT study. Although the fee level was very important in the respondents' decision making process, it was not the primary driver in deciding at which institution to study.



There are potentially two pressing issues relating to fee levels. Firstly, there is an understanding across the sector that students today at undergraduate level appear more aware that they should expect to 'receive value for money', although they may not necessarily understand exactly what that entails within the HE sector. The findings in this research suggest that the same is applicable at Postgraduate level. The 'fee level' and 'value for money' expectations add to the pressure on institutions to improve all aspects of its PGT offerings.

Secondly, PGT fees, as a result of the increase at undergraduate level have come under scrutiny and are being examined by the sector. Whilst some institutions have already raised their PGT fees, others appear to be waiting to see whether the Government will support a funding model. However, there is currently no sector consensus as to what an appropriate or affordable PGT fee level is thus resulting in price variations. There is not enough knowledge in the sector to determine when fee levels will discourage applicants from applying for higher level study. What is also uncertain is how the increased debt level for the 2012 English undergraduate cohort (paying £9,000 a year) will impact on PGT recruitment in the future. Any impact will not be known until 2016 at the earliest. Research suggests that the cost of fees is a major factor against progressing onto PGT study (e.g. Allen et al, 2006, Stuart et. al, 2008). The current hypothesis is that English undergraduate students may be less likely to progress onto higher level study due to the high levels of debt accrued during their undergraduate degree, despite repayment through the taxation system.

However, the recent report by Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson suggests that the data in their study does not support this hypothesis. Scottish students studying in Scottish universities do not pay undergraduate fees (unlike their English counterparts), but they are less likely to progress onto PG study (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). However, it is important to note that to obtain an honours degree in Scotland requires four years of study compared to three in English universities. Furthermore, Scottish students who successfully complete three years of an undergraduate course can graduate, but do so with an ordinary degree which is not (generally) an entry qualification accepted by English or Scottish universities for PGT level study. Both these points may be contributing factors in explaining the low progression rates of Scottish students in Scottish universities onto PG study.

The level to which the reputation of an institution and the Postgraduate subject plays a role in the pricing of a course in today's current climate is unclear. Research suggests that the PGT market is more price sensitive than the undergraduate market and that '*the demand on postgraduate study is inversely proportionate to the health of the economy as a general trend*' (Foskett et.al, 2006: 50) thus when the economy is suffering, people invest in education. However, in this harsh economic climate, a decrease in student numbers (in the

most recent overall UK figures in 2011/12 for PGT and STEM based subjects) contest this argument. It remains unclear how the harsh international economic climate will affect the PGT market, not only in STEM, but also arts and humanities in the UK in the coming years. With an increasing 'grey' population, universities may wish to design PGT courses for the baby boomers that did not obtain university degrees, but who now have pensions providing disposable income for activities such as learning.

Fee levels, funding options of PGT study and the impact of accrued debt are areas in need of further research. This knowledge would help universities set appropriate and affordable fees. As Government funding at PG level appears to be targeted at research degrees and employment led taught provision (DBIS, 2009), it is logical that an evidence based approach to pricing and provision needs to be adopted by institutions. As the average debt for an undergraduate student increases, and with the current fluctuations in the economy, fee levels and value for money are likely to become increasingly critical factors for applicants when considering what to study and where.

### ***Funding of PGT course***

There is an assumption across the sector, albeit anecdotal, that when a student enters PGT study that they will be financially self reliant and fund their own studies through bank loans or savings. However, bank development loans have not been in existence for many years in the UK and there is currently no available funding model for UK students wishing to pursue PGT study. There is also the perception that when a student studies at PGT level, parental involvement substantially reduces or even becomes non-existent. This research highlighted that this was not the case amongst the sample as a large percentage of the respondents were receiving parental support to fund their studies. Further, first generation, domiciled status, entry route and age appeared to be significant variables in how PGT study was being funded.

The lack of a funding model in the UK is both a problem for applicants and institutions wishing to expand their PGT numbers (e.g. Boorman et. al., 2009, UUK, 2013). For example, a potential pitfall of the unavailability of a funding model may be that the academic capability of the PGT applicant becomes an important driver in deciding whether the applicant decides to undertake a PGT qualification or indeed whether an institution offers them a place. The applicant with weak entry qualifications may decide that the risk of withdrawal or non-completion is too great to justify the expenditure especially in a harsh economic climate. The National Association of Student Money Advisers (NASMA) report that their members have seen an increase in Postgraduates currently studying applying for discretionary financial support from hardship funds but it is often difficult to ascertain the level of financial hardship nationally as in many institutions there is limited accurate data available (Gibson and Milne, 2013). Through their

ongoing work to support members this is something NASMA continue to work towards addressing. For the institution that may traditionally recruit students with low or diverse entry qualifications, its ability to continue to attract students in the current economic climate may be a challenge. A loan system, like the one available at undergraduate level, if extended to PGT students (as recommended by UUK and the Russell Group to the Browne Review) may act as a sweetener to the applicant and institution.

### ***Study and life demands***

Institutions are facing a number of challenges in terms of recruiting students and meeting expectations but so are the applicants and students in terms of juggling study and life demands. Balancing paid work, study and life demands are known to affect a student's ability to fully engage in their studies at undergraduate level (e.g. Stuart et al., 2008; Morgan, 2013). There is no evidence to suggest that the situation is any different for students studying at Postgraduate level. In fact it would be reasonable to speculate that as a student got older, life demands which could affect study time, such as paid work and caring responsibilities, would increase. Therefore, it is unsurprising that a high percentage of respondents intended working throughout the year whether on a part-time or full-time basis.

At undergraduate level, it is known that a lack of interaction, as a result of study and life demands, can result in isolation and disengagement resulting in withdrawal. Once more, there is no evidence to suggest that it would be any different at PGT level. As a result, when looking at PGT provision, offering a range of opportunities such as a choice of study modes and various types of delivery (e.g. online, blended, work-based, block style module teaching) maybe beneficial in not only supporting a student's ability to engage in study, but also in supporting and sustaining the PGT market. However, any delivery pattern needs to be fit for purpose for the student and needs to be able to meet their necessary support requirements. For example, if part-time courses are delivered at an institution during the evening, it is essential that these students have the same access to their school office, canteen and IT facilities and welfare services as their full-time counterparts. However, providing flexible study will require institutions to fit around the needs of the student, rather than the student fitting around the needs of the institution.

The respondents in this survey stated that making friends was not a critical part of their university experience, but having the opportunity to mix with students within the class and socially, in a learning context, was important. As student numbers swell and the availability of space becomes an issue, it will be important for institutions to ensure they maintain social space for PGT students not only for social learning opportunities but also to engender an academic community amongst this body of students.

### ***Expectations of PGT level study***

As student fees at all levels of study increase so too it is likely that student expectations will rise. The findings in this research illustrated that the majority of respondents generally expected a higher quality experience than at undergraduate level and that certain student characteristics such as age, generational and domiciled status were significant in contributing to these expectations. It is recognised at undergraduate level that effectively managing student expectations by providing targeted support, information and advice, and supporting the transition into study in the academic and non-academic spheres can impact on the resilience and success of the student (e.g. Morgan, 2013; Thomas, 2012). Again, it is highly likely to be the same at PGT level, but it will be important for HEIs to guard against merely using and implementing the same mechanisms and processes used at UG level to support PGT students.

Not only do students have study expectations, but institutions also have expectations of students studying at this level of study. Defining attributes of PGT students is essential to the management of all stakeholders' expectations. The LFIP project undertaken at Queen Margaret University has identified seven facets to 'Masterness' (Bamber, 2013). These are autonomy, depth, abstraction, complexity, research, unpredictability and professionalism and need to be embedded in PGT activity.

Any support and advice should be developed to meet the needs of a diverse postgraduate population. The suggestions provided by the respondents (in relation to supporting the learning experience in question 15 in the quantitative findings section) do have resource and operational implications, but they are key areas which would support students and help shape their responses in any future HEA PTES survey. Effectively managing PGT student expectations and providing the support across academic and non-academic spheres from first contact until after graduation is an essential activity. HEFCE are developing tool kits which will be available to staff in supporting the student experience and for advising students (Millward and Creasey, 2013).

### ***Anxiety levels***

The anxiety level amongst the respondents was considerably high both in the areas of academic and non-academic concerns (e.g. managing money and the demands of travel to and from university). The findings illustrated that EU and Non-EU domiciled respondents were more anxious about making friends, managing money and settling into university life compared to UK respondents. Commuting was a factor of concern for respondents in this research and it is reasonable to assume that the problems and issues experienced by undergraduate commuters may be applicable to the postgraduate student commuter. Commuting is known to increase stress levels and contribute to withdrawal at undergraduate level. For example, a recent report entitled *Back on Course*, which was funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for

England, found that 48 per cent of early leavers at undergraduate level from across 70 institutions were commuting students (Stephens and Peters, 2012). Research looking at undergraduate commuter students suggests that they may struggle to integrate into university social support systems and to develop a 'sense of belonging' with their institution due to the time taken up and pressure of travelling (e.g. Tinto, 1993, Thomas, 2012; Morgan, 2013). This can affect student persistence and degree attainment (Astin, 1993) as well as the overall satisfaction with their university experience.

There is also compelling evidence demonstrating the relationship between anxiety-to life-stress and achievement in undergraduate students (e.g. Andrews and Wilding, 2004; Wong et.al., 2006) so in the absence of evidence to prove the contrary, it would be reasonable to speculate that the same will be applicable at PGT level. The multifaceted characteristics of the students', and their competing life demands, provide institutions with the challenge of not only delivering targeted and high quality services, but also of supporting a diverse student body to help them manage their study and life anxieties more effectively.

### ***Skill base entering PGT level study***

The findings showed that the perception of skill base strength differed between some demographic groups and highlighted the learning issues in having a class of mixed ability at this level of study within a module or course. It is unclear whether this is due to the varying entry qualifications or the discipline. Evidence suggests that low skill base levels for those entering higher education at undergraduate level can increase transition difficulties (Richardson, 2003) and students' expectations may be distorted by their previous experience (Bamber and Tett, 2000). The findings in this research suggest that this may be applicable at PGT level study. Recent research by Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson that explored the transition of students into PG study showed that although graduates with a first class honours had the highest rate of progression to a higher degree, there were still high participation levels by students with lower second and third class honours degrees highlighting potential differences in knowledge and skill levels (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). Although the majority of the respondents in this research felt that they had a 'strong' skill base, a student's perception of their skill strength may not necessarily accurately reflect their actual ability. Identifying areas of weakness in a student's skill's base, and bridging the gap by providing extra support when and where it was needed, could be a useful approach. For example, they could include refresher sessions within a module, or providing extra curricula study skill sessions that are timetabled in a student's free time.

Students who undertake study at PGT level in a language that is not their primary one can experience difficulties in effectively engaging with their course content and accessing

appropriate support if there are inadequate mechanisms to enable them to do this. In this study, 42 different languages other than English were identified as 'first' languages; the challenge for an institution is how to support a student body with such diverse language capabilities in the academic and non-academic spheres. As the findings showed, although students were classified as 'home domiciled', English was not necessarily their first language. Further, just because a student is studying at PGT level, it cannot be not assumed that their spoken or written English will be strong.

## ***Academic feedback***

### *Understanding feedback*

Most of the respondents in this study appeared to understand what the term 'feedback' meant in relation to their academic work. The majority stated that they would read the feedback at PGT level, even though a significant percentage had not done so in their previous studies. Reinforcing what is meant by 'feedback', and introducing students to the various methods and approaches that they can expect to engage in at the start of their course, is a proactive approach which could be encompassed in a refresher session. At PGT level, students are expected to become independent learners as soon possible and feedback is a key element in this process. Feedback techniques, such as peer feedback, can support students who have previously been exposed to a 'non-questioning' learning culture (e.g. international students) to actively engage in class discussion (e.g. Race, 2010; Gibbs, 2010).

### *Preferred feedback methods*

Face to face feedback was the primary preference cited by respondents in this study followed by paper. The use of technology was not cited as a preferred method of receiving feedback. What is unclear is whether students just want to engage in methods they 'know' or whether they have tried other suggested methods such as audio and intranet feedback but 'rejected' them. The sample which comprised of science, engineering and computing students (whom it would be reasonable to assume would have preferred feedback via technology) preferred face to face feedback and interaction. As class sizes increase, traditional assessment and feedback methods can become cumbersome and problematic to manage. Appropriate feedback methods need to be fit for purpose, not only for class size and learning outcomes, but also so students can effectively progress and staff can manage their workload (Brown 2012, Brown, 2013).

## Section 7 Recommendations and conclusions

This section suggests practical and strategic activities to address the issues highlighted in the research for the Faculty, Institution and Sector.

### *Faculty*

Practical short-term activities include:

- closely monitoring PGT recruitment;
- improving support and access to support across academic and non-academic areas from first contact through until graduation;
- managing expectations more effectively in order to deliver a high quality experience and reduce anxiety levels on entry.

Strategic activities include:

- looking at the current course offerings and determining the suitability for the current environment and their sustainability;
- monitoring the new academic framework and any positive or negative impacts on PGT level study.

### *Institution and Sector*

For the Post-1992 Institution and Sector, issues and future activities are likely to be similar. Two pressing issues relate to recruitment and fees at PGT level. To sustain current PGT recruitment levels requires:

- an understanding of the reasons behind the recent retraction in numbers;
- the identification of new markets (international, WBL, online etc);
- the identification of international competitors and their long-term strategies.

Setting PGT fee levels in the current climate requires a number of interlinked issues to be examined which include:

- the price sensitivity of different PGT courses and the reputation of the institution;
- the impact of consumer choice on different PGT courses;
- funding model options to enable participation at PGT level;
- greater understanding of employer expectations and attitudes towards PGT level study to help shape the PGT provision within UK HEIs.

To sustain recruitment, and improve the PGT student experience, requires the accumulation of knowledge which in turn necessitates further research. In seeking to understand the changing PGT and PGR landscape, within the UK and internationally, collection and availability of accurate statistical data is needed. However, although HESA collects significant and accurate data, international competitors are not so effective; thus international analyses are made problematic.

This research has identified a number of areas in need of further investigation which include:

- Undergraduate debt aversion attitudes as a barrier to PGT study;
- Funding behaviour;
- Impact of PGT fee increase on the UK market;
- Impact of global economic downturn on EU and Non-EU applicants;
- PGT Expectations and skill base
- Discipline differences;
- PGT destination research;
- More complex analyses of gender, ethnicity, social class, domiciled and generational status on expectations and experiences at PGT level.

## **Conclusion**

The study has given an insight into prior feedback experiences, expectations of studying at PGT level and actual experiences within the Faculty's student body as well as highlighting differences in certain student demographic characteristics. It has also has provided valuable baseline data and a research framework that will be used to develop a collaborative funding bid across a range of institutions in the UK to further understand the impact of prior learning experiences and expectations of students studying at PGT level. This research should greatly assist the sector in managing expectations and helping institutions develop a high quality provision across academic and non-academic spheres.



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## Appendix 1 HESA Subject Areas

### Subject areas

HESA has defined 19 subject areas in terms of JACS codes for reporting information broken down by subject to present a useful broad-brush picture. The subject areas do not overlap, and cover the entire range of JACS principal subjects. Apart from the need to separate the mathematical science and computer science elements of principal subject G0 and G9, they are expressed entirely in terms of JACS principal subjects, and correspond closely to JACS subject groups.

Since Initial teacher training data is presented on a count of instance basis rather than an apportioned basis, the figures are not directly comparable with the apportioned figures in the education subject area, and are tabulated separately to reduce the risk of misinterpretation.

Subject areas	
Medicine & dentistry	Pre-clinical medicine, Pre-clinical dentistry, Clinical medicine Clinical dentistry, Others in medicine & dentistry
Subjects allied to medicine	Broadly-based programmes within subjects allied to medicine, Anatomy, physiology & pathology, Pharmacology, toxicology & pharmacy, Complementary medicine, Nutrition, Ophthalmics Aural & oral sciences, Nursing, Medical technology, Others in subjects allied to medicine
Biological sciences	Broadly-based programmes within biological sciences, Biology Botany, Zoology, Genetics, Microbiology, Sports science Molecular biology, biophysics & biochemistry, Psychology, Others in biological sciences
Veterinary science	Pre-clinical veterinary medicine, Clinical veterinary medicine & dentistry
Agriculture & related subjects	Broadly-based programmes within agriculture & related subjects, Animal science, Agriculture, Forestry, Food & beverage studies, Agricultural sciences, Others in veterinary sciences, agriculture & related subjects
Physical sciences	Broadly-based programmes within physical sciences, Chemistry Materials science, Physics, Forensic & archaeological science, Astronomy, Geology, Science of aquatic & terrestrial environments, Physical geographical sciences, Others in physical sciences
Mathematical sciences	Broadly-based programmes within mathematical sciences, Mathematics, Operational research, Statistics, Others in mathematical sciences
Computer science	Broadly-based programmes within computer science, Computer science, Information systems, Software engineering, Artificial intelligence, Others in computing sciences
Engineering & technology	Broadly-based programmes within engineering & technology, General engineering, Civil engineering, Mechanical engineering Aerospace engineering, Naval architecture, Electronic & electrical engineering, Production & manufacturing engineering, Chemical, process & energy engineering, Others in engineering Minerals technology, Metallurgy, Ceramics & glasses, Polymers & textiles, Materials technology not otherwise specified, Maritime technology, Biotechnology, Others in technology
Architecture, building & planning	Broadly-based programmes within architecture, building & planning, Architecture, Building, Landscape design, Planning (urban, rural & regional), Others in architecture, building & planning

Social studies	Broadly-based programmes within social studies, Economics, Politics, Sociology, Social policy, Social work, Anthropology, Human & social geography, Others in social studies
Law	Broadly-based programmes within law, Law by area, Law by topic, Others in law
Business & administrative studies	Broadly-based programmes within business & administrative studies, Business studies, Management studies, Finance, Accounting, Marketing, Human resource management, Office skills, Hospitality, leisure, tourism & transport, Others in business & administrative studies
Mass communications & documentation	Broadly-based programmes within mass communications & documentation, Information services, Publicity studies, Media studies, Publishing, Journalism, Others in mass communications & documentation
Languages	Broadly-based programmes within languages, Linguistics, Comparative literary studies, English studies, Ancient language studies, Celtic studies, Latin studies, Classical Greek studies, Classical studies, Others in linguistics, classics & related subjects, French studies, German studies, Italian studies, Spanish studies, Portuguese studies, Scandinavian studies, Russian & East European studies, European studies, Others in European languages, literature & related subjects, Chinese studies, Japanese studies, South Asian studies, Other Asian studies, African studies, Modern Middle Eastern studies, American studies, Australasian studies, Others in Eastern, Asiatic, African, American & Australasian languages, literature & related subjects
Historical & philosophical studies	Broadly-based programmes within historical & philosophical studies, History by period, History by area, History by topic, Archaeology, Philosophy, Theology & religious studies, Others in historical & philosophical studies
Creative arts & design	Broadly-based programmes within creative arts & design, Fine art, Design studies, Music, Drama, Dance, Cinematics & photography, Crafts, Imaginative writing, Others in creative arts & design
Education	Broadly-based programmes within education, Training teachers, Research & study skills in education, Academic studies in education, Others in education

**Total - Science subject areas** has been added to certain analyses. This is the sum of the following subject areas: medicine & dentistry; subjects allied to medicine; biological sciences; veterinary science; agriculture & related subjects; physical sciences; mathematical sciences; computer science; engineering & technology plus architecture, building & planning (i.e. sum of JACS codes A to K inclusive).

Source: <http://www.hesa.ac.uk/content/view/2707/278/#sub>



## Appendix 2 Quantitative Survey

### FACULTY OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND COMPUTING

#### Postgraduate Student Expectation Questionnaire

The Faculty is always seeking to improve the nature and the quality of your experience at university in order to enhance your capacity to learn and succeed. We welcome your honesty. All questionnaires are anonymous. The overall results will be published for you to see on Study Space.

#### **SECTION 1** **STARTING UNIVERSITY**

**1. Where have you come from?** (Please **TICK ONE** box):

University ☐ Work ☐ Year out ☐ Other ☐

If other, please state.....

**2. What are your reasons for undertaking a Postgraduate qualification?**

(Please **TICK** a maximum of **THREE** statements)

Improve knowledge of my subject	<input type="checkbox"/>	Provide more career options	<input type="checkbox"/>
Family expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>	Improve chances of getting a graduate job	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delay going into the job market	<input type="checkbox"/>	Desire to remain in higher education	<input type="checkbox"/>
For the enjoyment of studying	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gain exposure to the research environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Required for my chosen career	<input type="checkbox"/>	Encouraged by university staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	Please state.....	

**3. What was important to you when choosing a University for your postgraduate study?**

(Please **RANK** your top **THREE** choices where **1= 1st** choice)

Course content	<input type="checkbox"/>	University's research reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cost of fees	<input type="checkbox"/>	University's teaching reputation	<input type="checkbox"/>
Campus facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>	Where I studied as an undergraduate	<input type="checkbox"/>
My home town University	<input type="checkbox"/>	Studentship grant /scholarship available	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reputation for social life	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please state.....

## **SECTION 2   FINANCE**

4.     **How important were the fee levels in making your postgraduate course choice?**  
(Please **TICK ONE** box)

Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly disagree
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

5.     **How are you funding your postgraduate studies?**

(Please **RANK** your top **THREE** sources of funding where 1= 1st source)

Overdraft	<input type="checkbox"/>	Loan	<input type="checkbox"/>	Funded by parents/ guardians	<input type="checkbox"/>	Salary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Funded by spouse or partner	<input type="checkbox"/>	Savings	<input type="checkbox"/>	University scholarship/ studentship		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Employer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sponsorship	<input type="checkbox"/>	Research Council Studentship (e.g. ESRC, EPSRC, AHRC)		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	If other, please state.....					

6.     **Do you intend undertaking paid work during your postgraduate studies?**

(Exclude work placements which might be part of your postgraduate studies)  
(Please **TICK ONE** box)

Not at all (go to question 8)	<input type="checkbox"/>	Only during term time (go to question 7)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Only during vacations (go to question 7)	<input type="checkbox"/>	In both vacations and term-time (go to question 7)	<input type="checkbox"/>

7.     **If you intend undertaking paid work during your postgraduate studies, will it be:** (Please **TICK ONE** box)

Full-time	<input type="checkbox"/>	Part-time	<input type="checkbox"/>
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### **SECTION 3**    **POSTGRADUATE STUDY EXPECTATIONS**

8.      Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements. (Please **TICK ONE** box for each statement)

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I expect the quality of learning and teaching at postgraduate level to be higher than at undergraduate level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I expect to be taught like an undergraduate student		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I expect to learn in a more independent manner		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I will be less tolerant of poor quality learning and teaching at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I expect more value for money at postgraduate level than at undergraduate level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I expect a more individualised study experience at postgraduate level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I do not know what to expect when studying at postgraduate level		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

### **SECTION FOUR**    **YOUR PREVIOUS LEARNING EXPERIENCE**

9.      Briefly state what you understand by the term **feedback**.

.....

.....

.....

**10. In your previous studies, how did you receive your feedback for any of the work you submitted?**

(Please **TICK** which **ITEM/S** represents how you have received feedback on your academic work in the past).

Feedback on paper ☐ Via email ☐

Via an internal intranet site ☐ Audio (verbally recorded) ☐

Face to face with tutor ☐

Other please state.....

**11. Which type of feedback was your preferred method?**

(Please **TICK ONE** box only)

Feedback on paper ☐ Via email ☐

Via an internal intranet site ☐ Audio (verbally recorded) ☐

Face to face with tutor ☐

Other please state.....

**12. In your previous institution of study, did you ever approach a tutor to discuss the feedback given to you about your work? (Please **TICK ONE** box only)**

**Yes**

☐

(go to question 13)

**No**

☐

(go to question 14)

13. If yes, under what circumstances did you approach your lecturer to discuss feedback? (Please **TICK ONE** box which is applicable for each statement)

	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly disagree
I passed but was dissatisfied with the grade awarded		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I passed but wished to improve my grade		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I failed and did not understand the content of the feedback		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I passed but wanted clarification on the feedback		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I failed and did not understand why		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

If another reason, please state.....

14. If no, why did you decide not to approach your tutor?

(Please **TICK ONE** box which is applicable for each statement)

	Strongly agree	1	2	3	4	5	Strongly disagree
I got the grade I expected		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I was embarrassed to ask		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I did not agree with the feedback		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I never thought of asking for feedback		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I could not be bothered		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I understood the written feedback		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
My tutors were always too busy		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
I prefer to discuss academic problems with fellow students		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

15. How anxious overall are you entering University as a postgraduate student?  
(Please **TICK ONE** box)

Very anxious

☐

(go to ques 16)

Anxious

☐

(go to ques 16)

Not anxious

☐

(go to ques 17)

Not anxious at all

☐

(go to ques 17)

16. If you are anxious, what would help reduce your anxiety levels concerning your studies?

Please state.....

.....

.....

17. For the following statements, think about how you feel about coming to university and **TICK ONE** box against each statement which represents your opinion.

	Not anxious at all	Anxious	Slightly anxious	Very Anxious
Coping with the standard of work				
Getting involved in Uni life				
Making friends				
Managing my money				
Finding accommodation				
Looking after myself				
Coping with the travelling to university				

Other (please state).....

.....

18. What specific help or information would help you in your studies?

Please state and explain why?

.....

.....

**SECTION FIVE****YOUR CURRENT LEARNING EXPECTATIONS**

19. For the following statements, answer each statement which represents your opinion (Please **TICK ONE** box only for each statement)

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Sometimes	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I am aware when feedback is being given back to me					
I do not feel that I need to read the feedback					
I will use the feedback to help with future assignments					
I would like to get feedback via electronic means (audio, email, intranet etc)					
I will find it useful to discuss feedback with fellow students in class					
If I do not understand the feedback, I will ask my tutor					
I want the feedback to tell me where I can improve my work					
The feedback needs to raise my confidence and be encouraging					

20. As a Postgraduate student, how **would** you like to receive your feedback? (Please **TICK ONE** box represents your opinion for each feedback method)

Feedback Method	Most preferred method	An acceptable method	Least preferred method
On paper	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Via email	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Via an internal intranet site	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Audio (verbally recorded)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Face to face with tutor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If other, please state.....

21. How quickly do you expect written feedback to be given back to you after handing in an assignment? (Please **TICK ONE** box only)

Within 2 weeks

☐

Within 4 weeks

☐

Within 6 weeks

☐

22. How many contact hours (face to face) do you expect to have with tutors? (Please **TICK ONE** box only)

5-10 hours

☐

11-20 hours

☐

21 plus hours

☐

Unsure

☐

23. How many hours do you expect to study independently each week on top of your contact hours? (Please **TICK ONE** box only)

5-10 hours

☐

11-20 hours

☐

21 plus hours

☐

Unsure

☐

24. What do you regard as your strengths and weakness?

For the following statements, **TICK ONE** box against each statement which represents your opinion about your skill ability.

	<b>Very strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Weak</b>	<b>Very weak</b>
Quick assimilation of ideas				
Ability to organise my study independently				
My study skills				
Knowledge of subject studying at University				
Literacy skills				
Numeracy skills				



**SECTION SIX**

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS POSTGRADUATE STUDY**

25. Do you think employers value a postgraduate qualification more than an undergraduate one? (Please **TICK ONE** box)

Yes ☐

No ☐

Unsure ☐

Please explain the reason for your answer

.....

.....

26. Do you think the postgraduate course you are undertaking will enhance your skills in the following areas and why? (Please **TICK ONE** box)

Self management  
Communication

Team working  
Numeracy

Business awareness  
IT

Problem solving  
Leadership

Yes ☐

No ☐

Unsure ☐

Please explain the reason for your answer

.....

.....

**SECTION FIVE – BIOGRAPHICAL DETAILS**

(Please **TICK ONE** box for each question below)

27. Where was your last place of study? School ☐ FE College ☐  
University ☐

If your last place of study was a university, please state which one.....

28. Where are you coming from?

Study ☐

Work ☐

Other ☐

If other, please state.....

29. What is your highest qualification on entry to your postgraduate course??

☐

Qualifications below an undergraduate degree

Undergraduate degree or equivalent

☐

Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA)

☐

No academic qualifications but professional experience

☐

Other (Please specify).....

**30. Has a parent or guardian been to university?**

Yes

☐

No

☐

**31. Are you:**

Male

☐

Female

☐

**32. Are you:**

Asian

☐

Black

☐

White

☐

Mixed

☐

Other

☐

**33. Where is your permanent residency?**

British Isles

☐

Other European Union Country

☐

Outside the European Union

☐

**34. Do you live:**

By yourself in non-university accommodation

☐

With a partner/spouse

☐

In private shared accommodation

☐

With your parents

☐

If other, please state.....

**35. What is the distance you travel from home to Kingston University?**

Under 5 miles ☐      6-15 miles ☐      16-25 miles ☐  
26-34 miles ☐      Over 35 miles ☐

**36. Are you aged between:**

18 -24 ☐    25 -29 ☐    30 - 35 ☐    36 - 45 ☐    46+ ☐

**37. What course are you studying ?.....**

**38. Are you studying:**    Fulltime ☐                      Part-time ☐

**39. What School do you belong to?**

Aerospace and Aircraft Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil Engineering and Construction	<input type="checkbox"/>
Computing, Information Systems and Mathematics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geography, Geology and Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Life Sciences	<input type="checkbox"/>
Mechanical and Automotive Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pharmacy and Chemistry	<input type="checkbox"/>
Work-based Learning Courses	<input type="checkbox"/>

**40. Do you consider English to be your first language? (Please tick relevant box)**

**Yes** I consider it to be my first language ☐

**No** I consider it as my second language ☐

If no, please specify what you consider is your first language.....

**PLEASE DETATCH**

Thank you for taking time to complete this questionnaire - your willingness to participate is very much appreciated. Please check through the questionnaire to ensure you have answered each question. The findings of the questionnaire will be collated and the outcome will be posted on Student Space once complete.

**PLEASE RETURN YOUR COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRE TO YOUR COURSE DIRECTOR**

## Focus group schedule

Did you have or not have any expectations of studying at PGT level?

Did you expect to study in the same way at PG level as UG or differently? Explain

Do you think postgraduate students have distinct characteristics to UG or are they the same? What are they?

Are you experiencing any issues in relation to your studies?

Coping with the work

Travel

Money

Loneliness

Do you think your gender, domiciled status or if you were first in your family to go to university has impacted or not impacted on your PGT level study?

Did you expect or not expect to make friends undertaking your studies?

Have you used any university services? If yes, what are they and why did you use them?

Knowing what you now know, is there anything you would have liked to have been told or given information on during the admissions process, pre-arrival/arrival?

## Appendix 3 Student Advice Output

### FACULTY OF SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND COMPUTING Survey Results

#### Understanding the prior learning experiences and learning and teaching expectations of postgraduate Masters' students in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing 2012/13

##### WHAT YOU SAID

Thank you to everyone who completed the survey during the Induction session last month. The aims of the survey are to explore your previous learning and teaching experiences and your expectations of studying at postgraduate Masters Level (PGT). The objective is to use the results to develop academic and non-academic support activities within the Faculty and to strengthen your academic skills. Your responses will also raise awareness amongst staff of any concerns and anxieties that you may have and will be used to improve your overall PGT student experience at Kingston University.

The basic findings are listed below. Where you have expressed a concern, there is an advice box pointing you to where you can get further support and advice. The full report (available early next year for you to read and comment upon) will include analysis on any similarities and differences between subject areas and the demographic variables of students (e.g. age, domiciled status, gender).

##### Basic findings

This year, 232 new PGT students completed the survey. Your comments reflect those provided by the Faculty's new taught postgraduate students in previous surveys. This illustrates PGT students share similar worries and concerns and past experiences so do not think that you are alone.

##### Reasons for undertaking a PG degree

The top 3 reasons you cited for undertaking a postgraduate qualification are: 1) to improve the knowledge in your subject area; 2) provide more career options; 3) improve your chances of getting a graduate job.

**ADVICE** Improving your career prospects is very important to you. To help you do this effectively, you can get advice and support on careers and employability from the Careers and Employability Team in Room 4, Town House. They can be contacted by E: [careers@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:careers@kingston.ac.uk); T: +44 (0) 20 8417 7445; Facebook : [www.facebook.com/kucareers](https://www.facebook.com/kucareers) and Twitter: @KUCareers. Look out for employer events!

##### Reasons for choosing Kingston to do their PG study

For most of you, course content was the most important reason when choosing your university course. You put fee levels second and the University's teaching reputation third.

##### Fees and funding

For 52.1% of you, fee levels were an important factor in your decision making process when deciding where to study. Parents are helping 41.2% of you fund the course, 15% are using savings, 13.3% have a loan and 12.4% are using a salary.

**ADVICE** If you are concerned about funding issues you can get advice and support on your fees from: Credit Control: 0844 855 2309, E: [creditcontrol@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:creditcontrol@kingston.ac.uk).

**ADVICE** There is also money management advice available from Student Funding  
T: Phone: 020 8417 3553, E: [studentfunding@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:studentfunding@kingston.ac.uk)

If you have money concerns, you can also contact The Citizens' Advice Bureau based in the Students' Union, E: [cab@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:cab@kingston.ac.uk), which is free and confidential.

## Expectations

Your expectations of studying at postgraduate level are that you expect to receive a higher level of service than you experienced at undergraduate level; you expect to be treated in a manner reflecting a higher level of study; to study in a more independent way; you are less likely to tolerate a poor quality experience; you expect value for money and expect to receive more individualised study.

**ADVICE** If you are unhappy about any part of your postgraduate experience, talk to your Course Director in the first instance. If you have an academic issue regarding a module, talk to the Module Leader. Most issues can be resolved at the module level. You can also ask your Course Representative (the student who represents the views of the course) to raise any issues at the relevant Faculty Meetings to register your concerns if they are not resolved by your Course Director or Module Leader.

If your concern is about a non-academic issue, contact the Student Support team by emailing [SEcstudentsupport@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:SEcstudentsupport@kingston.ac.uk) or calling: 020 8417 331. You can also contact the Students Union for advice by calling 020 8417 2974 or by emailing: [support@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:support@kingston.ac.uk).

## Anxiety levels

Starting anything new such as a new course can cause anxiety. Over 70% of you stated that you were anxious about starting your course, 50% expressed anxiety about coping with the standard of work and 41.1% about managing your money.

**ADVICE** Feeling anxious is very normal. Postgraduate students have busy and complex lives so balancing study and life outside of university can be challenging. It is important that you speak to SOMEONE if you are worried so that you can be effectively supported. This can include your Module Leader, Course Director and the Student Support Team within the Faculty or the Student' Union and other University central support services. Most issues can be effectively addressed if done promptly. There are other support numbers listed at the end of this leaflet.

## Understanding what is meant by the term 'Feedback'

You understand what is meant by the term feedback in relation to your academic work. There is no correlation between understanding the meaning of feedback, domiciled status and English being a respondent's first language

**ADVICE** You are asked to provide us with feedback in a range of areas including modules and surveys like this one you completed. It is essential that we provide you with a satisfactory response to your comments. This approach is embedded in the University's Led by Learning policy and the Partnership Agreement. If you do not feel that you have had adequate academic feedback, please raise the issue with the appropriate person.

## Feedback preferences

The most popular preference for feedback is face to face feedback especially amongst those of you coming straight from work. The second preference is paper feedback followed closely by email. Most of you said that you would ask your tutor if you did not understand the

feedback but some of you said that you would feel uncomfortable asking especially if you do not agree with the comments.

**ADVICE** As a postgraduate student, you will be exposed to different learning styles and expected to study in a more independent way. Learning at postgraduate level is different to studying at undergraduate level.

If there is something you do not understand or agree with, it is important that you ask your Module Leader or Course Director. You should use the feedback, advice and guidance to help you with future assignments. If you do not know what you did right or where you went wrong, you cannot take this into account when undertaking your next assignment.

### Academic strengths and weaknesses

Many of you state that you feel you have very strong or strong academic strengths. However, some of you are concerned about some of your study skills with 26% of you feeling that you have weak literacy skills (writing and spelling) and 16.1 % weak numeracy skills. This is quite common so do not panic! It can also be subject related. For example, it is common for an Engineering or Mathematics students to feel that their literacy skills are not as strong as they could be and for a Life Science student to feel their numerical skills need improving.

**ADVICE** Your academic skill base will be shaped by where you have previously studied and your previous learning experiences. Every student is different and you will have your own preference to how you study. However, it is important to engage with the different learning approaches on your course. If you are concerned about any of your academic skills there is help available so DON'T PANIC!

If you feel you need extra support, the SEC Study Skills centre is available for all levels of students enrolled on courses within the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing. A group of trained staff and students are available to help you with your academic skills such as report writing, presentations, note taking, time management, exam revision, referencing and mathematical skills. The centre provides assistance and advice on draft assignments prior to hand in.

#### Penrhyn Rd campus

Drop-in sessions run during term time from Monday to Friday 11-3pm in PRJG0004 with a reduced service throughout vacations ([sss@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:sss@kingston.ac.uk)).

#### Roehampton Vale campus

Drop-in sessions run during term time on Tuesdays from 11-5pm in the Learning Resource Centre (LRC) ([sss@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:sss@kingston.ac.uk)).

#### Create your own study Group

As a postgraduate student, studying alone outside of class can be challenging especially if you do not understand something. It can be helpful to create a 'Study Group' of fellow students who are on your course who you can contact outside of the classroom. A study group can be a very supportive learning tool especially if it contains fellow students who have different academic skills. You support one another in your studies.

### Value of a PG qualification

As a cohort, you feel that employers do value a PGT qualification more than an undergraduate one and that a PGT qualification will provide you with the higher skills required for succeeding in the workplace.

**ADVICE** This is true but it is important that you harness all your skills when applying for a job after your postgraduate degree. You must remember that employers do not necessarily see a postgraduate qualification as an indicator of leadership potential or work wisdom and these are two of the key skills employers are looking for in Master and Doctorate graduates. The Careers and Employability Service can help you produce a CV and applications that will be of interest to employers so do contact them!

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Where students were coming from?

This year, 36.5 % of the sample have come straight from university, 39.5% from work, 16.3% from taking a year out and 7.7% stated 'Other'.

### Gender

The gender split for those participating in the survey is 57.3% male and 42.7% female.

### Ethnicity

You classified yourselves as 38.8% White, 33.2% Asian, 15.9% Black, 3.4% as Mixed and 8.6% as Other.

### Domiciled status

You said that 48% of you are resident in the British Isles, 16.1% in the European Union (EU) and 35.1% as Overseas (Outside the EU). This reflects the overall PGT Kingston University statistics where 42.4% of PGT students are recorded as being UK domiciled.

**ADVICE** If you are an International student you can contact the International Advisory Centre for specific help, advice and guidance on T: 0208 417 3645, E: [ISAC@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:ISAC@kingston.ac.uk)

### Age

The majority of the sample are in the 18-24 and 25-29 age groups with 38.3% and 33% respectively. However, 28.6% are aged 30 and above.

**ADVICE** As a mature student, studying alone outside of class can be challenging especially if you do not understand something. It can be helpful to create a 'Study Group' of fellow students who are on your course who you can contact outside of the classroom.

### First language

Of the survey sample, 40.9% of you stated that English is your first language. Of the remaining 59.7% for whom it is your second language, 43 different languages were reported!. This illustrates the diverse environment in which you are studying. It is common for UK domiciled students to have English as a second language.

**ADVICE** If English is not your first language, you can get support from the English Language Development Department. They run classes that are free. They can be contacted by emailing [ELS@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:ELS@kingston.ac.uk).

If you need support and guidance, there are a range of other services at the University you can use. These are listed below.

#### **ADVICE Other useful support numbers**

Chaplaincy T: 0208 417 2940, E: [chaplaincy@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:chaplaincy@kingston.ac.uk)  
Disability Support T: 020 8417 4282 E: [disability@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:disability@kingston.ac.uk)  
Dyslexia Support T: 020 8417 4282 E: [disability@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:disability@kingston.ac.uk)  
Health and Counselling Service T: 020 8547 7172, E: [healthandcounselling@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:healthandcounselling@kingston.ac.uk)  
GP Fairhill Medical Practice T: 020 8417 2204  
Nightline (confidential support service) T: 020 7631 0101 E: [listening@nightline.org.uk](mailto:listening@nightline.org.uk)  
University Switchboard T: 020 417 9000