# The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2014

Ioannis Soilemetzidis, Paul Bennett and Jason Leman

# Contents

# Foreword by Professor Karen O'Brien

Now in its sixth year, PTES paints a truly comprehensive picture of the diverse, often highly international population of postgraduate taught (PGT) students studying in the UK. PTES has recorded its highest ever number of respondents (67,580) and highest number of participating HEIs (100). The overall response rate has risen to 28.3%, though many institutions achieve a far higher response rate than this. And the survey has captured a broadly representative group of students, by subject, by domicile and by mode of study.

PTES has undergone some significant revision this year, under the guidance of the Advisory Group and informed by rigorous cognitive testing and qualitative research. Although a number of key questions remain the same, the survey is now shorter, and it adheres consistently to a five point scale from Definitely Agree to Definitely Disagree.

During the review process, we worked closely with HEFCE to ensure we could capture the demographic information in ways that would give us a clearer understanding of the PGT population studying in the UK. In particular, we decided to ask students about the time elapsed since they were last in higher education, added a new question about ethnicity for UK-domiciled students and included questions, for the first time, about the ways in which students actually fund their postgraduate study. This "sources of funding" question will contribute to the evidence base for the current national focus on the issue of access to postgraduate education for those students who cannot rely on a well-stocked "bank of Mum and Dad". It will give us insights, in other words, that will inform the new "widening participation" agenda for postgraduate education. There is also a new question about English language fluency, asking those students who considered themselves not fluent whether they had received sufficient language support. Only 57% of the non-fluent group agreed that they had, a surprisingly large gap in support for non-native speakers.

The end result is certainly not a National Student Survey for PGT students, but the convergence of scales and, crucially, the alignment of the final overall satisfaction question with the NSS question 22, give us a new way of benchmarking our postgraduate educational delivery against our undergraduate delivery. The overall satisfaction question ("overall I am satisfied with the quality of the course") is not comparable to the question in previous years (which asked students to evaluate satisfaction against expectations). Instead, it gives a new baseline for future years. As a baseline of 82.6%, it shows that PGT students are less satisfied (lower by almost four percentage points) than the 2014 graduating undergraduates who filled out the NSS. Part of the reason for this variation may lie in the differences between the surveys. But it nevertheless also appears to be the case that PGT students expect more, and are sometimes disappointed, particularly with course organisation, contact hours and assessment. We will all want to reflect on this as we continually strive to enhance the quality of postgraduate education in the UK.

New questions in the "engagement" section address students' opportunities to give feedback about their course (a reliable predictor of overall satisfaction) and their perceptions of their learning gains ("My course has challenged me to produce my best work"). 80.5% of students agreed with this, which surely goes to the heart of what a postgraduate education is all about. A high percentage but one we will all want to continue to raise.

In nearly all respects the survey gives us confidence in the quality of postgraduate taught education in the UK. Ratings for the quality of teaching are consistently high, on some measures higher than they are for undergraduates surveyed through the NSS. This, too, is what postgraduate education is all about: exciting, enthusiastic and transformational teaching for students who, as the survey shows, are simultaneously seeking to enhance their career prospects yet deeply interested in the subjects they have chosen.

**Professor Karen O'Brien, Vice-Principal (Education), King's College London**
Chair of the PTES Advisory Group

# Executive summary

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) collects and benchmarks feedback from postgraduate taught students to help inform enhancements to their experience. The survey is offered annually by the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and is run in conjunction with participating institutions.

- 100 higher education institutions participated in PTES 2014, the highest-ever level. Over the last two years, 117 UK institutions have participated in PTES at least once.
- 67,580 taught postgraduate students responded (28.3% of those students invited to take part), the biggest ever survey sample of postgraduate students in the UK.

## Redesign of PTES

The PTES questionnaire was redesigned before fieldwork was conducted between February and June 2014. The redesign was informed by sector-wide consultation and overseen by the PTES Advisory Group. It was evidence-based and included analysis of past datasets and cognitive testing of existing and newly proposed questions with students from a range of backgrounds and disciplines across the UK.

The new survey has been brought right up-to-date, reflecting the sector's increasing focus on student engagement, information provision and widening participation. It has a simpler structure and redundant questions have been removed, while options for making qualitative comments have been enhanced. Some continuity has also been preserved, but PTES 2014 also sets a new baseline for the sector.

## Profile of respondents

The demographic profile of PTES responders is broadly comparable with the profile of all postgraduate taught students. However, there continues to be some under-representation of part-time students who constitute 34% of PTES respondents (32% of those studying for a Masters) yet are almost 42% of students in the wider population of 'Higher Degree taught' students.

## Motivations and information provision

Reflecting on the reasons for choosing their current course, more students cited career progression (58%) and improving employment prospects (55%) than were motivated by personal interest (47%) or because they wished to progress to a higher level qualification such as a PhD (38%). However, students also have multiple motivations which do not neatly fit into 'employability' or 'academic' classifications. Of the 55% of students overall who cited "to improve employment prospects" as a motivation, over half (56%) also cited "for personal interest" and 41% cited "to progress to a higher level qualification (e.g. PhD)". This suggests many courses should cater for multiple aspirations, rather than be exclusively 'professional' or 'research' focused.

UK students were most likely to cite location as the reason for choosing their institution, while international students were more likely to cite reputation. The most important reason for part-time students was flexible delivery (47%), which was cited by just 10% of full-time students. Courses which fail to offer flexibility may lose out on almost half of the part-time market and around a quarter of the overall postgraduate taught market.

This year UK funding bodies issued new guidance asking institutions to improve, where necessary, their information provision and a new question scale was introduced in PTES asking for feedback about information on course choice. The majority of students said information was easy to find (86%), useful (87%) sufficient (80%) and accurate (80%). Unexpectedly, the amount of time elapsed since the student was last in higher education had little impact. However, students who had previously studied at institutions outside the UK but in the EU were generally less satisfied with information provision than those previously at UK and non-EU institutions. The results naturally only reflect the views of students who actually went on to take the course.

## Overall experience

83% of taught postgraduates were satisfied with the quality of their course and this positivity continues across the range of dimensions of experience explored by PTES. Students are positive in the greatest numbers about resources and services and the teaching and learning they experience (82% average agreement on both scales), while fewer (72% on average) agree with positive statements about assessment and feedback.

The majority of scales suggest an increase in positivity compared with 2013, but this is largely the result of the redesign of the questionnaire, and the 2014 scale scores should be treated as new baselines.

There are strong associations between each of the scales, particularly between teaching and learning and engagement. The teaching and learning scale (most likely including 'engagement') has the biggest causal influence on overall satisfaction with skills development and organisation and management also important factors. The same four dimensions, together with overall satisfaction, also contribute the most strongly to an overarching 'student experience' factor that captures most of the variation in experience between students.

## Experience in detail

**Teaching and learning:** Overwhelmingly students supported the view that staff are good at explaining things (88%) and enthusiastic about what they are teaching (90%). However, only two-thirds (67%) agreed there is sufficient contact time (face-to-face and/or online) to support effective learning. Part-time students were more likely to be positive than full-time students and among full-time students UK and non-EU students were more likely to be positive than students from other EU countries.

**Engagement:** Four-in-five students said they were challenged to produce their best work. The new engagement scale also found good levels of interactive learning, with 87% of students encouraged to participate in class, though fewer (77%) reported sufficient opportunities to discuss work with other students. 75% agreed they had appropriate opportunities to give feedback and 73% agreed that the workload on their course was manageable. STEM subjects showed lower levels of engagement than other subject areas. Part-time students from the UK showed the highest levels of engagement. The influence of initial motivation(s) on engagement was limited and with only slightly higher levels of engagement for those citing personal interest or progression to a higher qualification such as a PhD as a motivation.

**Assessment and feedback:** Around three-quarters of students were positive about assessment and feedback, with the exception of the promptness of feedback where positivity drops to two-thirds (66%). There are strong disciplinary differences and part-time students were more positive about assessment and feedback than full-time students.

**Dissertation or major project:** 83% of students planning, undertaking or having completed a dissertation agreed that their supervisor had the necessary skills and subject knowledge, while 76% agreed they received helpful feedback on progress and only 70% were happy with the support they received at the planning stage. Reflecting this, those currently at the planning stage when answering PTES were least likely to be positive across all the questions on this scale.

**Organisation and management:** 77% agreed their timetable fits well with their other commitments and 74% agreed the course is well organised and running smoothly, the latter being strongly related to overall satisfaction. However, only 60% agreed they were encouraged to be involved in decisions about how their course was run and involvement was particularly low for distance learners (53%), though still enough to suggest learning at a distance need not be a barrier to such involvement. With the exception of the lower level of agreement amongst Law students (54%) there was no evidence that studying in those subjects most aligned with prescribed professional standards, meant less involvement in decision making about courses.

**Resources and services:** Positivity about resources and services was generally high – 83% agreed the library resources and services met their needs and 86% agreed that they could access IT facilities as required. Fewer (77%) were aware of how to access the support services at their institution. Part-time students, comprising

greater numbers of distance learners, were less positive about resources and services than full-time students, but given that the questions also relate to online resources and generic support this is a concern even if students are not physically 'on campus'. Students in STEM subjects were the most positive on this scale.

**Skills development:** Students are largely positive about their experience related to skills development, particularly in respect of becoming more confident of independent learning and developing research skills (both with 82% agreement). The relationship between initial motivation and skills development was limited, but those students seeking to progress to a higher qualification were the most positive about skills development, particularly in respect of independent learning and research skills.

## Further factors influencing student experience

As well as discipline, domicile and mode-of-study, factors such as time since last in higher education, English language skills, ethnicity, disability and funding were also explored.

Those returning to higher education after a longer period away are more likely to report a more positive experience than 'continuers' or those returning after a short period.

57% of students who did not consider themselves fluent in English at the beginning of their studies agreed that they have received appropriate support for their English language needs. Those not fluent in English at the start of their course were slightly less likely to agree they had been engaged but were notably more positive about organisation and management and resources and services.

Among UK-domiciled students, those giving an ethnic identity of Chinese or Black or Black British were most positive about their experience across a range of scales, with the biggest influences of ethnicity on assessment and feedback, organisation and management and skills development.

In the main, students with no known disability are more likely to rate their experience highly across the whole range of scales than those with a disability. However, students with physical disabilities tended to have a more positive experience than those with specific learning difficulties, mental health conditions and social/communication impairments. Blind students were also notably less positive about engagement and skills development than students with other physical disabilities.

The main sources of funding cited by students were family or friends, personal income and savings – this was applicable for course fees and even more so in respect of living costs. This raises questions about the affordability of entry to many professions and especially progression onto a PhD (and possible academic career) in many subject areas. Overall satisfaction varied modestly by source of fees and was highest (86%) for students funded by an employer, though there are likely to be discipline and mode-of-study influences on this.

## Comparison of PTES with the National Student Survey (NSS)

Several questions in PTES are comparable with those in the National Student Survey. Postgraduate taught students are more positive about the usefulness of feedback and the enthusiasm of teaching staff than final year undergraduates. However, on the majority of questions, levels of agreement with positive statements are slightly lower for PTES, including for 'Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course' to which 83% of PGT students agreed compared with over 86% of undergraduates, a difference of 3.7 percentage points.

## PTES 2015

PTES will next run in Spring 2015, as will the HEA's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) and UK Engagement Survey (UKES). Institutions can register to participate from October 2014. The HEA's Surveys team also offers a consultancy service to higher education institutions and sector bodies to support them with the design, analysis and use of student surveys for enhancement.

Further details are available by emailing surveys@heacademy.ac.uk or by consulting the HEA's website at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/consultancy-services/surveys

# About the authors

**Ioannis Soilemetzidis**

Ioannis Soilemetzidis is an Academic Development Officer for Surveys at the HEA. Among other qualifications, Ioannis holds a Bachelor Degree in Tourism Management, a Postgraduate Qualification in Production Management, Quality and Quality Management and an MBA in International Business from Coventry University. Ioannis is a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, a member of the Chartered Management Institute (MCMI) and a PRINCE2 certified and registered professional practitioner. With professional experience in four UK universities, some of his expertise and research interests include the areas of teaching and learning, international student recruitment, student support, collaborative academic partnerships and student retention.

**Paul Bennett**

Paul Bennett is Head of Surveys at the HEA where he oversees the delivery and analysis of the HEA's postgraduate experience surveys, as well as the wider support, research and consultancy services that the HEA Surveys team provides to the higher education sector at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. Prior to joining the HEA, Paul was a senior researcher and analyst in the Scottish Government and, before that, Lecturer in Economic Geography for nine years at the University of Edinburgh, where he still occasionally teaches. He holds a BA and DPhil from the University of Oxford and an MSc from the University of Bristol.

**Jason Leman**

Jason Leman is Academic Development Officer for Surveys at the Higher Education Academy and oversees the delivery and analysis of the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. Before joining the HEA in September 2012, Jason was Senior Lecturer in Research and Evaluation at Sheffield Hallam University, where he worked for ten years on survey research, including on student engagement, interpretation of survey items, and reporting for enhancement. Jason has a Masters in Research in Social Policy and Sociology from Sheffield Hallam University and a BSc in Physics and Astronomy from the University of Sheffield.

To contact the HEA about PTES or other student survey work, please email: surveys@heacademy.ac.uk

# Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the PTES Officers in all participating institutions for their efforts and for encouraging so many students to complete this year's survey. We would of course particularly like to thank the students who responded for their time and valuable feedback.

We are especially grateful for the advice, comments and support from the PTES Advisory Group, chaired by Professor Karen O'Brien, particularly in respect of the group's work on the redesign of PTES in advance of this year's survey. Colleagues at HEFCE were also very helpful, as were contributions and suggestions made from across the sector.

Finally we would like to express special thanks to Dr Gosia Turner who undertook many of the data analyses in preparation for this report.

# 1. Introduction

The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is the higher education sector's annual survey of postgraduate students studying for taught Masters and other taught programmes. The questions in this year's survey, the sixth in succession, were significantly redeveloped before the survey was released across the UK - between February and June 2014. A total of 67,580 taught postgraduates took part, representing a continuing increase on previous years (58,679 had taken part in 2013, the previous highest response).

This report presents the national findings from PTES 2014, aggregating results from the 100 diverse and broadly representative higher education institutions (HEIs) that took part, and giving us the most comprehensive picture of the postgraduate taught experience in the UK. Notes on the analyses used in this report are contained in Appendix 2.

## 1.1 The Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)

PTES collects feedback from taught postgraduates about their experiences of their programmes. The survey is run by the Higher Education Academy (HEA), in conjunction with participating institutions, and is designed to help inform discussions and decisions within institutions about enhancements to learning and teaching.

The survey includes questions on the full study cycle of taught postgraduates, from motivations and information used to support course choice, experiences while on the course, through to their skills development and preparation for a future career. PTES contains some questions from the undergraduate National Student Survey (NSS), allowing institutions to compare the experience of their undergraduate and taught postgraduate provision, but also contains more advanced questions suitable for postgraduate cohorts. The survey also goes into more depth and detail than the NSS, for example asking about students' engagement and motivations.

| Table 1.1.1 Key features |
|---|
| • National online survey |
| • Enhancement focus |
| • Institutions can add their own questions |
| • Flexible timing within four-month window |
| • Implemented locally |
| • Included in HEA subscription |
| • Institutions' results are confidential |
| • Benchmarking groups |

Institutional-level results are confidential so cannot be used to form league tables. This gives institutions the freedom to treat survey results as useful but partial indicators of where things might be going well and where improvements might be required. Their effective use in enhancement requires interpretation in conjunction with other information (often qualitative) from students and staff. This is particularly important at taught postgraduate level where the small and specialist nature of many courses can result in small samples and means care should be taken not to use these results in isolation.

Nonetheless, knowing how they are doing relative to others can help institutions understand where they need to improve. PTES allows benchmarking through the use of benchmarking groups - while keeping institutional level results confidential. These allow participating institutions to compare their own performance with the average performance of the institutions in each group. There are currently nine standard benchmarking groups, while the HEA now also offers the ability for institutions to choose their own custom benchmarks as an add-on service. PTES is also available for use internationally, allowing participants to compare their students' experience with those in the UK higher education sector.

| Table 1.1.2 Benchmarking groups | | |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-92 | Scottish | million+ |
| Post-92 | Welsh | Russell Group |
| Small and specialist | GuildHE | University Alliance |

## 1.2 Overview of PTES in 2014

All HEIs in the UK were invited to take part in PTES 2014, with 100 institutions from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland deciding to do so. In the last two years 117 institutions have participated in PTES at least once.

The PTES 2014 survey window opened on 3 February 2014 and closed on 19 June 2014. Within this period, institutions could choose when to run PTES locally.

The questionnaire was redesigned before launch and this was overseen by the PTES Advisory Group. The redevelopment was evidence-based, informed by sector-wide consultation, analysis of past data, and research and testing with students themselves. The new survey is up-to-date, with a simpler structure, while complex and redundant questions have been removed. Some of the freed-up space has been used to include additional qualitative comments, a new focus on student engagement, and questions which inform the widening participation agenda. Further information about the redevelopment is contained in Chapter 2 and a copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix 3.

| Table 1.2.1 The structure of the PTES questionnaire in 2014 | |
|---|---|
| A: Teaching and Learning | G: Skills Development |
| B: Engagement | H: Overview |
| C: Assessment and Feedback | Motivations |
| D: Dissertation or Major Project | About Yourself |
| E: Organisation and Management | About your Course |
| F: Resources and Services | About your Education and Career |

As in previous years, PTES was delivered via the Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) system[1], which is also used to deliver the HEA's Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)[2]. A new version of BOS will significantly improve functionality for institutions in 2015. Access to the survey was controlled through passwords or personalised links, meaning it could only be answered by eligible students.

Benchmarking reports were again provided to each institution by the HEA. These compared institutions' own results, by subject, with the national aggregate and a selection of the nine standard benchmarking groups. For the first time, institutions were able to create custom benchmarking groups providing aggregate results for a minimum of six participating institutions. This new service has been piloted by the HEA to allow institutions to compare their own results with their usual comparator group.

[1] Please see: http://www.survey.bris.ac.uk/
[2] Please see: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/consultancy-services/surveys/pres

# 2. Redesign of PTES

The PTES questionnaire underwent a major redesign in advance of the 2014 survey to bring it up-to-date, make it more user-friendly, ensure its robustness, and make it more manageable and useful to institutions.

Significant changes include:

- removing a range of scales and individual items to shorten the survey overall;
- introducing new items on engagement, skills and career development, and other quality attributes;
- adding a small number of questions to inform the widening participation and provision of information agendas[3];
- improving the wording of many questions;
- standardising and simplifying question formats;
- introducing free-text comments boxes for each main question scale.

## 2.1 Background

PTES has been conducted in the UK since 2009. It was based on the successful Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), which had been introduced two years previously. PRES was successfully redesigned and updated in 2012-13 and saw a significant increase in use by institutions and response from students. Feedback from institutions indicated they would welcome a similar redevelopment of PTES.

The HEA therefore embarked on a programme of research and consultation to ensure any changes to the questionnaire were evidence-based and informed by the needs of the sector. The redesign was based on a careful, statistically-informed analysis of the earlier PTES datasets. New items and proposed changes were tested through qualitative interviews and focus groups with students from diverse institutions. Institutions were consulted on their priorities for inclusion in the questionnaire and given the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Final decisions on the design of the survey were made by the PTES Advisory Group. The HEA is grateful for the contribution of everyone who had an input into the redesign.

The rest of this chapter outlines the qualitative and quantitative testing and development work that underpins the redesigned survey and also shows where comparisons can be made – with due care – between questions in PTES 2014 and those from previous versions.

## 2.2 Cognitive testing[4]

Cognitive testing of survey questions is vital to ensure respondents interpret them consistently and as intended, and to inform interpretation of results. CooperGibson Research was commissioned by the HEA to undertake cognitive testing of PTES questions. The objectives were to:

- test the face validity and interpretation of the experience-related questions proposed for retention in PTES, as well as newly proposed questions;
- where tests reveal significant problems with face validity and interpretation, to propose and test alternative wordings;
- to provide evidence which assists the sector in the interpretation and use of PTES results;
- to contribute to the robust evidence base underpinning PTES.

The cognitive interviewing method focuses on the thought processes that respondents use to answer survey questions, exploring students' understanding and interpretations of questions. The testing of PTES utilised

[3] For example, questions about sources of funding for fees and living costs, time since last in higher education, ethnicity, English language support and the adequacy of information provided to inform course choice.

[4] The full report on the cognitive testing is available on the HEA website: CooperGibson Research (2014) Cognitive review of survey items at postgraduate level, The Higher Education Academy, May 2014, https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/PTES%20Cognitive%20Review_CGR.pdf

both think-aloud interviewing and verbal probing techniques by presenting each question to respondents and asking them to explain how they arrived at their answer. Students were asked to explain their thinking when answering questions, highlight where questions were unclear or ambiguous and had potential for multiple interpretations. They were also able to make useful suggestions about how to revise the wording of questions, fill any significant gaps and structure the questionnaire.

Face-to-face interviews were supplemented by telephone interviews, which improved convenience and accessibility for some students, and focus groups which used group discussion to stimulate more ideas and suggestions. Students were asked to volunteer to take part and were provided with incentives for doing so.

The process was iterative, based on four stages of fieldwork. After each stage of data collection, findings were fed back to the HEA and revisions to questions took place with changes and additions introduced to test in the next round.

The sample of postgraduate students included 77 postgraduate students from 11 institutions across England, Scotland and Wales. The HEIs included both Pre-1992 and Post-1992 institutions, ranging from large Russell Group members to small specialist institutions. The students came from a wide range of subject areas, including sciences, engineering, IT, business, arts and humanities, teacher training and medicine. To capture the diversity of students, a broad mix of genders, ages, origins, and modes of study were represented.

The testing highlighted important key issues around wording and phrasing of a range of questions proposed for introduction or retention in PTES 2014. Detailed feedback against each of the survey items is contained in the full cognitive interviewing report, while key messages are summarised below.

**Key findings**

- overall, students felt the questions tested were relatively clear and most could provide an answer to most questions, although there were differing interpretations for some questions and difficulties with specific terminology;
- there was a clear preference for the use of 'course' rather than 'programme';
- some questions were deemed to be less relevant to distance learning or part-time students because they were interpreted to relate to experiences on campus or in face-to-face sessions (e.g. 'I have been encouraged to ask questions or make contributions in taught sessions');
- students felt some questions did not fit well in certain sections (although it was noted that they reviewed extracts of the questionnaire rather than the full survey);
- the final versions of questions showed more consistent interpretation during cognitive testing; on the whole students were comfortable with the wording of items and with the ease of providing a response;
- students requested that space was provided on the questionnaire to clarify certain responses;
- suggestions were made by students to include questions around providing feedback, academic and pastoral support offered, careers advice, workload and access to resources;
- the removal of a number of problematic questions has improved the relevance of the survey for the majority of students across a wide student cohort;
- some terminology was particularly problematic for international students. Commonly used words/phrases were not recognised (e.g. 'motivated', 'reflect', 'professional development', 'work-based learning'). Simple language appeared to be paramount to aid their understanding;
- questions which required a response to be generalised (e.g. across modules, content, methods of delivery or programme staff), could be problematic for students because they felt their experiences were not consistent (e.g. the quality of modules varied);
- questions that rated regularity/frequency/consistency were sometimes problematic since there were varying interpretations;
- students were not always comfortable with rating their own performance.

Overall, it was felt that the process of qualitative testing produced a set of questionnaire items that could robustly capture the experience of diverse students.

## 2.3 Quantitative testing

The new questionnaire is logically structured into thematic scales informed by quantitative analysis of previous PTES surveys. However, the extent of the redesign meant that we could not confirm in advance that each of the eight experience scales constituted a coherent and distinct 'factor'. This is important because the scales are intended to give a rounded picture of each aspect of experience, which is more reliable than relying on the results to individual items. Factor analysis and internal consistency testing were thus performed on the eight main scales using the 2014 data to check whether it was legitimate to summarise each questionnaire scale with a single score (or whether there was actually a different set of factors at work that deviated from the visual questionnaire structure).

A factor analysis[5] using the principal components method was conducted involving all 39 items from the eight main question scales (questions 1, 3, 5, 9, 11, 13, 15, and 22). The analysis reveals factors that reflect the structure of the questionnaire and suggest that it is legitimate to report a single scale score for seven of the eight scales. The engagement scale did not clearly form a single factor, with the items on course challenge and workload loading more strongly onto other factors (teaching and organisation respectively). The analysis is complicated by relatively strong correlations between the different factors, indicating that none can be considered entirely independent from the other.

Table 2.3.1 The structure of the PTES questionnaire in 2014

| **Scale** | **Cronbach's alpha** | **Cronbach's alpha if least coherent item removed** |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching and Learning (7 items) | 0.891 | 0.885 (contact time) |
| Engagement (5 items) | 0.779 | 0.777 (workload manageable) |
| Assessment and Feedback (4 items) | 0.834 | 0.810 (criteria used in marking) |
| Dissertation or Major Project (4 items) | 0.866 | 0.882 (understanding standards) |
| Organisation and Management (5 items) | 0.834 | 0.838 (timetable fits well) |
| Resources and Services (4 items) | 0.833 | 0.842 (access support services) |
| Skills Development (6 items) | 0.900 | 0.890 (skills need to develop) |
| Information (4 items) | 0.899 | 0.892 (information easy to find) |

To check the internal consistency of each scale (ie the extent to which the scale items 'hang-together' and provide a coherent measure of the scale theme), the Cronbach's alpha of each scale was calculated and the results are shown in Table 2.3.1. A minimum Cronbach's alpha of 0.7 is normally sought with values of 0.8 or more desirable as they show strong internal consistency. Seven of the scales in PTES have Cronbach's alpha scores that exceed 0.8, suggesting that single scale scores are legitimate and coherent measures for each of the aspects of experience. Whilst the Engagement scale does not indicate quite as strong internal consistency, it does exhibit a very good level of coherence.

The Engagement scale itself reflects a number of different aspects of teaching and learning so it is not surprising that it is less internally consistent than the others. Nonetheless, a scale score can still be usefully employed as a general indicator, complemented by drilling down into individual item scores.

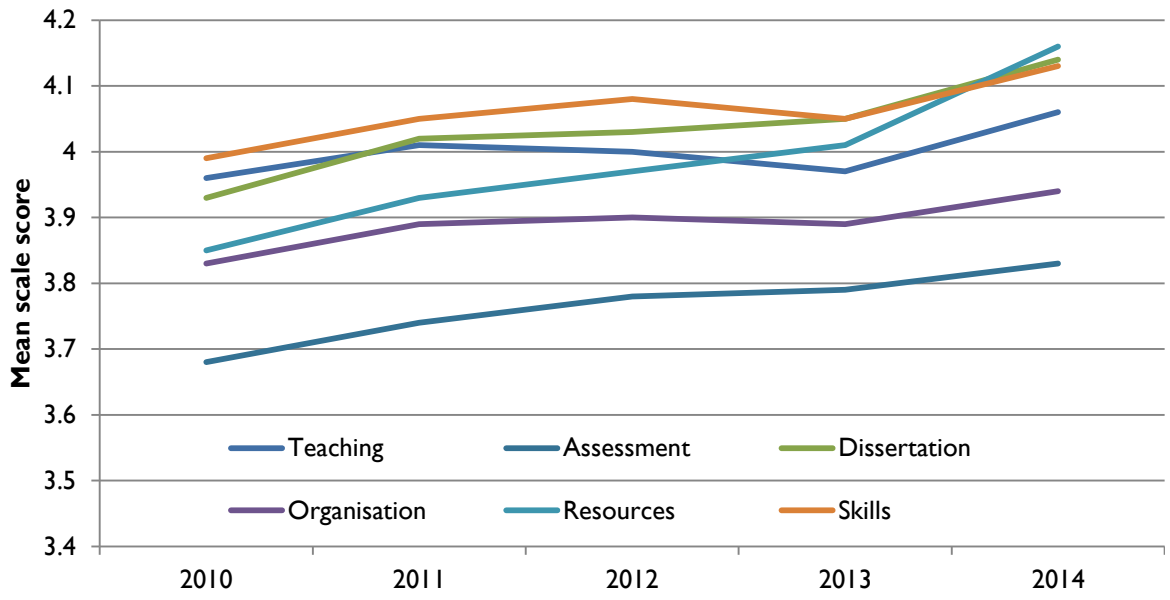
[5] Analysis used Principal Components Analysis and Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation. Determinant of the correlation matrix < 0.00001, indicating multi-collinearity, Kappa of 3.80 and VIFs indicated multi-collinearity was not serious. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.968, Bartlett's test was significant ($p<0.001$). Around 60% of total variance was explained by the eight factors.

The questionnaire structure is also intended to be logical and easy to interpret for the purpose of informing enhancement. Given that the quantitative analysis has not revealed any major causes for concern with the new questionnaire structure, and that institutions need a period of stability in the questionnaire design in order to monitor progress over time, it is not proposed to make further changes to the questionnaire as a result of this analysis.

## 2.4 Comparison with previous years

A significant number of questions have either remained the same or have received minor modifications so comparison is possible between results for PTES 2014 and those from previous years. However, it should be noted that the ordering of response options for all the experience scales has been reversed, so that options now run from 'definitely agree' to 'definitely disagree' in line with the National Student Survey. Analysis shows that while this has not significantly altered response patterns, there has been some increase in positivity between 2013 and 2014 which is likely, in part, to reflect this change, see Figure 2.4.1.

Figure 2.4.1 Trend of scale responses 2010-2014*




N = 10,017 – 34,542

* from institutions running PTES in all years, 2010-2014

The measure of 'overall satisfaction' (question 17) is not comparable with previous years. PTES 2013 asked students to rate their experience overall relative to expectations on a seven-point scale, where the middle point = met expectations. PTES 2014 asked students to agree or disagree with the statement: "Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course", using the standard five-point scale. In this case, the middle-point response is not sufficient to indicate satisfaction. The new wording is, however, comparable with that used in the NSS.

To indicate where comparisons may be made with care, table 2.4.2 lists the questions which have either remained the same or have been modified since 2013. It does not show the brand new questions, which were introduced in 2014, or those that were removed in their entirety. Where questions have been modified, or moved position in the survey, results over time should be compared with caution as modifications may have significantly influenced responses.

| Table 2.4.2 Questions that are comparable with those in PTES 2013 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Question Number** | **Question wording** | **Change** | **PTES 2013** |
| Q1.a | Staff are good at explaining things | Same* | Q2.a |
| Q1.b | Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching | Same* | Q2.c |
| Q1.c | The course is intellectually stimulating | Same* | Q1.d |
| Q1.f | There is sufficient contact time (face to face and/or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning | Same* | Q1.b |
| Q1.g | I am happy with the ~~*teaching*~~ support **for my learning** I receive from staff on my course | Modified* | Q1.c |
| Q5.a | The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance | Same | Q5.a |
| Q5.b | Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair | Same | Q5.b |
| Q5.c | Feedback on my work has been prompt | Same | Q5.c |
| Q9.a | I understand the required standards for the dissertation / major project | Same | Q7.a |
| Q9.c | My supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my dissertation / major project | Same* | Q7.b |
| Q9.d | My supervisor provides helpful feedback on my progress | Same* | Q7.f |
| Q11.a | The timetable fits well with my other commitments | Same | Q8.a |
| Q11.b | Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively | Same | Q8.b |
| Q11.c | The ~~*programme*~~ **course** is well organised and is running smoothly | Modified | Q8.c |
| Q13.a | The library resources and services are good enough for my needs **(including physical and online)** | Modified | Q10.a |
| Q13.b | I have been able to access general IT resources **(including physical and online)** when I needed to | Modified* | Q10.c |
| Q13.c | I have been able to access ~~*specialised equipment, facilities, or rooms when I needed them*~~ **subject specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software) necessary for my studies** | Modified* | Q10.e |
| Q15.a | As a result of the ~~*programme*~~ **course** I am more confident about independent learning | Modified* | Q11.c |
| Q15.c | ~~*The programme has developed*~~ My research skills **have developed during my course** | Modified* | Q11.a |
| Q15.f | **As a result of the course** I feel better prepared for my future ~~*employment*~~ **career** | Modified* | Q12.b |
| Q21.(2) | Reputation in chosen subject area **/ department** | Modified | Q17.(2) |
| Q21.(3) | Reputation of ~~*department*~~ **the course tutors** | Modified | Q17.(3) |
| Q21.(9) | The way the **course** ~~*programme*~~ is **structured or** assessed | Modified* | Q17.(10) |

**Bold** = additional wording for PTES 2014
* = different order in question scale

# 3. Profile of respondents

## 3.1 Response rates

Table 3.1.1 National response rates for PTES 2009-2014

| Year | HEIs | Responses | Rate |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2009 | 30 | 14,421 | 17.7% |
| 2010 | 76 | 32,638 | 14.8% |
| 2011 | 80 | 38,756 | 17.8% |
| 2012 | 83 | 54,640 | 24.7% |
| 2013 | 89 | 58,679 | 26.0% |
| 2014 | 100 | 67,580 | 28.3% |

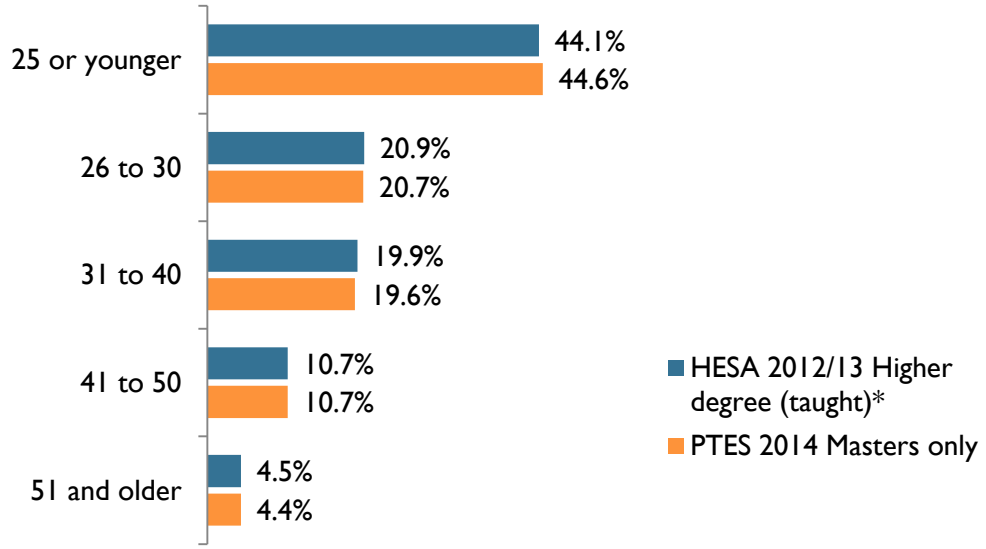
67,580 students from 100 institutions responded to PTES in 2014, representing 28.3% of all students invited to take part. This continues the sustained growth in institutional and student participation, and response rates.

Table 3.1.2 Institutional response rates for PTES 2014

| | Rate |
|---|---|
| Top of the range | 87% |
| Top of the range (non-Small and Specialist) | 56% |
| Upper quartile | 38% |
| Mean | 28% |
| Median | 29% |
| Lower quartile | 20% |

## 3.2 Profile and representativeness of respondents

Figure 3.2.1 Profile of respondents by age




PTES N = 53,798 *estimate for this age grouping based on detailed HESA age categories Question 24

Figure 3.2.1 illustrates the age profile of the participants of PTES in 2014 and compares them with the profile of all taught Masters students in the HESA student record from the previous academic year. The profile of respondents by age is very close to that of the HESA population. PTES respondents are getting slightly younger, with the proportion of respondents aged under 25 increasing from 44.1% in PTES 2013 to 44.6% in PTES 2014. This continues recent trends in the wider population of taught postgraduates.

Table 3.2.2 Profile of respondents, by gender, disability, domicile and mode of study

| | PTES 2014 all | PTES 2014 Masters only | HESA 2012/13 Higher degree (taught) | Difference between PTES 'Masters only' and HESA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 57.3% | 54.8% | 54.4% | 0.4% |
| Male | 42.7% | 45.2% | 45.6% | -0.4% |
| **N** | 65,636 | 53,392 | 305,985 | |
| | | | | |
| Disabled | 6.1% | 6.0% | 5.7% | 0.3% |
| Not known disability | 93.9% | 94.0% | 94.3% | -0.3% |
| **N** | 65,288 | 53,153 | 305,945 | |
| | | | | |
| UK | 53.7% | 47.1% | 52.8% | -5.7% |
| Other EU | 12.7% | 14.2% | 9.2% | 5.0% |
| Non-EU | 33.6% | 38.7% | 38.0% | 0.7% |
| **N** | 66,043 | 53,854 | 305,985 | |
| | | | | |
| Full-time | 66.2% | 67.6% | 58.3% | 9.3% |
| Part-time | 33.8% | 32.4% | 41.7% | -9.3% |
| **N** | 65,727 | 53,807 | 306,035 | |

Table 3.2.2 compares the profile of PTES respondents (all respondents and the 82% specifically studying for a Masters) with the wider population of taught Masters students recorded by HESA in 2012-13. There is virtually no difference in the balance of genders and disabled/not disabled students between the PTES 2014 Masters only profile and the HESA 2012/13 taught Masters population. UK domiciled students are slightly underrepresented in PTES. However, this reflects the greater tendency of UK domiciled students to study part-time and it is in mode-of-study where the greatest divergence between the PTES profile and the HESA population profile exists. While part-time students make up 33.8% of the PTES taught Masters sample, they constitute 42% of all taught Masters students in the previous year. Even with the continued fall in part-time students in the HESA population, this means that part-time students are under-represented in the sample and this should be borne in mind by institutions when benchmarking their own results. For example where mode-of-study has a significant impact on experience (and this report provides analysis of this) then an unduly good or poor score may reflect mode-of-study as much as it does reflect the quality of provision.

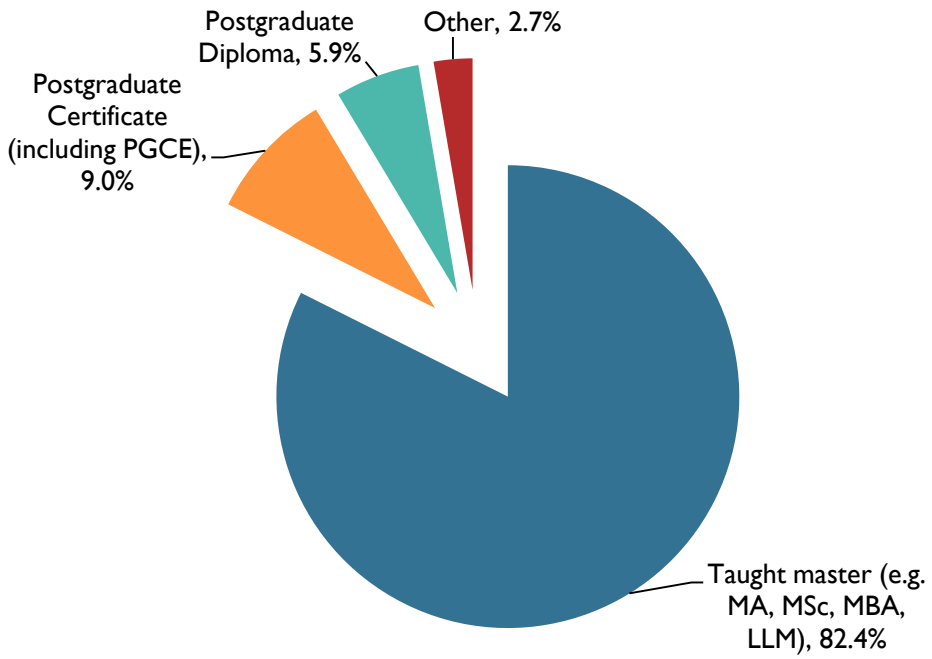
PTES 2014 includes a new question about students' ethnicity which is used later to compare the experiences of different students. Table 3.2.3 shows that the PTES sample of UK domiciled students is broadly representative of the Taught Masters population, although Black or Black British students are somewhat under-represented while Chinese students are over-represented. Interestingly students from these two broad groupings are most likely to report positive experiences.

Table 3.2.3 Profile of respondents by ethnicity (UK-domiciled)

| | PTES 2014 all | PTES 2014 Masters only | HESA 2011/12 Higher degree (taught) | Difference between PTES 'Masters only' and HESA |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 82.0% | 79.9% | 79.0% | 0.9% |
| Black or Black British - Caribbean | 0.8% | 0.8% | 1.3% | -0.6% |
| Black or Black British - African | 3.5% | 4.0% | 5.6% | -1.7% |
| Other Black background | 0.5% | 0.6% | 0.3% | 0.2% |
| Asian or Asian British - Indian | 3.2% | 3.3% | 3.8% | -0.5% |
| Asian or Asian British - Pakistani | 1.4% | 1.4% | 1.8% | -0.4% |
| Asian or Asian British - Bangladeshi | 0.4% | 0.4% | 0.5% | -0.1% |
| Chinese | 2.9% | 3.6% | 1.3% | 2.3% |
| Other Asian background | 1.1% | 1.3% | 1.8% | -0.5% |
| Other (including mixed) | 4.3% | 4.7% | 4.4% | 0.3% |
| **N** | 33,312 | 23,724 | 155,410 | |

Figure 3.2.4 shows that 82.4% of the responders are studying for a taught Masters degree, an increase of 3.2% in relation to PTES 2013. Table 3.2.5 indicates that the discipline profile of PTES 2014 respondents is broadly reflective of the national student body. There is some slight over-representation of students in Biological Sciences and some underrepresentation of those in Business and Administrative Studies (where a large proportion of MBA students study part-time). The analysis in this report examines the existence of discipline effects on experience. Where these are strong, institutions should benchmark within disciplines (across the sector) rather than across disciplines (within their institution).

Figure 3.2.4 Profile of respondents by type of programme




N = 66,270

Question 31

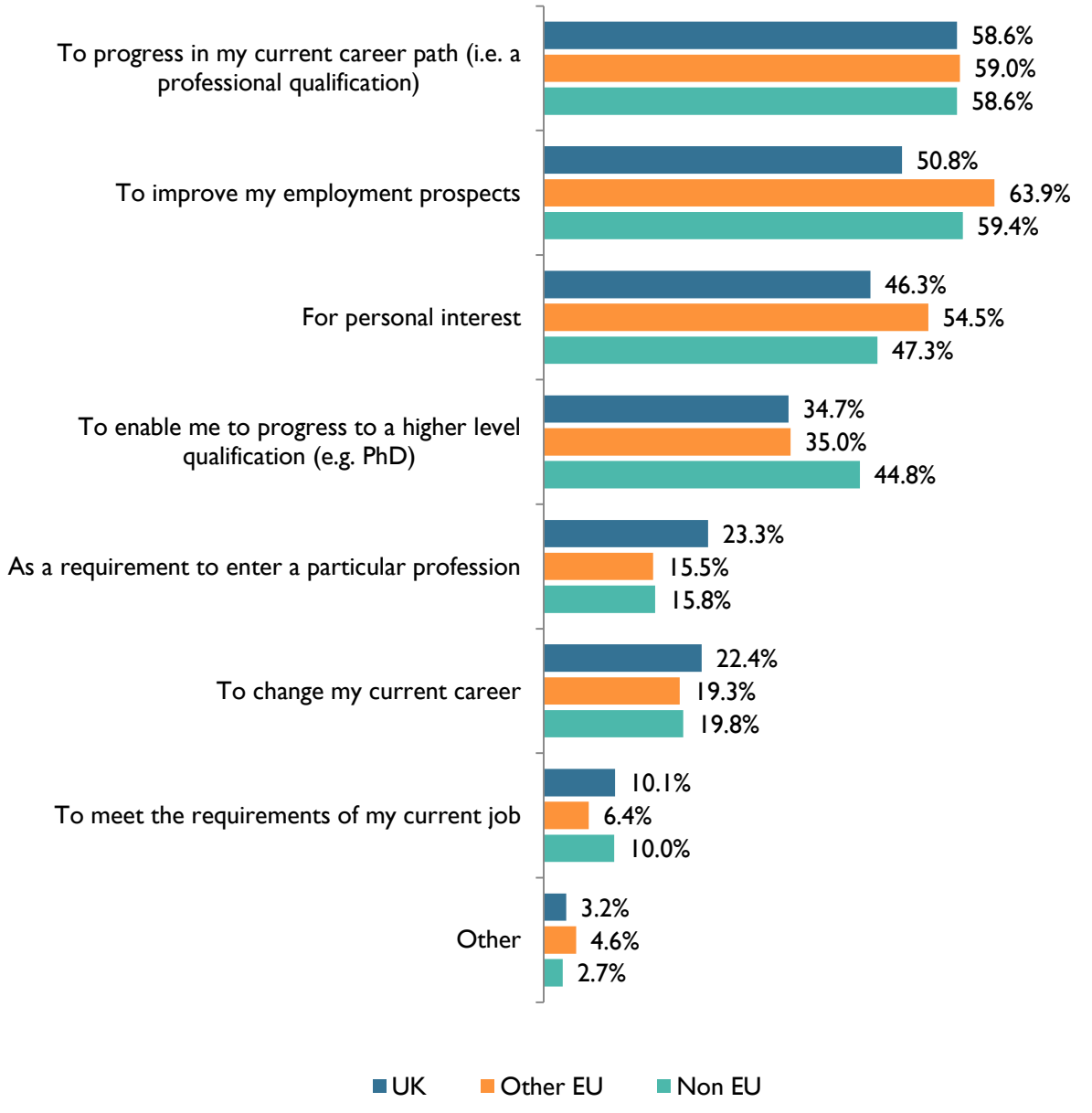
| Table 3.2.5 Profile of respondents by discipline | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **PTES 2014 all** | **PTES 2014 Masters only** | **HESA 2011/12 Higher degree (taught)** | **Difference between PTES 'Masters only' and HESA** |
| Medicine and Dentistry | 3.0% | 2.5% | 2.6% | 0.0% |
| Subjects allied to Medicine | 9.3% | 8.4% | 8.5% | -0.1% |
| Biological Sciences | 7.7% | 8.4% | 5.6% | 2.8% |
| Veterinary Sciences | 0.4% | 0.3% | 0.1% | 0.2% |
| Agriculture and related subjects | 0.9% | 0.9% | 0.6% | 0.4% |
| Physical Sciences | 2.6% | 3.2% | 2.3% | 0.9% |
| Mathematical Sciences | 1.3% | 1.5% | 1.0% | 0.5% |
| Computer Science | 3.2% | 3.9% | 3.7% | 0.1% |
| Engineering and Technology | 6.7% | 8.1% | 7.5% | 0.6% |
| Architecture, Building and Planning | 2.6% | 2.7% | 2.7% | 0.0% |
| Social studies | 8.9% | 10.1% | 9.8% | 0.2% |
| Law | 4.1% | 3.7% | 4.0% | -0.3% |
| Business and Administrative studies | 20.5% | 24.3% | 29.1% | -4.7% |
| Mass Communications and Documentation | 2.2% | 2.6% | 2.7% | -0.1% |
| Languages | 3.0% | 3.6% | 3.1% | 0.5% |
| Historical and Philosophical studies | 2.9% | 3.4% | 3.0% | 0.4% |
| Creative Arts and Design | 3.9% | 4.5% | 5.6% | -1.1% |
| Education | 14.9% | 7.8% | 8.3% | -0.5% |
| Combined | 2.0% | 2.3% | 0.0% | 2.2% |
| **N** | 63,215 | 50,465 | 306,005 | |

# 4. Motivations and course choice

## 4.1 Motivations

PTES asks students to think back to when they applied for their course and reflect on their motivations for study and reasons for picking their particular course. Students placed more importance on career progression (58.2%) and improving employment prospects (54.8%) as their motivation, compared to those motivated by personal interest (47.2%) or by wishing to progress to a higher qualification (37.9%)[6]. However, figure 4.1.1 shows that non-EU students (44.8%) were significantly more focused on their postgraduate course as a pathway to a PhD than their counterparts from the UK (34.7%) and the rest of the EU (35%).

Figure 4.1.1 Motivation to study postgraduate course by domicile




N = 66,043

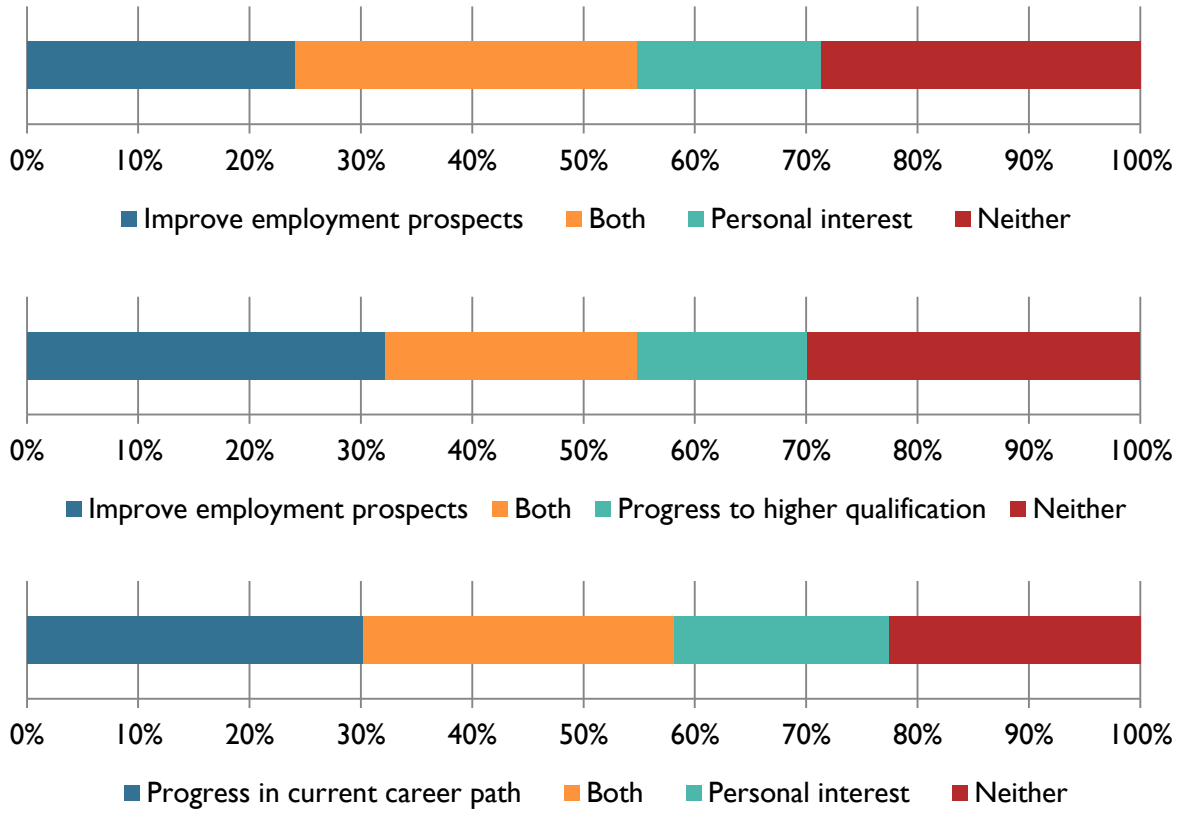
Question 20 and 28

[6] These percentages are based on all respondents, including those who did not state their domicile. Therefore, they are not an aggregation of the percentages in figure 4.1.1 and may diverge from them.

Students from other EU countries were the most likely to cite improving employment prospects (63.9%) and pursuing personal interest (54.5%). UK students were more likely to cite "As a requirement to enter a particular profession" (23.3%) than other EU and non-EU students (both just under 16%).

Students were permitted to choose multiple motivations and the overlap between some of these motivations is shown in Figure 4.1.2. Of the 54.8% of students overall who cited "to improve employment prospects" as a motivation, over half (56.1%) also cited "for personal interest" and 41.3% cited "to progress to a higher level qualification (e.g. PhD)". And even of those 58.2% of students who wanted "to progress in my current career path (i.e. a professional qualification)", around half (48.1%) were also motivated by personal interest.

Figure 4.1.2 Overlap between motivations for taking course



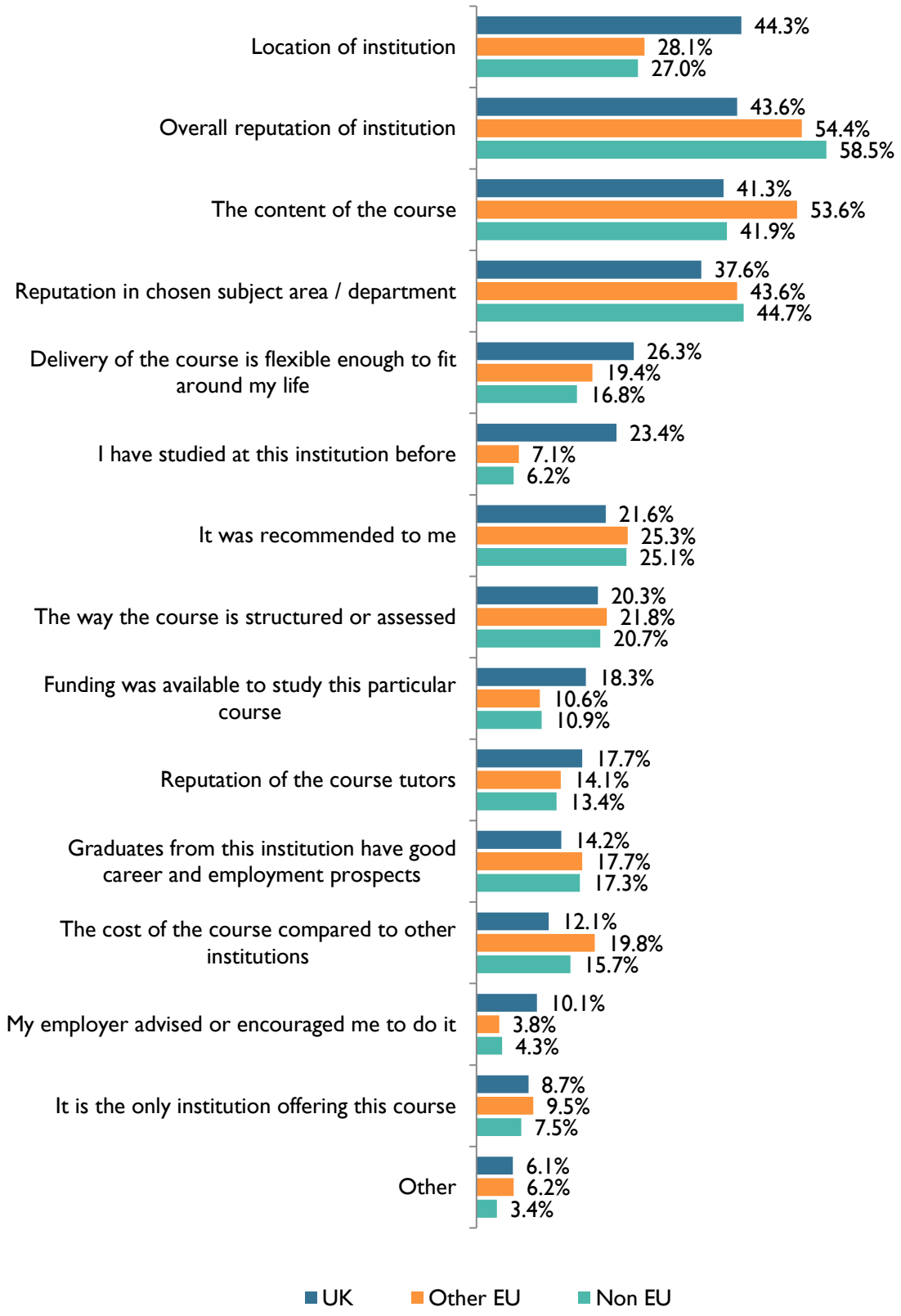

N = 67,510 Question 20

The postgraduate taught student market is often caricatured as being polarised between those motivated by more professional/employment goals and those motivated by more academic/research aspirations. The results of PTES 2014 suggest that students' motivations are more complex and often combine these apparently contrasting reasons. For institutions, this means simply targeting niche markets may be insufficient – postgraduate courses, while specialist, will often have to meet multiple needs.

PTES also asks students why they chose to study for this qualification at this particular institution, with the results summarised in Figure 4.1.3. The reason most cited by UK students (44.3%) is institutional location. This contrasts with their international counterparts (27-28%), partly reflecting the larger proportion of part-time students with other existing commitments amongst UK students who are also more likely to cite flexible delivery (26.3%) as a reason. Institutional reputation was also cited by a similar proportion (43.6%) of UK students, but was far more significant for other EU students (54.4%) and non-EU students (58.5%). A total of 53.6% of other EU students cited the content of the course as a main motivation for their choice, notably higher than the 41% of UK and non-EU students who cited this, though it remains a leading factor for all

student groups. Financial reasons were given by a minority of students, although one-in-five other EU students (19.8%) cited course costs and a similar proportion of UK students (18.3%) cited availability of funding.

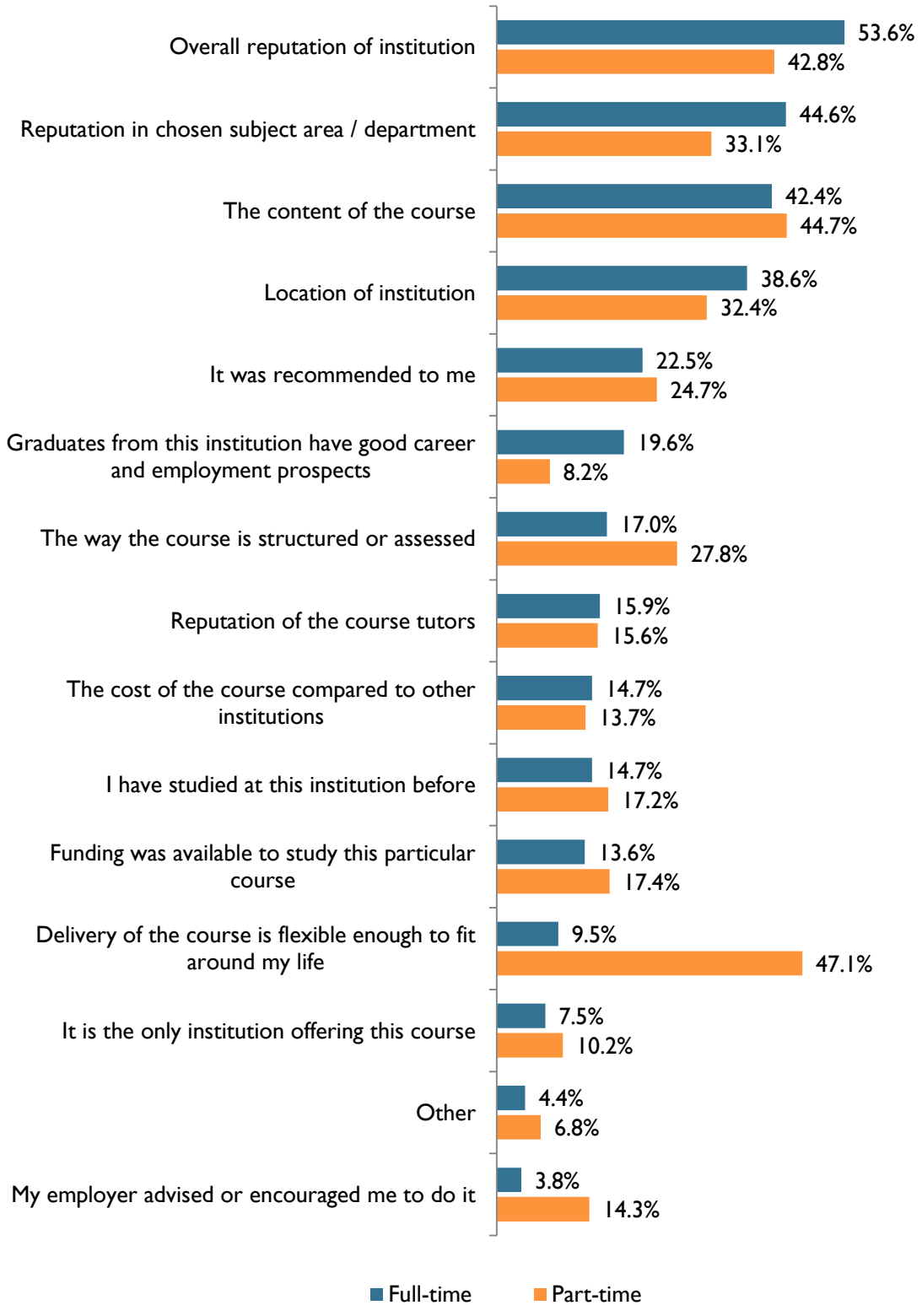
Figure 4.1.3 Motivation to study qualification at this institution by domicile




N = 67,510

Question 21 and 28

Figure 4.1.4 Motivation to study this postgraduate course by mode of study




N = 67,510

Question 21 and 34

Figure 4.1.4 examines the same motivations according to the motivation to study the particular postgraduate course in relation to the mode of study. Full-time students are most likely to cite reputational reasons (53.6% citing institutional reputation and 44.6% citing subject area reputation) perhaps reflecting the fact that they are less likely to be in current professional employment and see reputation as an employability factor. On the

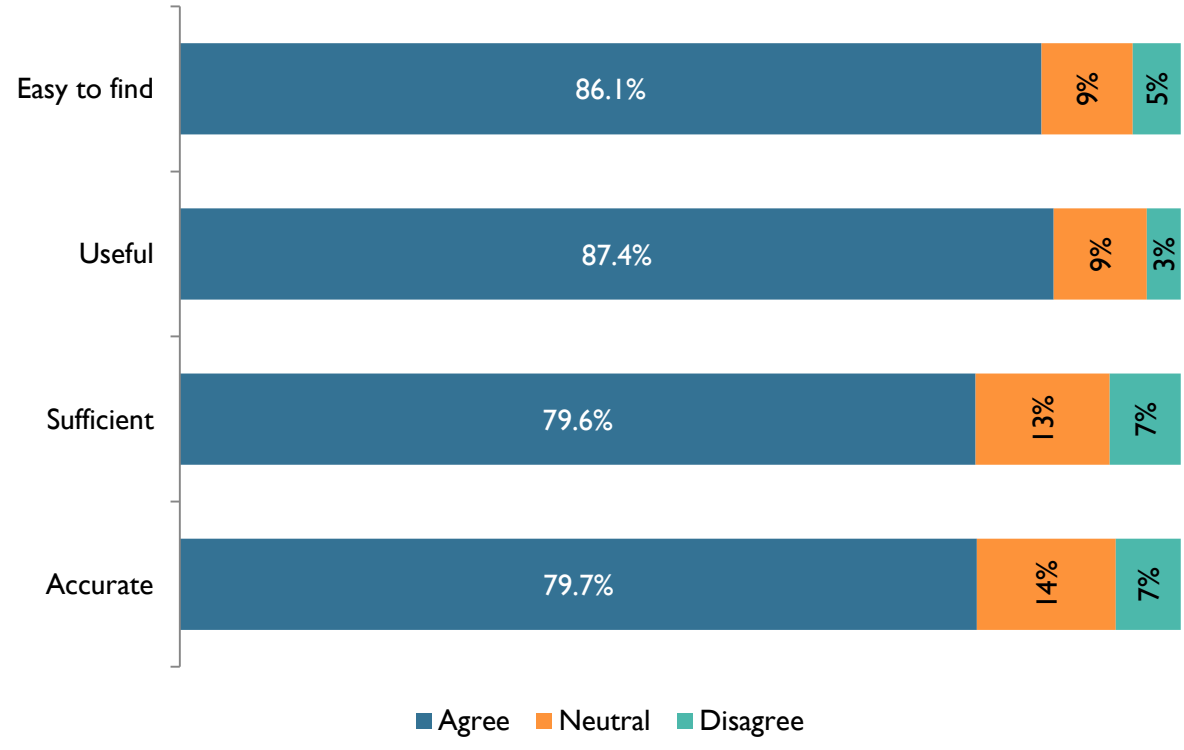
other hand, 47.1% of part-time students – who may well be in current employment or have other commitments – cited flexible course delivery, in contrast to just 9.5% of full-time students. This is one of the most striking differences found in PTES, and suggests that any course not offering flexible delivery effectively shuts out almost half the part-time market and around a quarter of the overall postgraduate taught market.

### 4.2 Information provision

The provision of information to aid course and institution choice by prospective postgraduate taught students has been the subject of significant recent national research and policy discussion. This culminated in the funding councils introducing new guidance to institutions asking them to improve, where necessary, their information provision and guidance by spring 2015[7].

To support this agenda, a new information scale was introduced as part of the redevelopment of PTES. The scale asks students to rate the extent of their agreement that the information provided by their institution met four key qualities – easy to find, useful, sufficient and accurate. The ratings, of course, are only made by those students who actually chose the course they are currently studying – it remains possible that inadequate information contributed to other students' decision to study elsewhere. Nonetheless, the PTES 2014 results provide a useful benchmark against which progress in response to the new guidelines can be measured from PTES 2016 onwards.

Figure 4.2.1 Views on information provided by institutions to help students choose their course



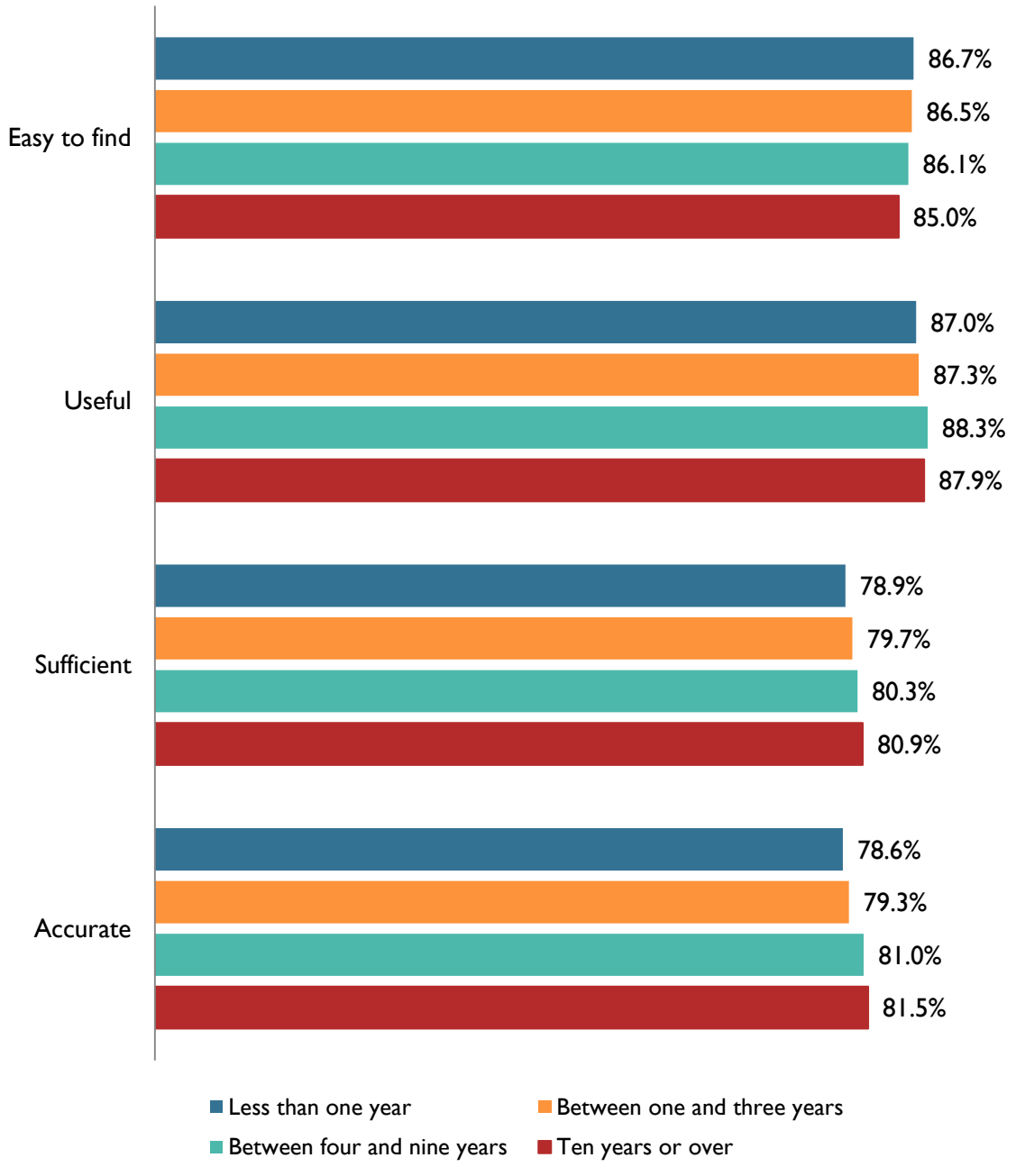

N = 63,890 - 64,946 Question 22

Figure 4.2.1 shows that there are already high levels of agreement that information provided was easy to find (86.1%) and useful (87.4%), with slightly less (though still high) agreement that it was accurate (79.6%) and sufficient (79.7%).

[7] Please see: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2014/cl102014/

A particular concern in policy discussions over information provision concerned access by those who were currently outside the higher education system. Figure 4.2.2 shows the views of students about information provision in relation to how long they had been away from the higher education environment. Interestingly – and again with the caveat that these data do not show the views of students who did not apply – the effect of time since last in higher education is almost negligible.

Figure 4.2.2 Views on information provided by institution to help course choice by time since last completing an academic course



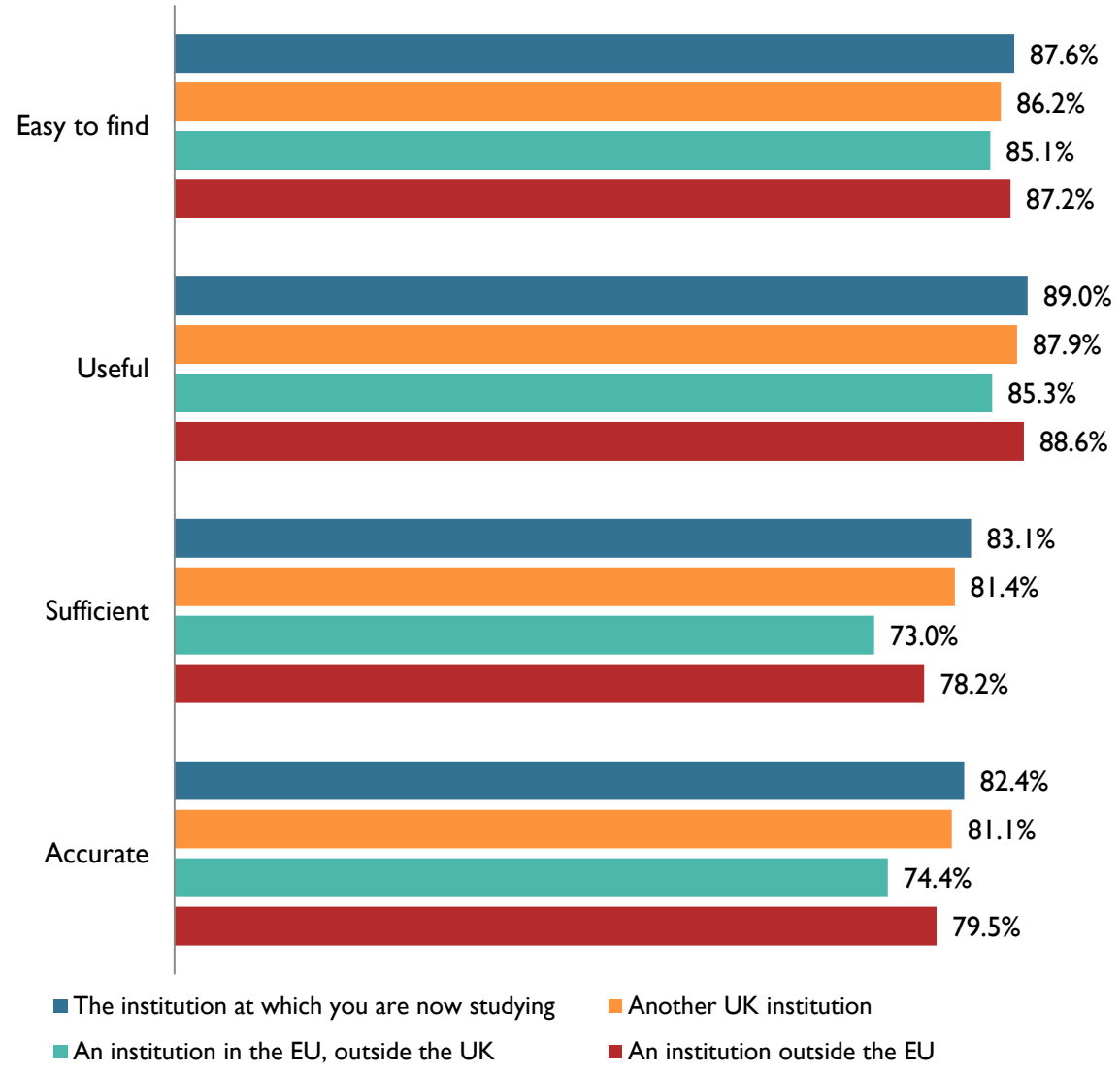

N = 59,187 - 60,146

Question 22 and 37

It was also thought possible that information access might often be easier for those students continuing at their current institution and more difficult from those students coming to the UK from other countries.

Figure 4.2.3 presents views on information provision in relation to the location of their last higher education provider. The main pattern that emerges is that students previously studying at institutions outside the UK but within the EU are slightly less likely to rate information positively than their counterparts previously at UK and non-EU institutions, particularly when it comes to the sufficiency and accuracy of information.

Figure 4.2.3 Views on information provided by institution to help course choice by location of previous institution




N = 66,285 - 66,902

Question 22 and 37

# 5. Overall experience

## 5.1 Main aspects of experience

Table 5.1.1 Mean scale scores

| | Mean | Standard Deviation | % agree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resources and services scale | 4.15 | 0.736 | 82.2% | 58,035 |
| Teaching and learning scale | 4.10 | 0.719 | 81.9% | 67,090 |
| Dissertation or Major Project scale | 4.08 | 0.828 | 77.6% | 37,076 |
| Skills development scale | 4.06 | 0.774 | 77.4% | 65,651 |
| Engagement scale | 4.04 | 0.694 | 78.4% | 66,571 |
| Organisation and Management scale | 3.88 | 0.815 | 73.0% | 66,456 |
| Assessment and feedback scale | 3.87 | 0.866 | 72.1% | 64,185 |
| Overall satisfaction with the quality of the course | 4.08 | 0.955 | 82.6% | 66,824 |

Table 5.1.1 shows that resources and services and teaching and learning are rated the highest by the students. Consistent with other student surveys of this type, the assessment and feedback scale is rated the lowest. All scales other than the organisation and management scale show an increase in positivity compared with 2013 – this is in large part likely to reflect the impact of the redesign in which the response order was reversed so that more positive 'agree' options come first. The organisation and management scale featured the introduction of a challenging new statement: 11e "I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run", which prevented a comparable increase on this scale.

Comparing students' views on overall experience between 2013 and 2014 is not recommended because of the major changes to the questionnaire. For example, differences in the 'overall experience/satisfaction' question are shown in Table 5.1.2. In 2013 students were asked to rate their overall experience relative to their expectations on a seven-point scale. In 2014 a new wording was used and the standard five-point 'definitely agree' to definitely disagree' scale was used. The proportion of students using an above 'neutral' rating is notably higher in 2014. On the other hand, if we equate 'satisfaction' with at least having one's expectations met, it appears there has been a decline since 2013. In reality, we cannot tell what the impact has been of the changes to both the item wording and the structure of the answer options, and the 2014 overall satisfaction results should be treated as a new baseline.

Table 5.1.2 Overall experience compared between PTES 2013 and PTES 2014

| **PTES 2013** | **Below my expectations** | **Met my expectations** | **Exceeded my expectations** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Overall experience of my course | 11.8% | 13.7% | 74.6% |
| | | | |
| **PTES 2014** | **Disagree** | **Neutral** | **Agree** |
| Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course | 8.0% | 9.3% | 82.6% |

## 5.2 Relationships between aspects of experience

| Table 5.2.1 Correlations between thematic scales | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | **Engagement** | **Assessment** | **Dissertation** | **Organisation** | **Resources** | **Skills** | **Overall Satisfaction** |
| Teaching | 0.75 | 0.63 | 0.58 | 0.69 | 0.40 | 0.67 | 0.78 |
| Engagement | | 0.60 | 0.54 | 0.68 | 0.42 | 0.65 | 0.67 |
| Assessment | | | 0.52 | 0.60 | 0.35 | 0.52 | 0.59 |
| Dissertation | | | | 0.52 | 0.37 | 0.52 | 0.55 |
| Organisation | | | | | 0.44 | 0.60 | 0.69 |
| Resources | | | | | | 0.42 | 0.37 |
| Skills | | | | | | | 0.69 |

The different aspects of experience measured by PTES do not exist in isolation from one another and there are significant relationships between the question scales. Indeed, all correlations reported in Table 5.2.1 are statistically significant. There are very high correlations between teaching and engagement and between teaching and overall satisfaction (r = 0.75 and r = 0.78 respectively). The weakest correlation was between the resources scale and the remaining scales.

| Table 5.2.2 Influence of aspects of experience on overall satisfaction | | |
|---|---|---|
| | **Beta** | **Sig.** |
| Teaching and Learning scale | 0.390 | 0.000 |
| Skills development scale | 0.249 | 0.000 |
| Organisation and Management scale | 0.205 | 0.000 |
| Assessment and feedback scale | 0.060 | 0.000 |
| Dissertation or Major Project scale | 0.046 | 0.000 |
| Engagement scale | 0.022 | 0.000 |
| Resources and services scale | -0.026 | 0.000 |

Table 5.2.2 shows the results from the stepwise linear regression. The dependent variable, i.e. the main variable of interest is the overall satisfaction with the quality of the course. All dimensions combined account for around 68% of the total variability of the overall satisfaction. This is very high and suggests there are not many other areas of PGT courses that may be relevant to the overall satisfaction.

Due to a high degree of multi-collinearity the regression cannot tell us a great deal about the relative importance of the different factors. As shown in Table 5.2.1, the correlations between the different factors are very strong. This means that the multiple regression analysis struggles to distinguish the 'part' of overall satisfaction explained by teaching and learning, in particular, from other factors. For example, although the regression implies that engagement is a weak factor for overall satisfaction, it is so strongly correlated with the teaching and learning scale that its real impact is almost certainly hidden.

### The 'core student experience'

Indeed, an alternative analysis suggests engagement is one of the most significant factors in the overall student experience. This method models a 'core student experience' factor responsible for the scales varying up or down together. Using 'principal axis factoring' analysis, a single core student experience factor emerges which

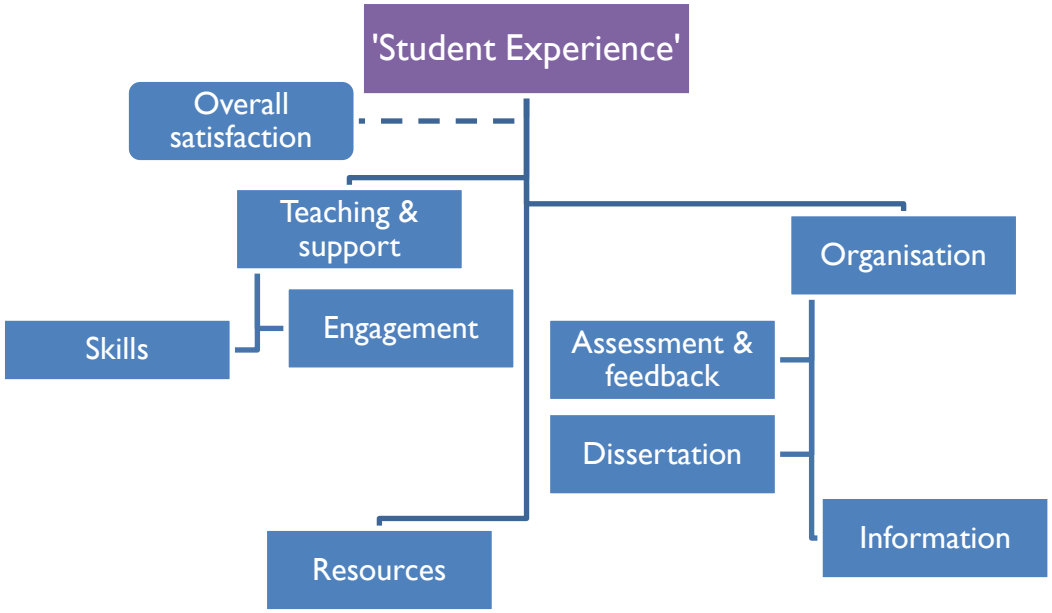
explains 55% of the variance across the summary scales. Table 5.2.3 indicates that the most influential scale score on this factor is teaching and learning. The scales on 'engagement' and 'organisation and management' also contribute highly. The scales on provision of information and on resources are not influential.

Table 5.2.3 Relative weight of factors on the core student experience

| | Loading (and rank) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | **All** | **Fluent in English** | **Not fluent in English** |
| Teaching and learning scale | 0.878 | 0.882 (1) | 0.853 (1) |
| Overall satisfaction item | 0.846 | 0.851 (2) | 0.809 (4) |
| Engagement scale | 0.834 | 0.836 (3) | 0.821 (2) |
| Organisation and management scale | 0.818 | 0.818 (4) | 0.818 (3) |
| Skills development scale | 0.791 | 0.793 (5) | 0.773 (5) |
| Assessment and feedback scale | 0.729 | 0.729 (6) | 0.720 (6) |
| Dissertation or major project scale | 0.657 | 0.659 (7) | 0.641 (7) |
| Information scale | 0.540 | 0.541 (8) | 0.518 (9) |
| Resources and services scale | 0.517 | 0.503 (9) | 0.582 (8) |

Those not fluent in English at the start of their course appeared to place less weight on, or interpret differently, the overall satisfaction item. They also appeared to place more weight on resources than students fluent in English. This indicates that to be most effective, enhancement needs to reflect the priorities of cohorts, rather than assuming a single aspect is most important for all students. Figure 5.2.4 describes a possible structure of student experience indicated by the factor analysis. However, as described above, all these factors overlap and may also change for different student populations.

Figure 5.2.4 Factorial structure of student experience as measured in PTES



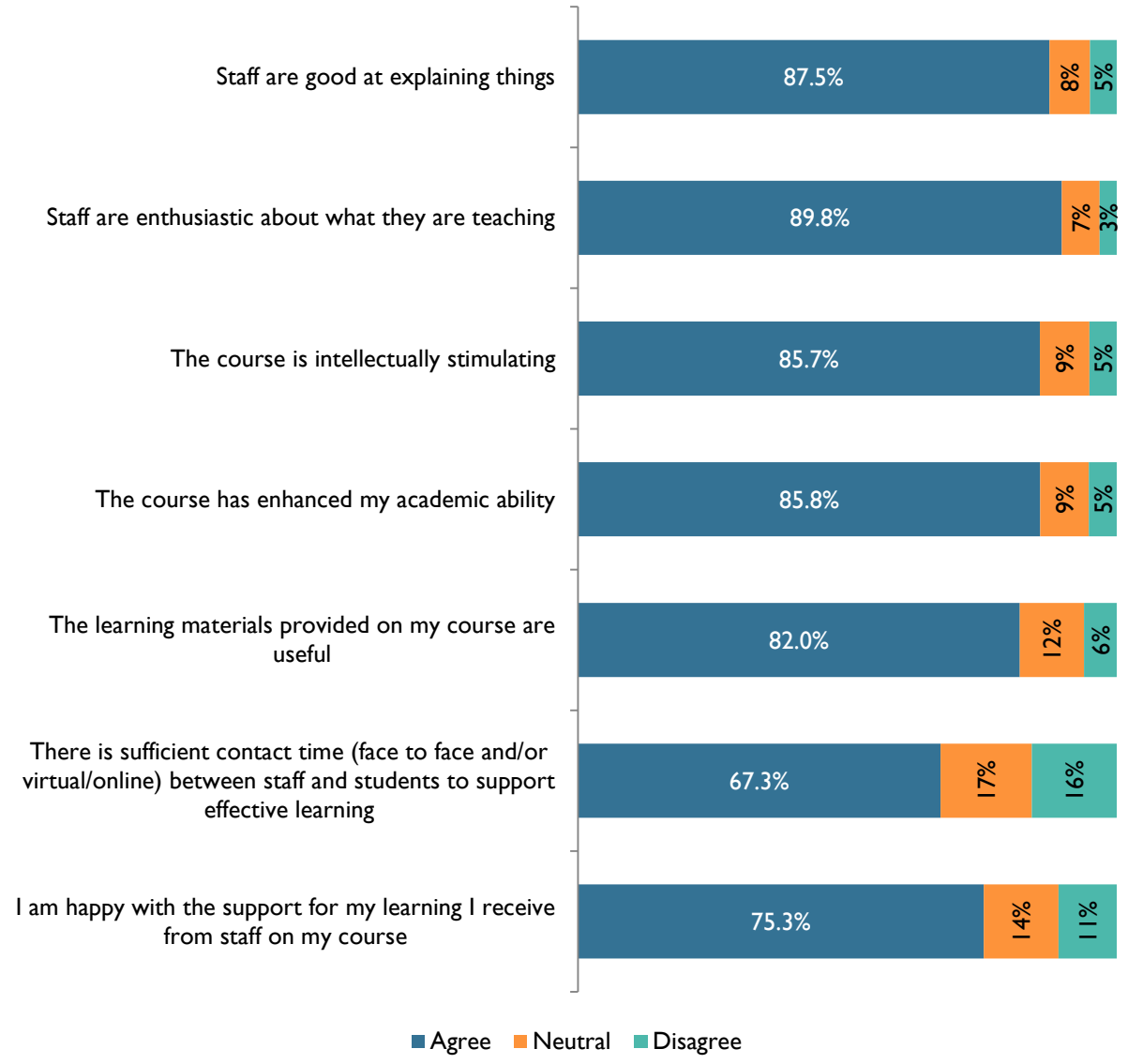
# 6. Experience in detail

## 6.1 Teaching and learning

Figure 6.1.1 displays the views of students about teaching and learning experienced during their studies. Overwhelmingly students support the view that the staff members they have come in contact with were good at explaining things (87.5%) and they were enthusiastic about what they were teaching (89.8%).

However, only 67.3% of students found that there was sufficient contact time (face-to-face and/or virtual/online) between them and staff members to support effective learning. And almost 25% were not happy with the support they have received for their learning from staff members on their particular course.

Figure 6.1.1 Experience of teaching and learning

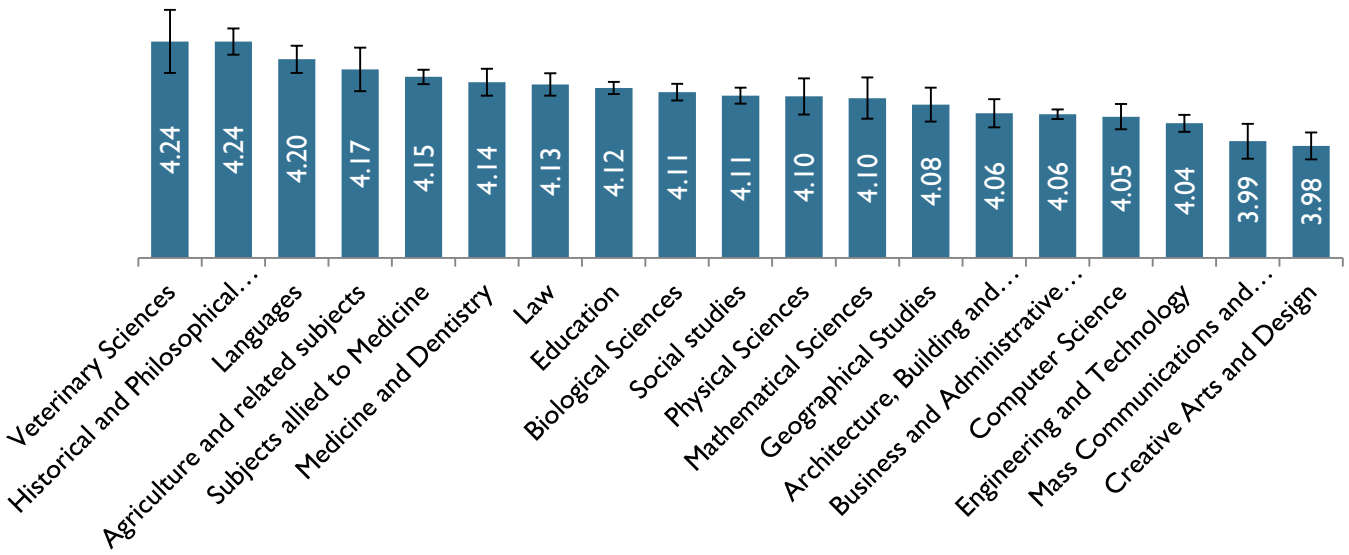



N = 66,285 - 66,902 Question 1

Figure 6.1.2 shows how the overall mean scale score for teaching and learning varies between discipline groups, together with error bars (95% confidence) that indicate the range in which the 'true' experience in the wider population of postgraduate taught students may lie. There is significant variation between disciplines, but no strong patterns in respect of standard discipline clusters. Where institutions compare the performance

of their subjects internally, they should be aware of these discipline effects; it is often better to benchmark within the same subject at different institutions.

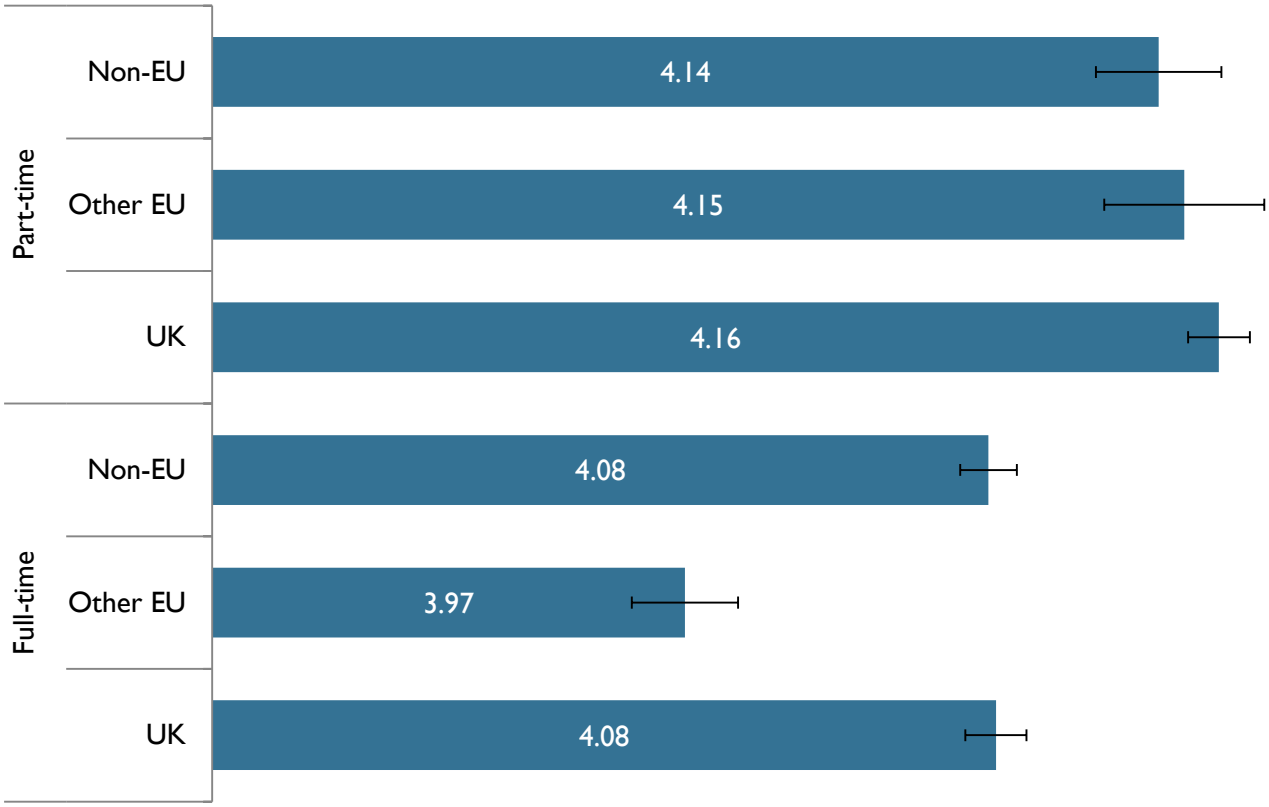
Figure 6.1.2 Mean scale score for teaching and learning by discipline




N = 238 - 12,947

Question 1 and 32

Figure 6.1.3 Mean scale score for teaching and learning by domicile and mode of study




N = 2,092 - 18,442

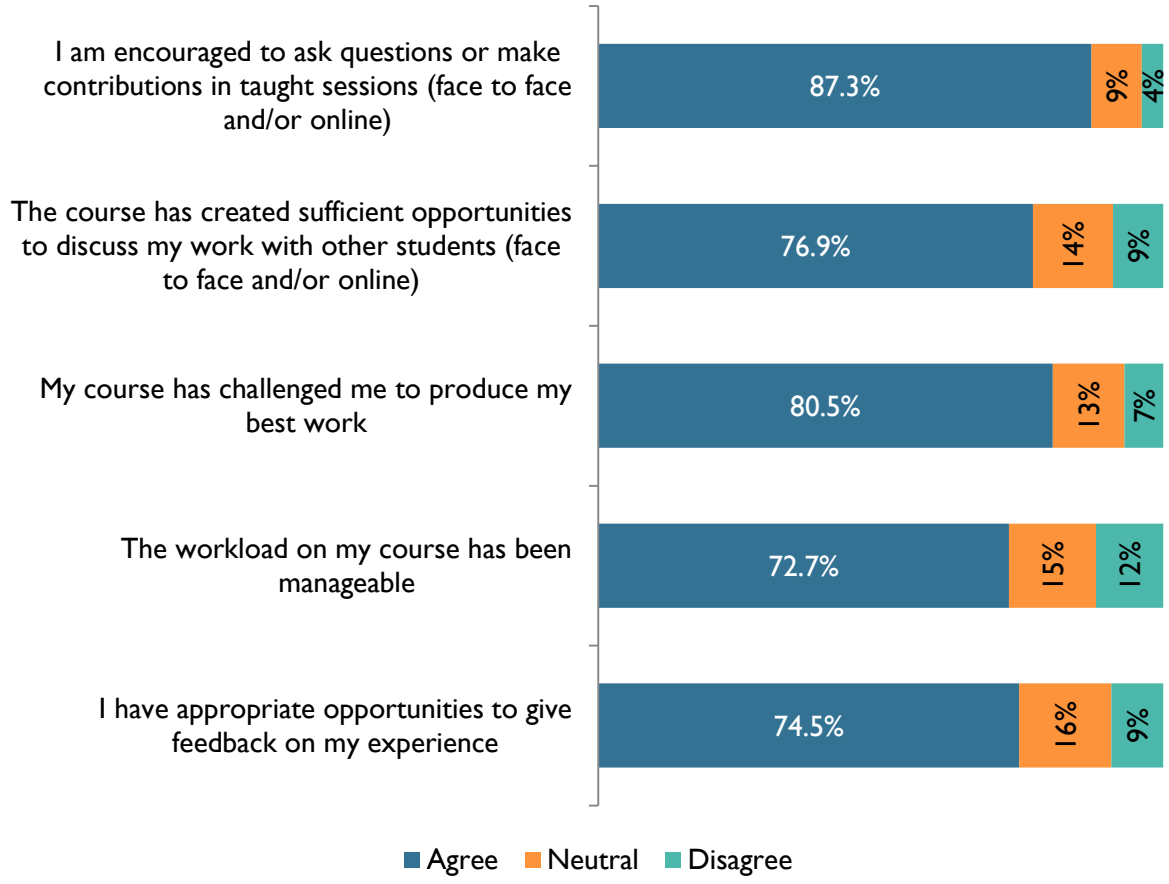
Question 1, 28 and 34

Examining variation in views between students from different domiciles and study modes, Figure 6.1.3 shows that the views of part-time students are more positive on average than those of full-time students. And while there are no significant differences in views among part-time students from different domiciles amongst full-time students, those from other EU countries are noticeably less satisfied than their UK and non-EU peers.

## 6.2 Engagement

PTES 2014 included a new scale examining how well students are encouraged and facilitated to engage in their learning – for example, by learning interactively, being challenged, having a manageable workload (so as not to resort to 'surface' learning) and having opportunities to give feedback themselves. This was intended to provide an alternative focus on learning environments and behaviours that contrast with the focus on 'provision' in the teaching and learning scale and which may arguably constitute better predictors of deeper learning styles. That said, as Table 5.2.1 showed, there was a very strong correlation between the engagement scale and the teaching and learning scale.

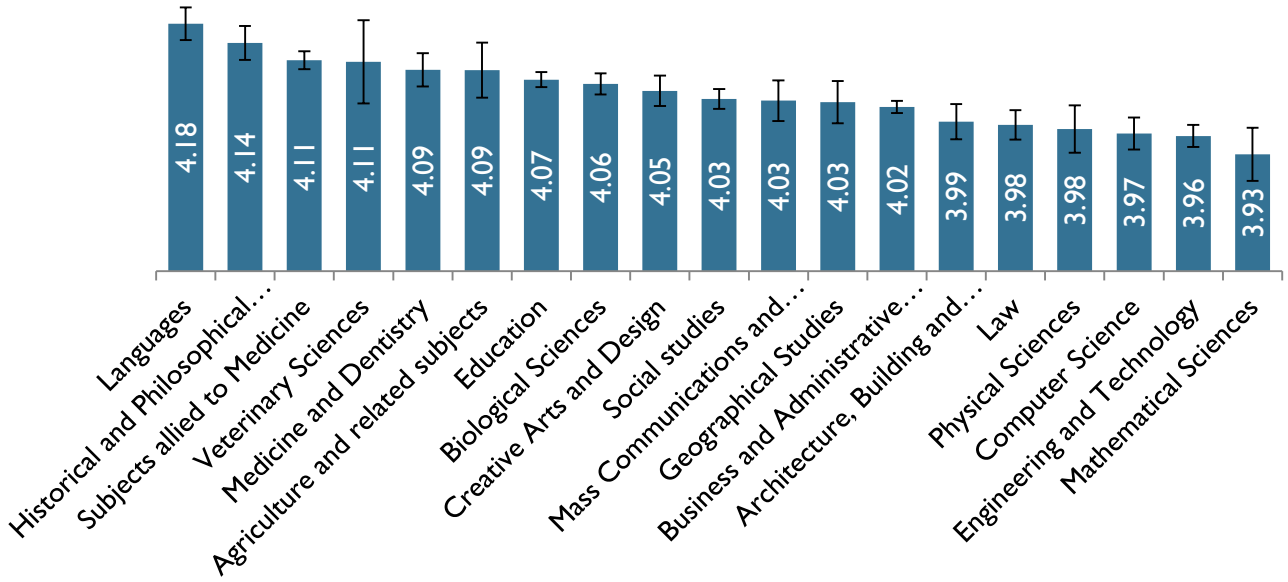
Figure 6.2.1 Experience of engagement




N = 66,029 - 66,742 Question 3

Agreement was again strong on this scale (Figure 6.2.1) though note that over a quarter of students (27%) did not agree that their workload was manageable and 25% did not agree they had opportunities to give feedback – two possible enhancement issues for the postgraduate taught sector as a whole.

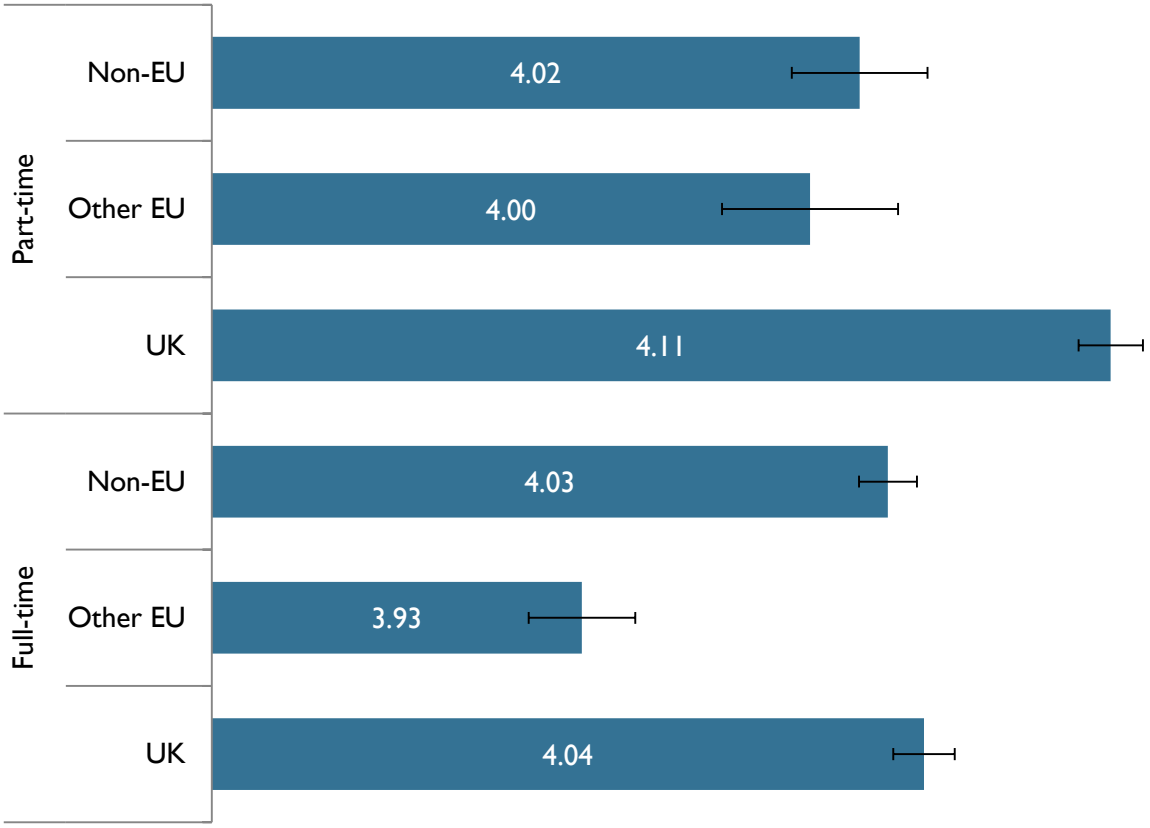
Figure 6.2.2 Mean scale score for engagement by discipline




N = 235 - 12,840

Question 3 and 32

Figure 6.2.3 Mean scale score for engagement by domicile and mode of study




N = 2,052 - 18,366

Question 3, 28 and 34

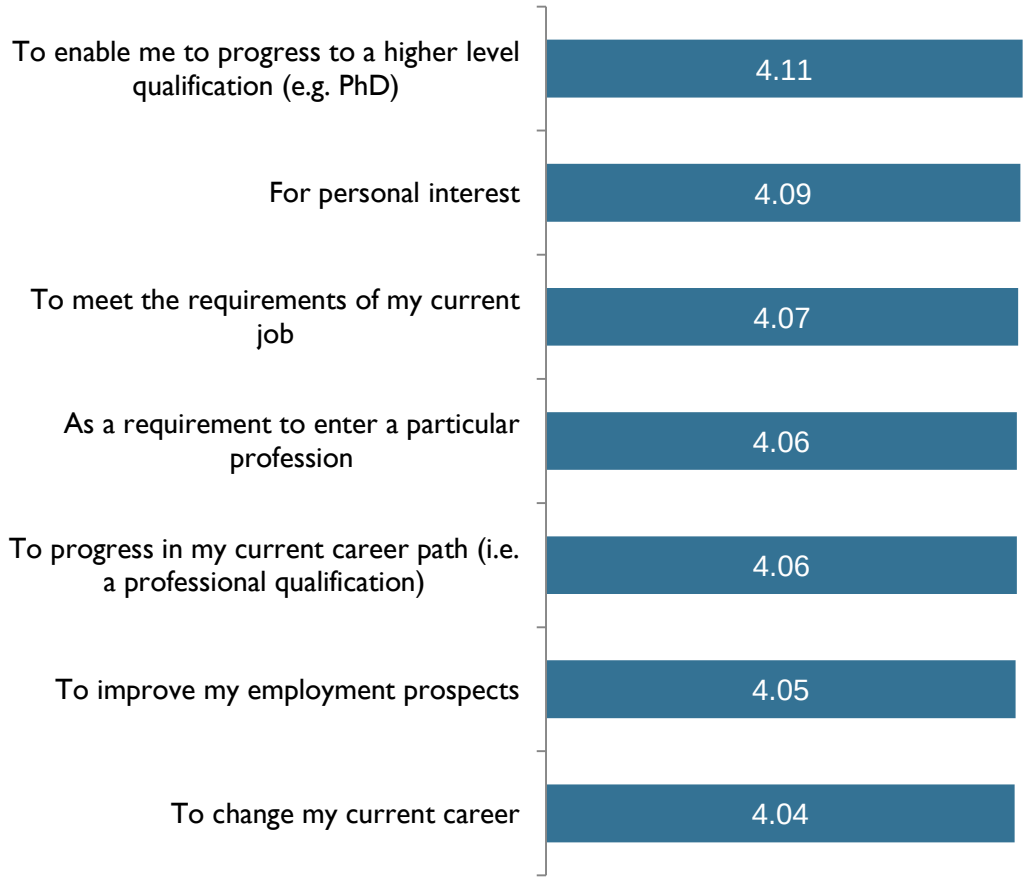
Figure 6.2.2 again shows some wide disciplinary variations in engagement, with STEM subjects showing notably lower scores than others, despite the opportunities for practical and lab-based work found in some of these subject areas. The pattern of subjects with higher engagement scores is, however, quite diverse. And although the possibility of sharing good practice between different subjects should not be discounted, discipline effects suggest benchmarking is once again best done within subjects, across institutions, rather than within institutions, across subjects.

UK part-time students are most likely to report high levels of engagement relative to those from other domiciles or full-time students – perhaps reflecting the higher mean age of UK part-time students and their greater tendency to study for professional qualifications. Other EU full-time students reported lower levels of engagement than other groups (Figure 6.2.3), mirroring the overall lower levels of satisfaction found for this group.

Students who were currently in paid employment tended to rate the engagement scale higher (4.07) than those who were not employed (4.01). There was no evidence that increased hours of work negatively affected how the engagement scale was rated.

We also explored whether engagement varied according to the original motivations to study. Figure 6.2.4 shows that variation by motivation is limited and only slightly higher for those citing personal interest or progression to a higher qualification such as a PhD as a motivation. As shown previously, many students cite both 'professional' and 'academic' motivations, which also help to limit the differences.

Figure 6.2.4 Mean scale score for engagement by main motivations to study




N = 67,510

Question 3 and 20

The strongest finding related to reasons for choosing to study at this particular institution as examined in Figure 6.2.5. Students who were motivated by academic-related reasons such as the reputation of the course tutors and the way the course is structured or assessed have a tendency to rate their engagement more highly, relative to those motivated by more practical factors such as the location of the institution and the cost of their degree.

Figure 6.2.5 Mean scale score for engagement by main motivations to study at this HEI

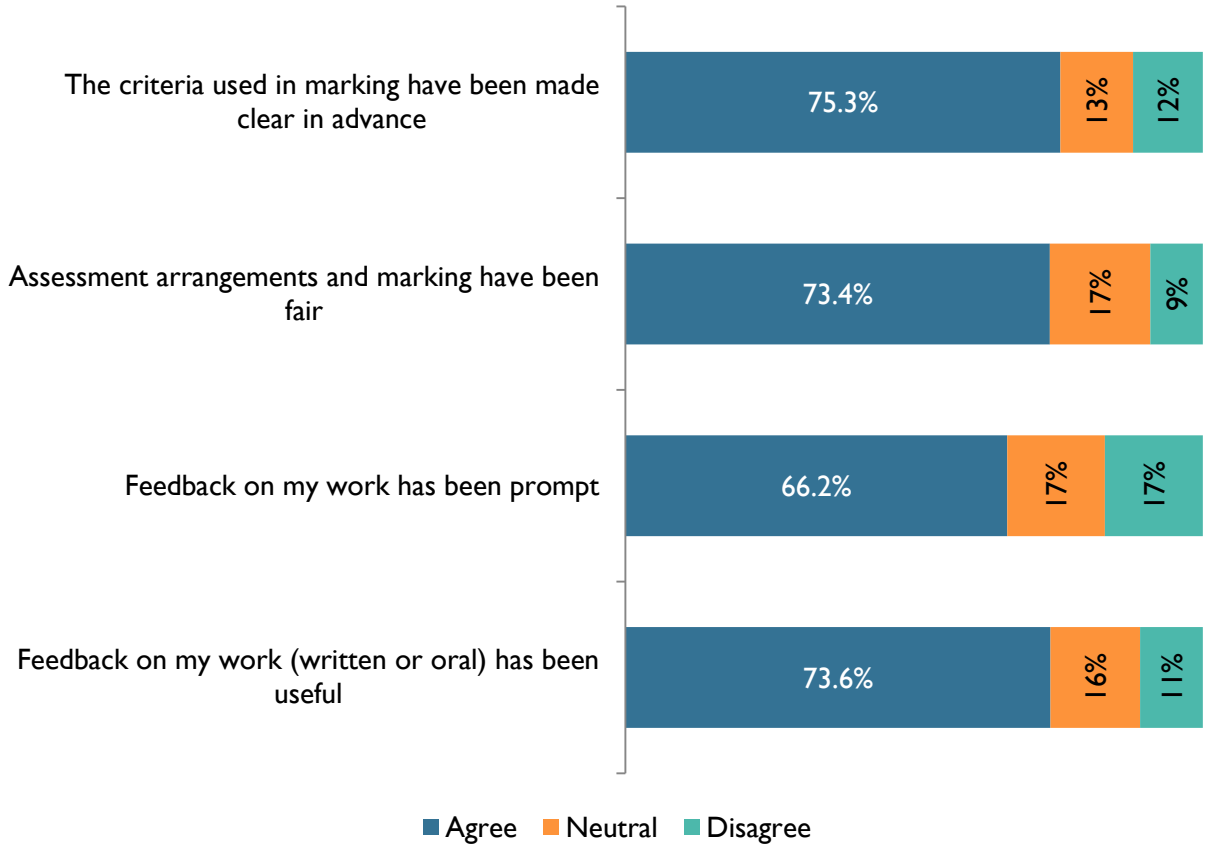

N = 67,510

Question 3 and 21

## 6.3 Assessment and feedback

A clear majority of two-thirds to three-quarters of students rate their experience of assessment and feedback positively, even though it remains the weakest performing scale, with the promptness of feedback showing the lowest levels of agreement (Figure 6.3.1). This, of course, may mean quite different things on different programmes and may also vary in the implications promptness has for learning and development. So while it is potentially an important enhancement issue, institutions and subjects would be well advised to discuss this issue with students in order to devise effective solutions.

Figure 6.3.1 Experience of assessment and feedback



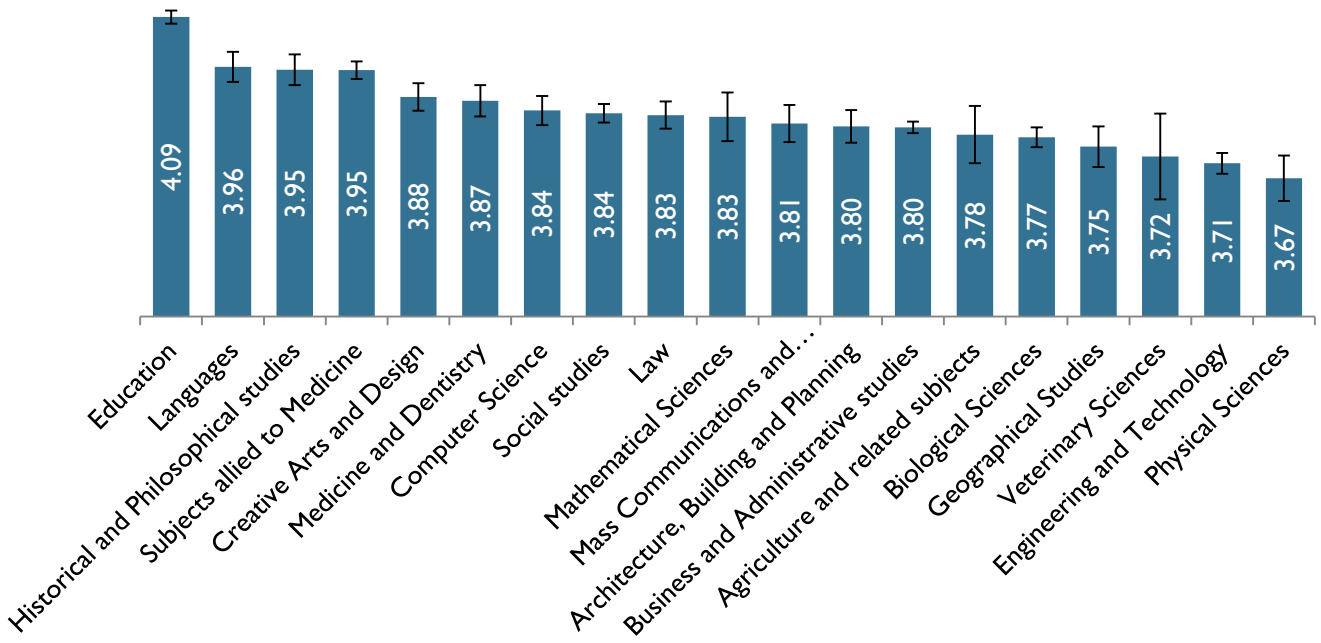

N = 65,344 - 66,625

Question 5

Strong discipline effects are found for assessment and feedback as shown in Figure 6.3.2. Some of the subjects with the strongest scale scores for assessment and feedback include those where more immediate, interactive feedback might be expected, including education, languages, the medical sciences and creative arts and design. However, disciplines are not generally clustered in typical discipline clusters, although a range of STEM subjects exhibit lower scores.

Figure 6.3.3 repeats the pattern found for teaching and learning, showing that overall part-time students are much more positive than full-time students across domiciles. However, the results for full-time learners are more diverse with other EU students once again notably less positive.

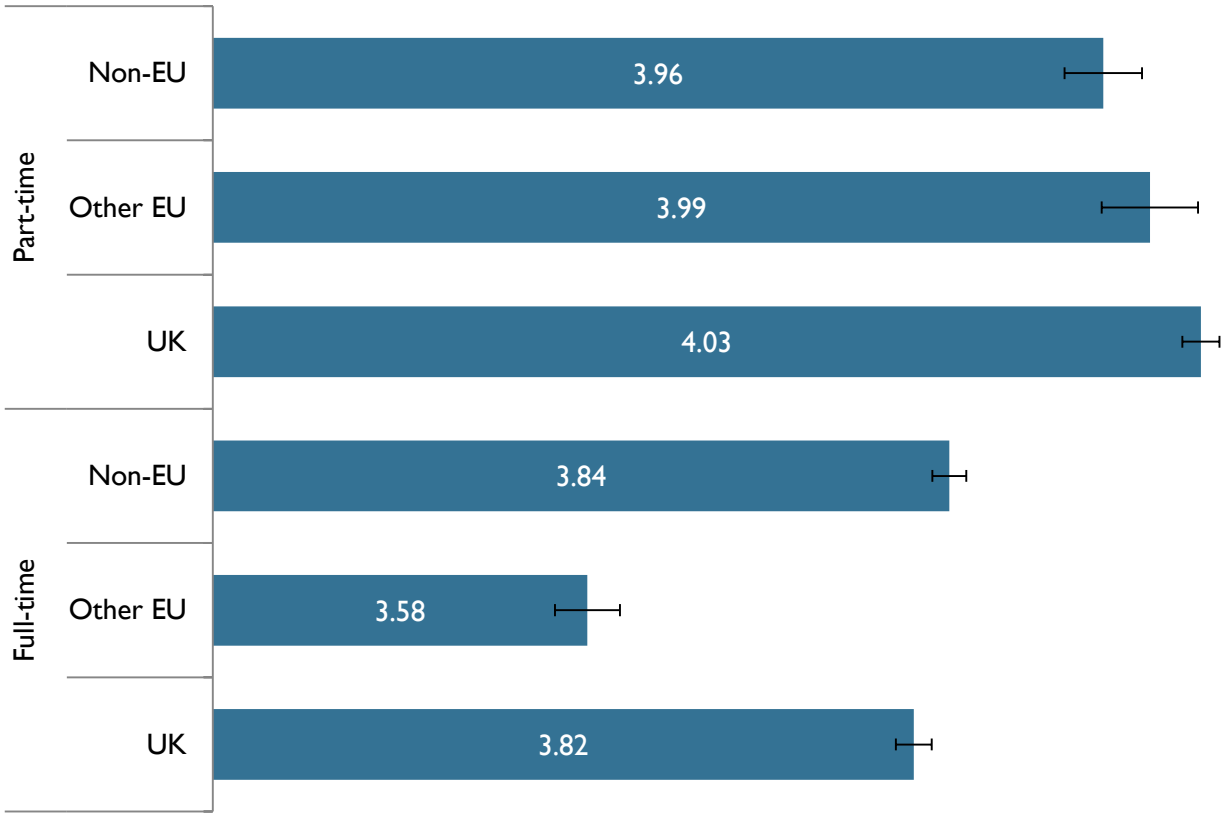
Figure 6.3.2 Mean scale score for assessment and feedback by discipline




N = 231 - 12,515

Question 5 and 32

Figure 6.3.3 Mean scale score for assessment and feedback by domicile and mode of study




N = 1,973 - 17,905

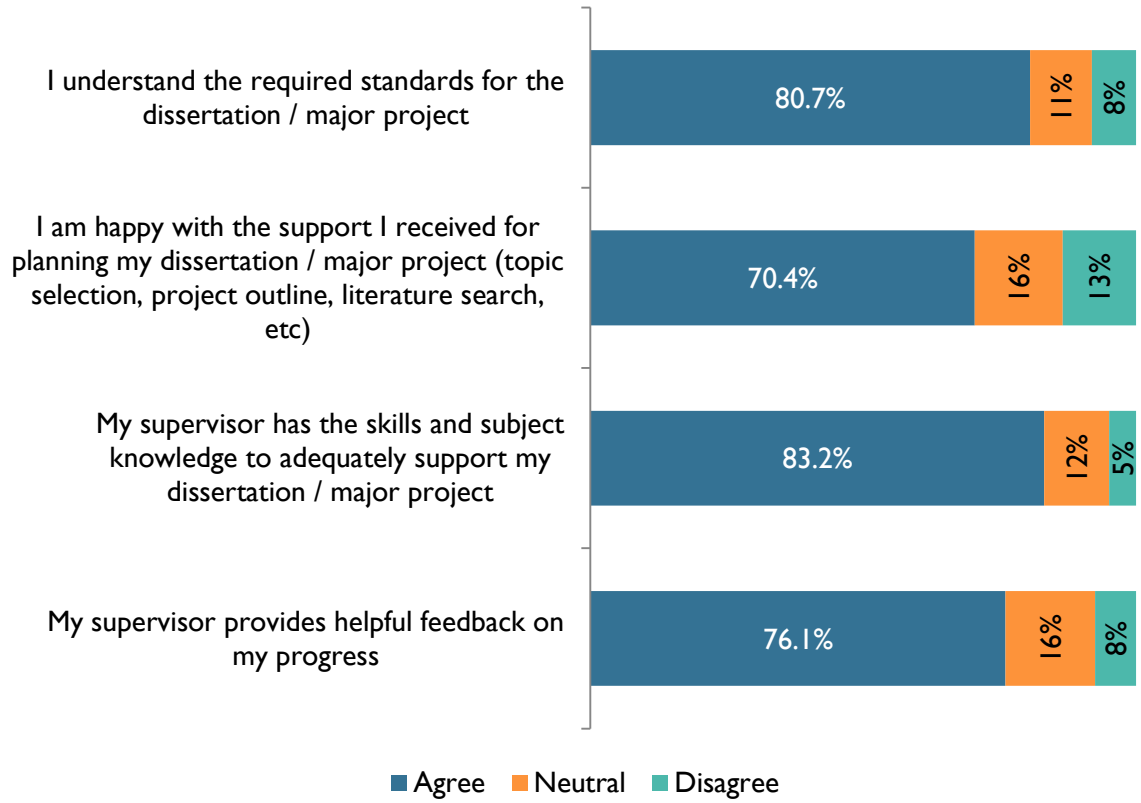
Question 5, 28 and 34

## 6.4 Dissertation or major project

The majority (70%) of respondents said that they were planning, undertaking or had completed a dissertation or a major project. Of those, 51% were in the planning phase, 37% were currently working on their dissertation and 11% had completed it.

The experiences of those students who said they were planning, undertaking or have completed a dissertation or a major project are shown in Figure 6.4.1. Students are especially likely to be positive about the skills and knowledge of their supervisor (83.2% agreement) but fewer (70.4%) are happy with the support they received in planning their project.

Figure 6.4.1 Experience of dissertation or major project



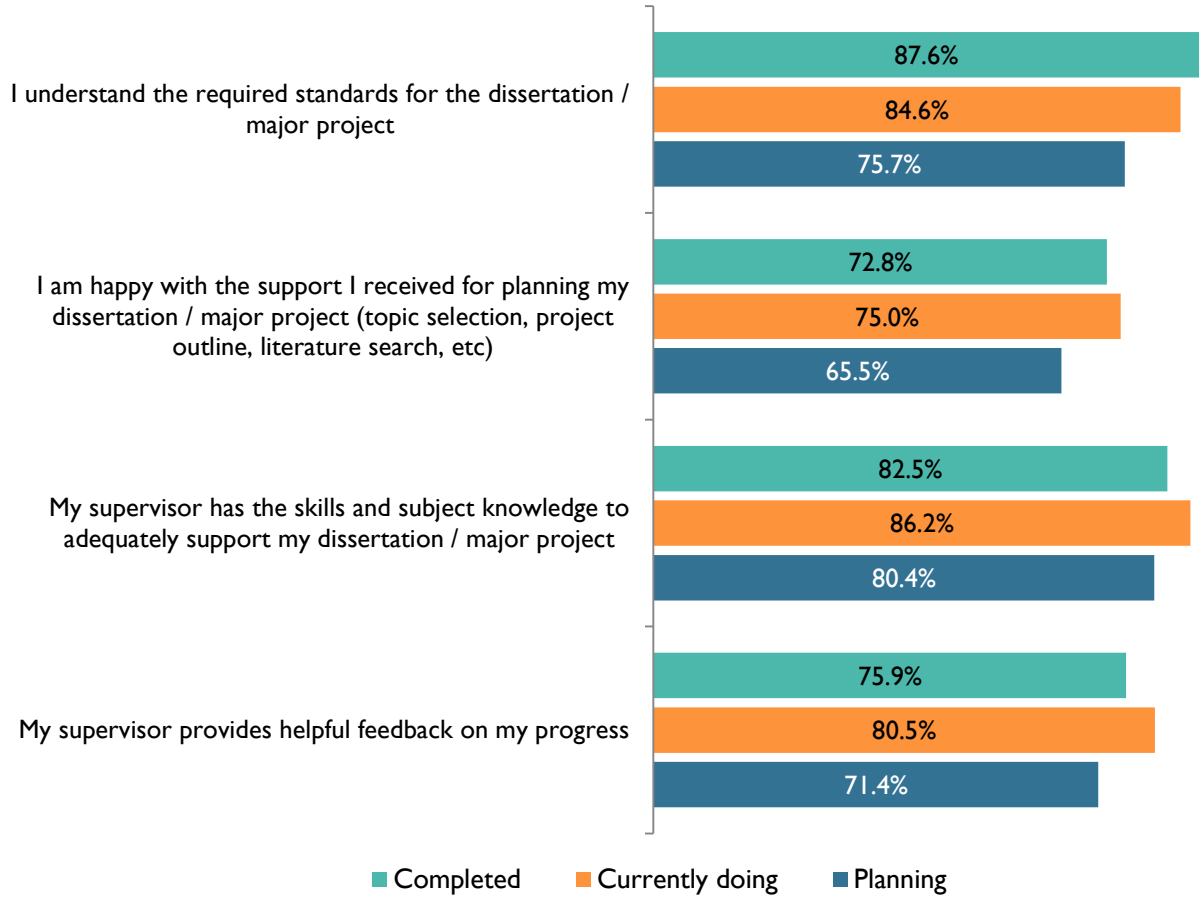

N = 65,344 - 66,625 Question 9

Despite the 'too soon to say' response option for the dissertation items, one might reasonably expect experience to vary according to the stage the student has reached. Figure 6.4.2 examines experience by stage showing limited differences in positivity between stages. Those at the planning stage are less likely to be confident that they understand the required standards. Interestingly they are less likely to be satisfied with the support for planning they are receiving than those at later stages – perhaps suggesting that the benefits of support received at early stages often become more apparent as the dissertation progresses. Positivity about feedback on progress is – as expected – strongest amongst those at the 'doing' stage.

Disciplinary differences in overall experience of undertaking a dissertation or major project are shown in Figure 6.4.3. Law and some social sciences subjects exhibit lower levels of positivity for dissertation support than other subject areas.

Part-time students are generally more positive than full-time students and, among full-time students, non-EU students are more positive than their UK and especially other EU peers (Figure 6.4.4).

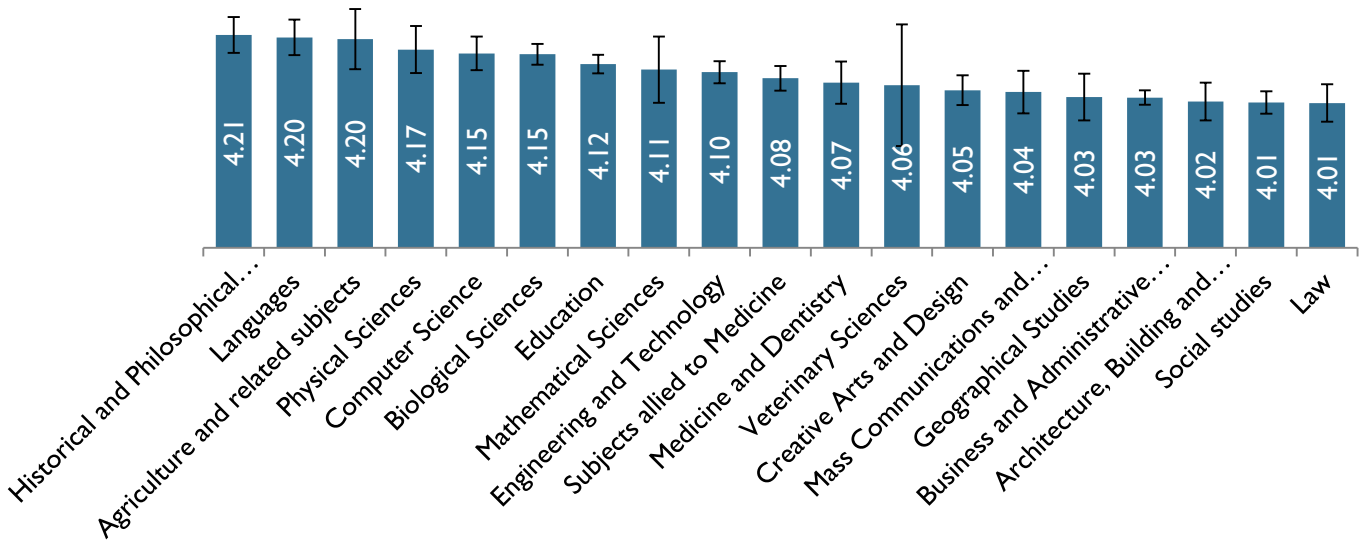
## Figure 6.4.2 Agreement on experience of dissertation or major project by stage




N = 5,004 - 20,028

Question 8 and 9

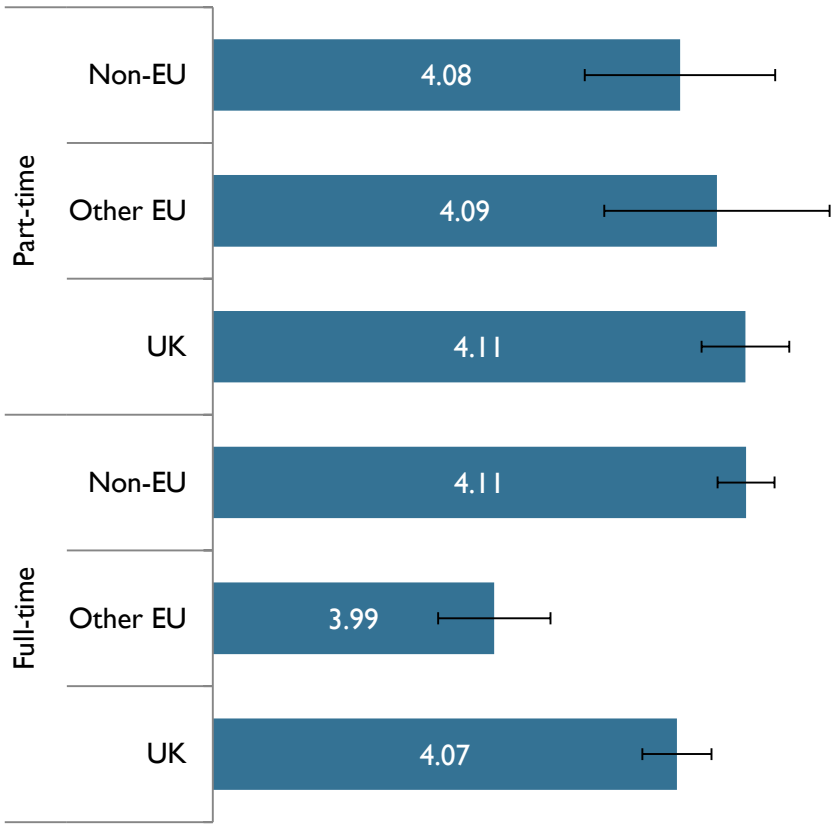
## Figure 6.4.3 Mean scale score for dissertation or major project by discipline




N = 74 - 6,503

Question 9 and 32

Figure 6.4.4 Mean scale score for dissertation or major project by domicile and mode of study




N = 881-12,462

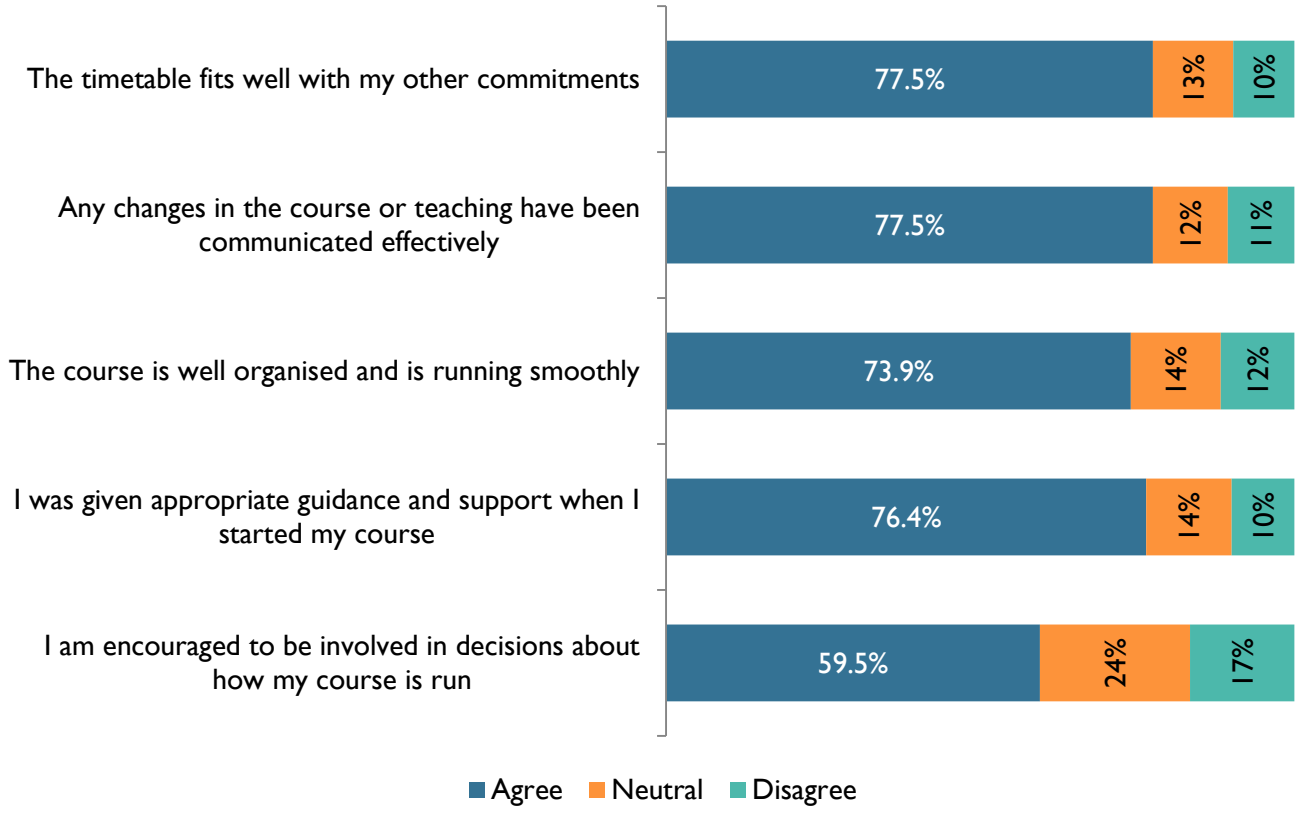
Question 9, 28 and 34

## 6.5 Organisation and management

Effective course organisation and management can be particularly important for postgraduate taught students who are juggling multiple commitments and thus the items ask about timetabling and effective communication of any changes. The scale now also includes an item covering support for transition into the programme and asks about the extent to which students themselves are involved in decisions about how the course is run. The scale has a relatively strong (r=0.69) correlation with overall satisfaction and is a strong factor in the model of the 'core student experience' (see Chapter 4). Students who agree more with the statement that they are encouraged to be involved in decisions about how their course is run tend to be more satisfied with the course overall (r = 0.53). Nevertheless, the strongest correlation with the overall satisfaction were found with the statements "The course is well-organised and is running smoothly" and "I was given appropriate guidance and support when I started my course" (r = 0.66 and r = 0.61 respectively).

The new statement: "I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run" shows significantly lower levels of agreement than other items in the scale (Figure 6.5.1) and this is particularly the case for part-time students (Figure 6.5.3) who otherwise show similar if not slightly higher levels of positivity than full-time students. Some discipline effects are again present, if difficult to explain or justify for this scale, though most subjects are close to the mean scale score of 3.88 (Figure 6.5.2).

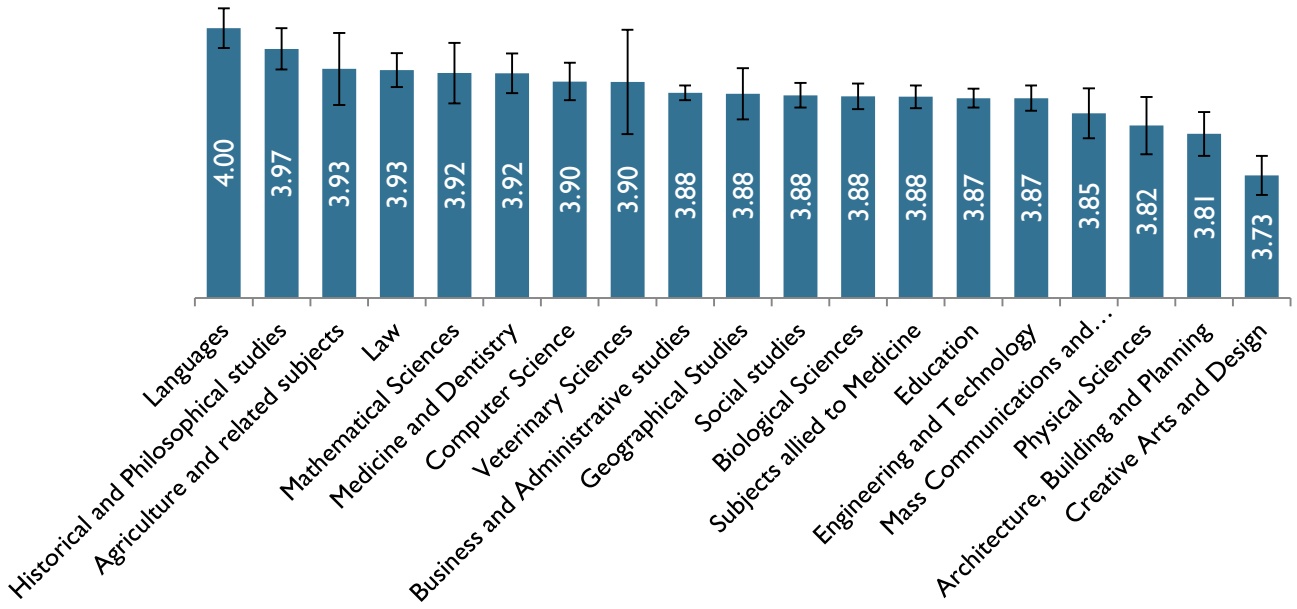
Figure 6.5.1 Experience of organisation and management




N = 65,173 - 66,763

Question 11

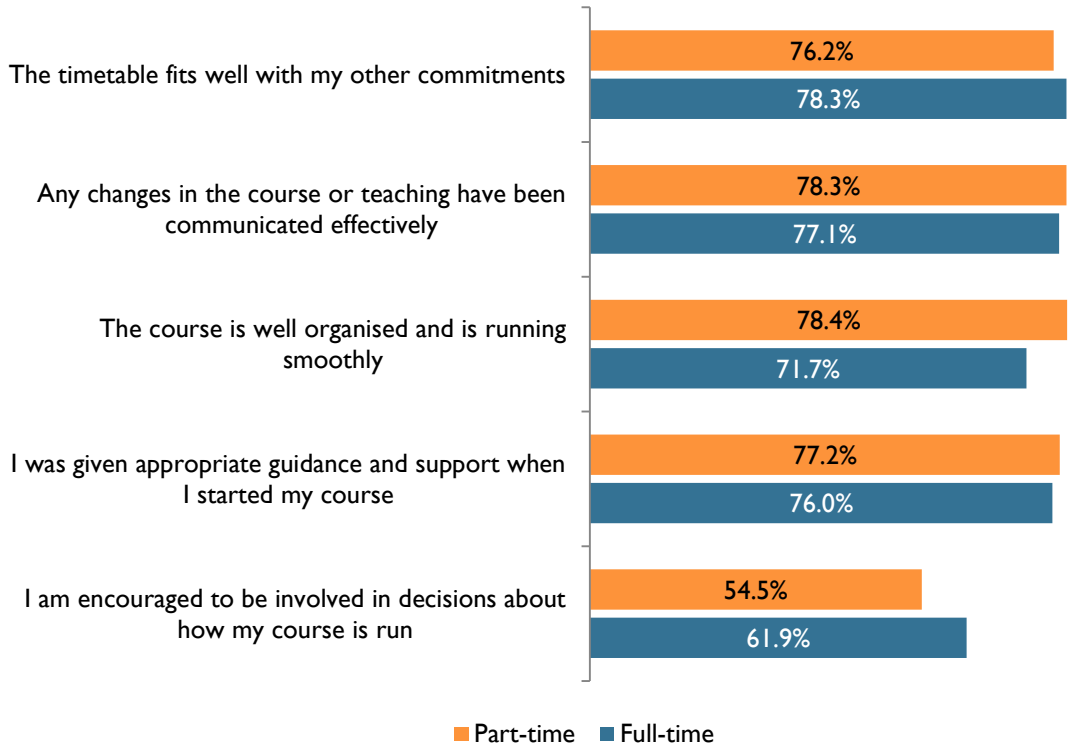
Figure 6.5.2 Mean scale score for organisation and management by discipline




N = 238 - 12,826

Question 11 and 32

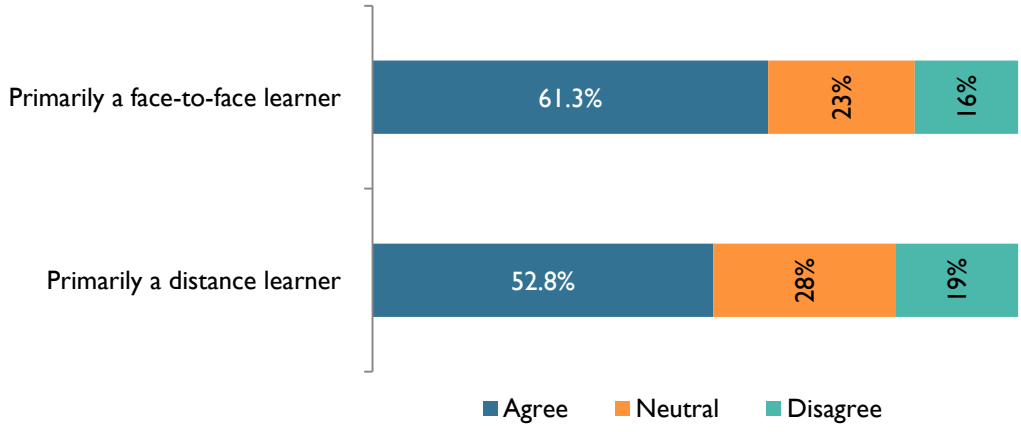
Figure 6.5.3 Experience of organisation and management by mode of study




N = 20,862 - 43,146 Question 11 and 34

We were interested to explore whether involvement in decisions about how the course is run, as measured by question 11e, differed by whether students were face-to-face or distance learners. This analysis is shown in figure 6.5.4. Distance learners are less likely to agree that they have been encouraged to be involved in decisions about their course. However, even then, a majority of distance learners say they have been encouraged suggesting that distance need not be a barrier to such involvement.

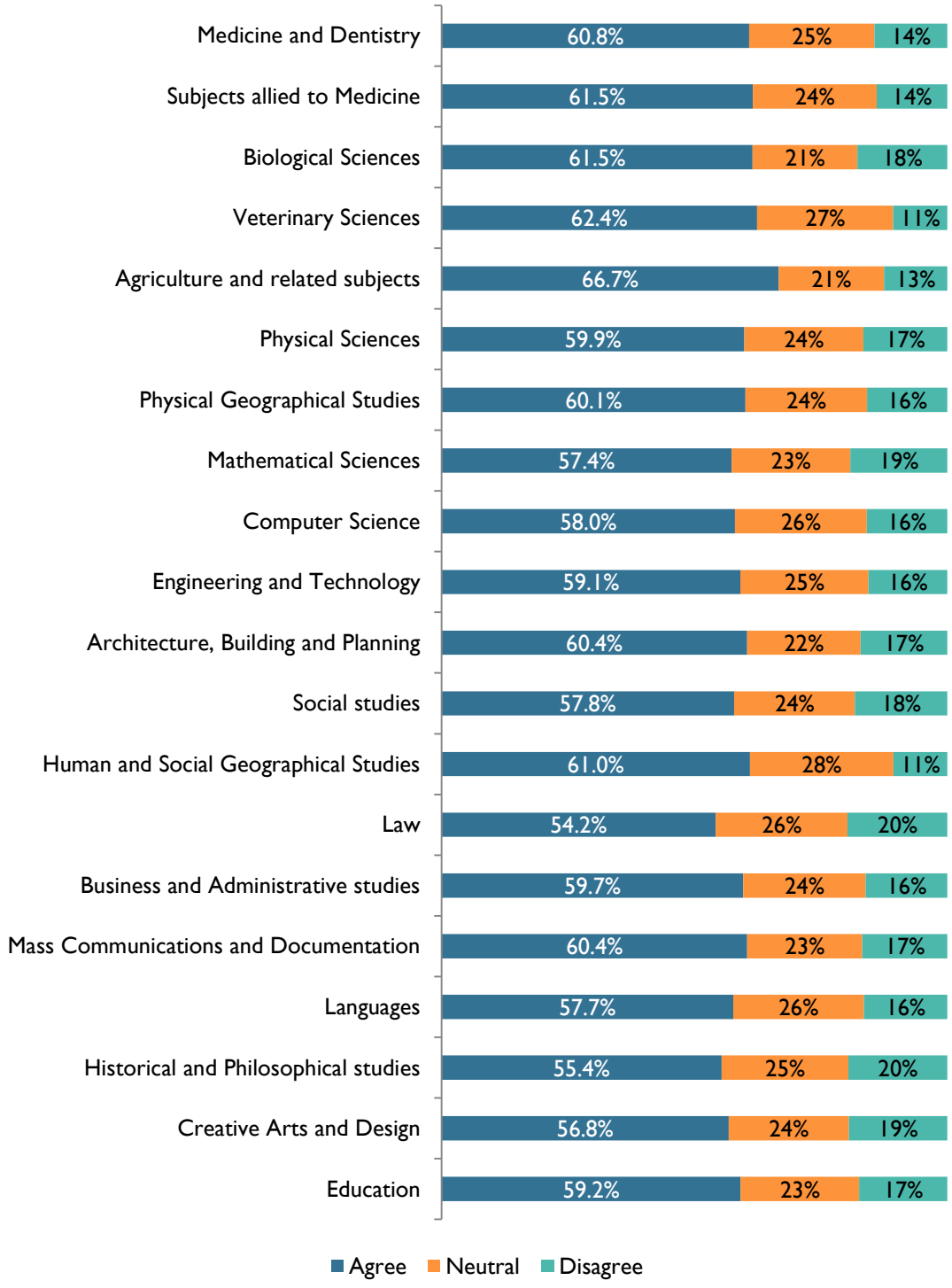
Figure 6.5.4 'I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run' by face-to-face or distance learning




N = 14,295 - 49,093 Question 11e and 35

Figure 6.5.5 presents a further analysis of the same question, this time by subject. For example, was student involvement in decisions less common in those subjects more commonly tied to professional qualifications and needing to meet prescribed professional standards? While students in Law were the least likely to say they were encouraged to be involved in decisions, the next lowest rate was for Historical and Philosophical Studies and overall the hypothesis is not borne out. Indeed, there is relatively little difference between subjects overall and a majority of students in all subject areas say they have been encouraged to be involved in decisions. The implication of this is that there are no obvious disciplinary reasons for not involving students in this way.

Figure 6.5.5 'I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run' by discipline



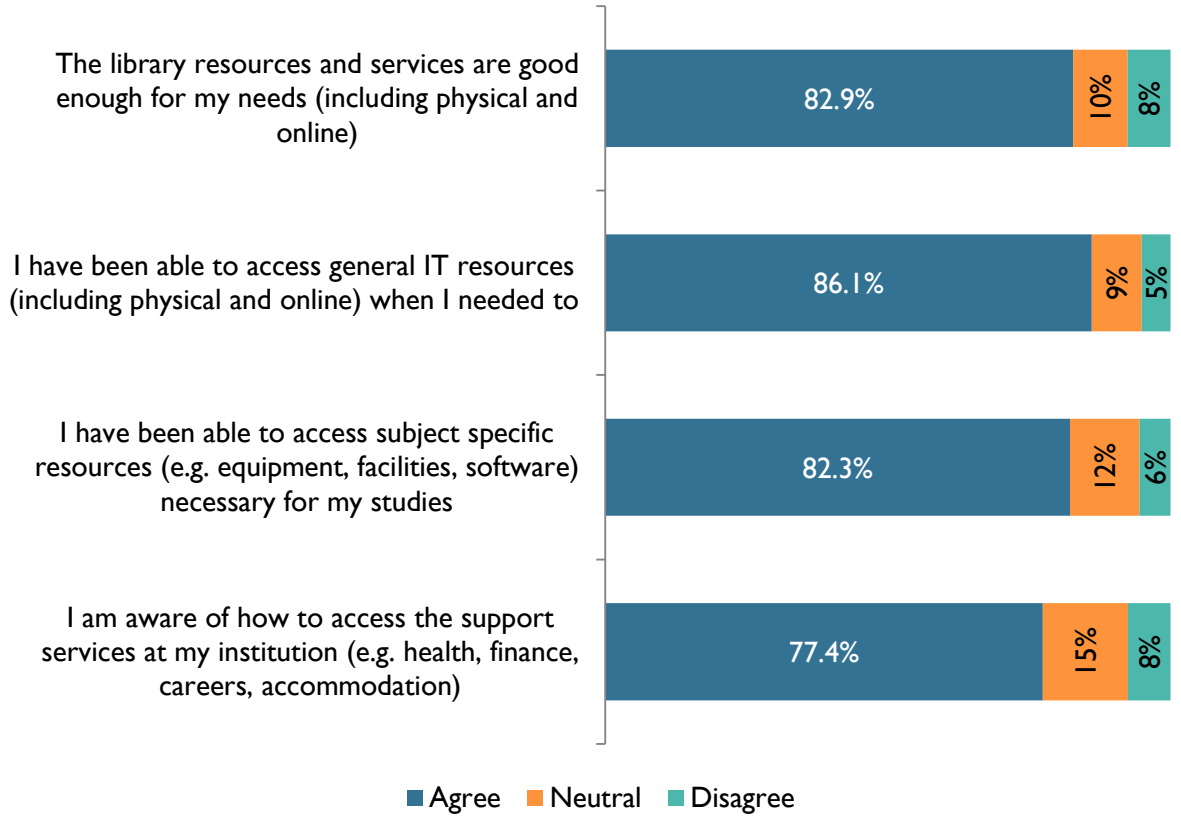

N = 234 – 9,138

Question 11e and 32

## 6.6 Resources and services

Resources and services is the highest scoring scale in PTES, although it is also the scale which generally relates least to overall experience, perhaps reflecting their status as 'hygiene factors' (things which students would miss if they weren't there). Around 23% of students did not agree that they were aware of how to access support services, although not all of these will have been applicable to all students and this may be reflected in the larger proportion neither agreeing nor disagreeing for this item.

Figure 6.6.1 Experience of resources and services

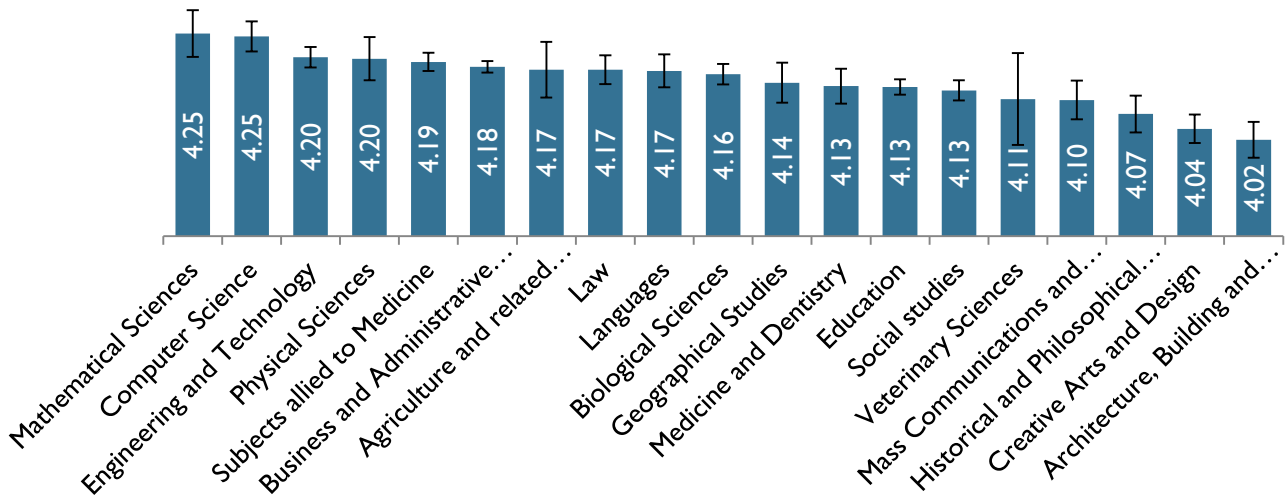



N = 61,966 - 65,791

Question 13

Students taking STEM subjects are more likely to report positively on resources and services than those taking social sciences and, especially, arts subjects (Figure 6.6.2). Resources and services is the only area about which part-time students are less positive than full-time students (see Figure 6.6.3). This is largely – though not entirely – because of the higher proportion of distance learners amongst these groups. While physical institutional resources may be less immediately relevant to distance learners, the items in the scale also ask about online resources, software and generic support and it may be that further enhancements of this provision are needed to create a truly equitable experience.

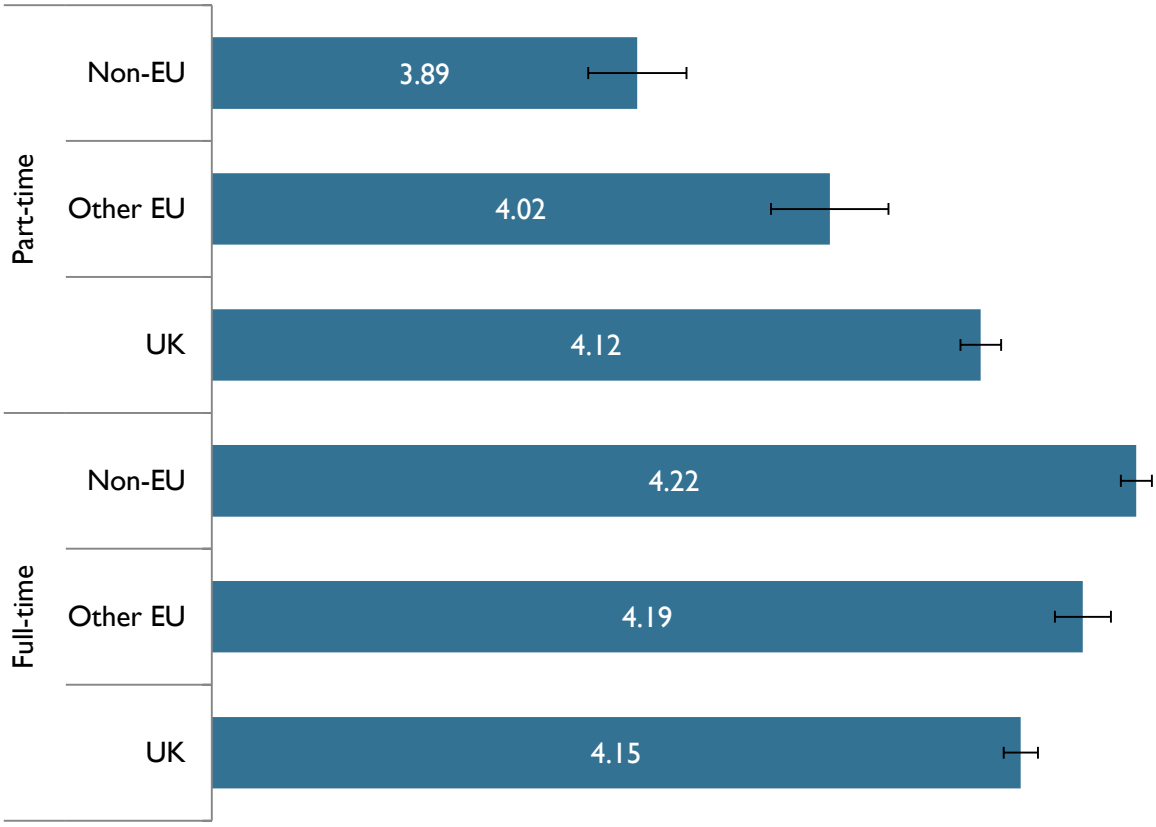
Figure 6.6.2 Mean scale score for resources and services by discipline




N = 186 - 11,504

Question 13 and 32

Figure 6.6.3 Mean scale score for resources and services by domicile and mode of study



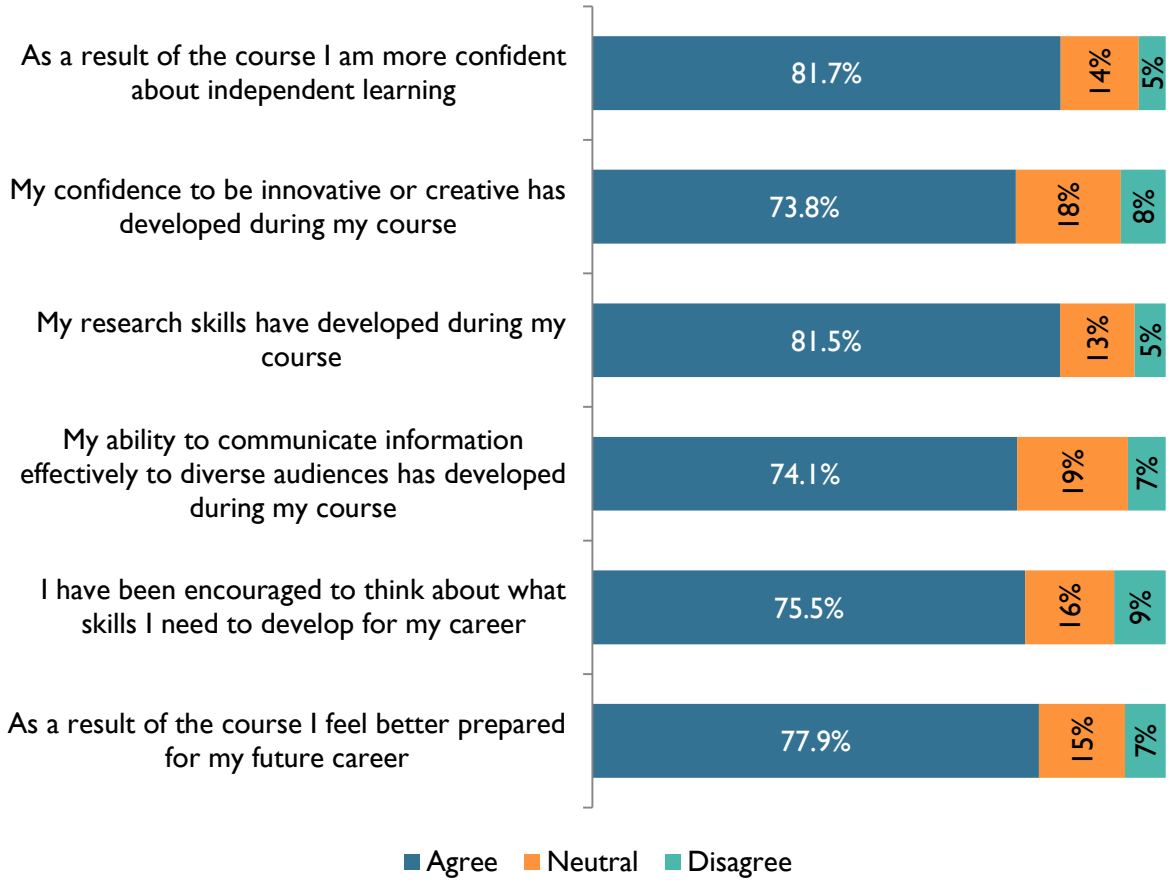

N = 1,412 - 17,163

Question 13, 28 and 34

## 6.7 Skills development

Students are generally positive with their experience in relation to their skills development (Figure 6.7.1), particularly in terms of becoming more confident of independent learning (81.7%) and developing their research skills (81.5%) during their course. Other transferable skills exhibit slightly lower levels of positivity, with over a quarter of students unable to agree that their course had improved their confidence to be creative or innovative. This was generally the case across subject areas, although arts and teacher training students, as well as those in sports science and electrical engineering, were more likely to have improved their confidence to be creative or innovative than those in other subject areas.

Figure 6.7.1 Experience of skills development

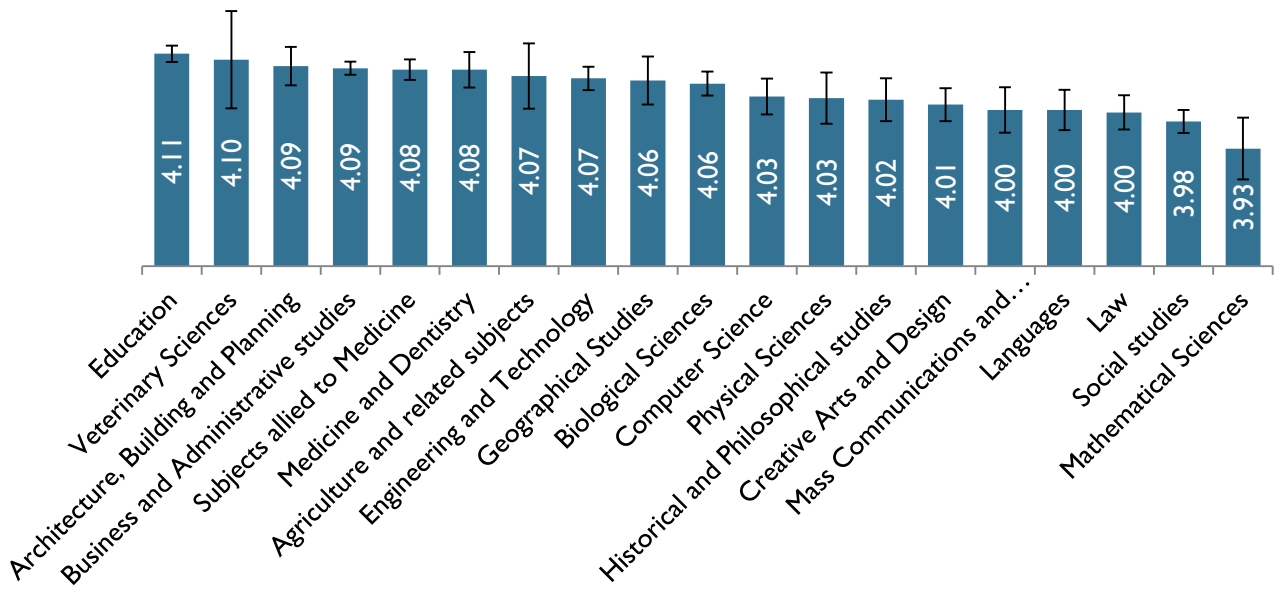



N = 65,543 - 66,520

Question 15

Figure 6.7.2 suggests discipline effects are quite muted for this scale, although given the range of skills items subjects may be stronger on certain skills than others, averaging out effects. There were no notable differences in experience between those from different domiciles or between full-time and part-time students.

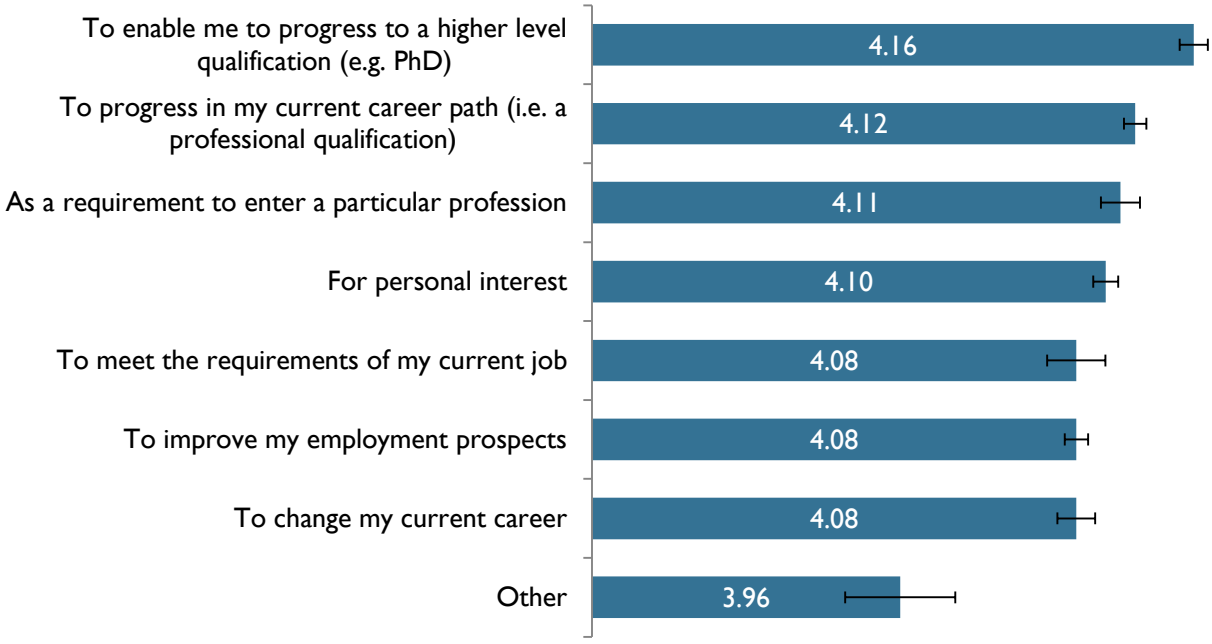
Figure 6.7.2 Mean scale score for skills development by discipline




N = 235 - 12,798 Question 15 and 32

We were interested to explore whether students' experiences of skills development were related to their original motivations for study. Figure 6.7.3 shows limited effects but suggests that those intending to progress to a higher qualification were most positive, closely followed by those seeking to progress professionally.

Figure 6.7.3 Mean skills development scale score by main motivation to study




N = 67,510 Question 15 and 20

Examining individual items (Table 6.7.4), those who were seeking to progress to a higher level qualification or by personal interest were most likely to agree their confidence in independent learning and research skills had been improved. Likewise, those seeking career progression were slightly more likely to report positively on related items. Overall, though, the impact of particular motivations on which types of skills are developed is limited.

Table 6.7.4 Relationship between experience of skills development items and original motivations

| Motivation | Confident about independent learning | Confident to be innovative or creative | Research skills | Communicate to diverse audiences | Think about skills for my career | Better prepared for career |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Progress to higher level qualification (e.g. PhD) | 85.9% | 79.0% | 86.5% | 78.2% | 77.7% | 80.3% |
| Progress in current career path | 83.7% | 76.0% | 82.9% | 76.3% | 78.8% | 81.8% |
| Change current career | 81.7% | 74.4% | 81.2% | 73.8% | 77.2% | 79.5% |
| Improve employment prospects | 83.6% | 75.0% | 83.5% | 75.5% | 76.0% | 78.6% |
| Enter particular profession | 80.6% | 74.5% | 79.2% | 76.9% | 82.5% | 82.6% |
| Meet requirements of current job | 80.6% | 75.0% | 80.1% | 73.0% | 78.3% | 81.6% |
| Personal interest | 84.1% | 75.8% | 84.4% | 74.5% | 74.2% | 77.8% |
| Other | 76.5% | 68.9% | 78.4% | 67.3% | 67.3% | 71.9% |

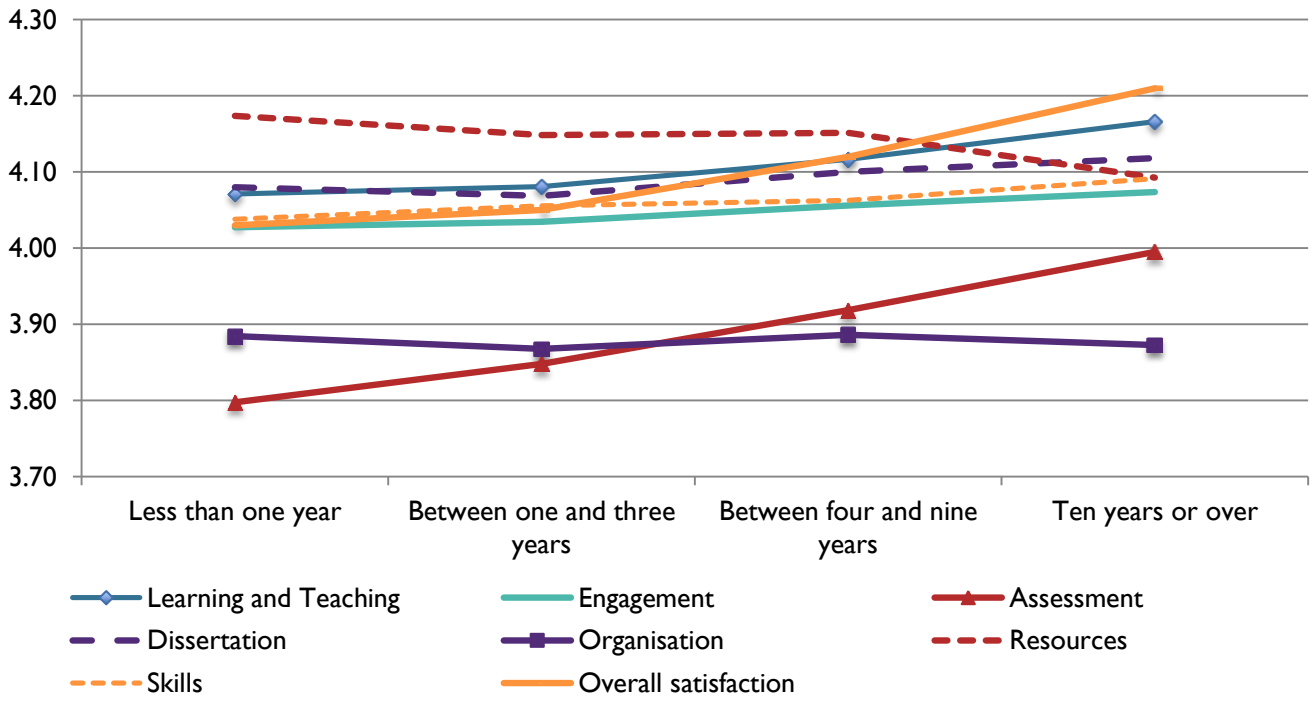
# 7. Further factors influencing student experience

Discipline, mode-of-study and domicile are three of the most important factors explaining differences between the experiences of students. These factors are explored systematically during the detailed analysis and presentation of results in chapter 6. This chapter considers some of the additional factors that may also influence experience.

## 7.1 Time since last in higher education

PTES 2014 included a new question, asking respondents how long, prior to their current postgraduate course, was it since they completed an academic course. Figure 7.1.1 shows how the main scale scores vary by time elapsed since last taking an academic course. On average, those who have returned after a longer period away are more likely to report a positive experience than those continuing on directly or after a shorter time since their previous course. There are two exceptions: resources and services, and organisation and management. In the case of resources and services, part-time students who are also more likely to have been away from higher education for longer were less likely to report a positive experience than their full-time counterparts, while for organisation and management there was little difference. Other related factors such as the age, employment status, expectations and discipline may thus be primarily what influences experience, rather than time since last in higher education per se.

Figure 7.1.1 Mean scale scores by time since last completing an academic course



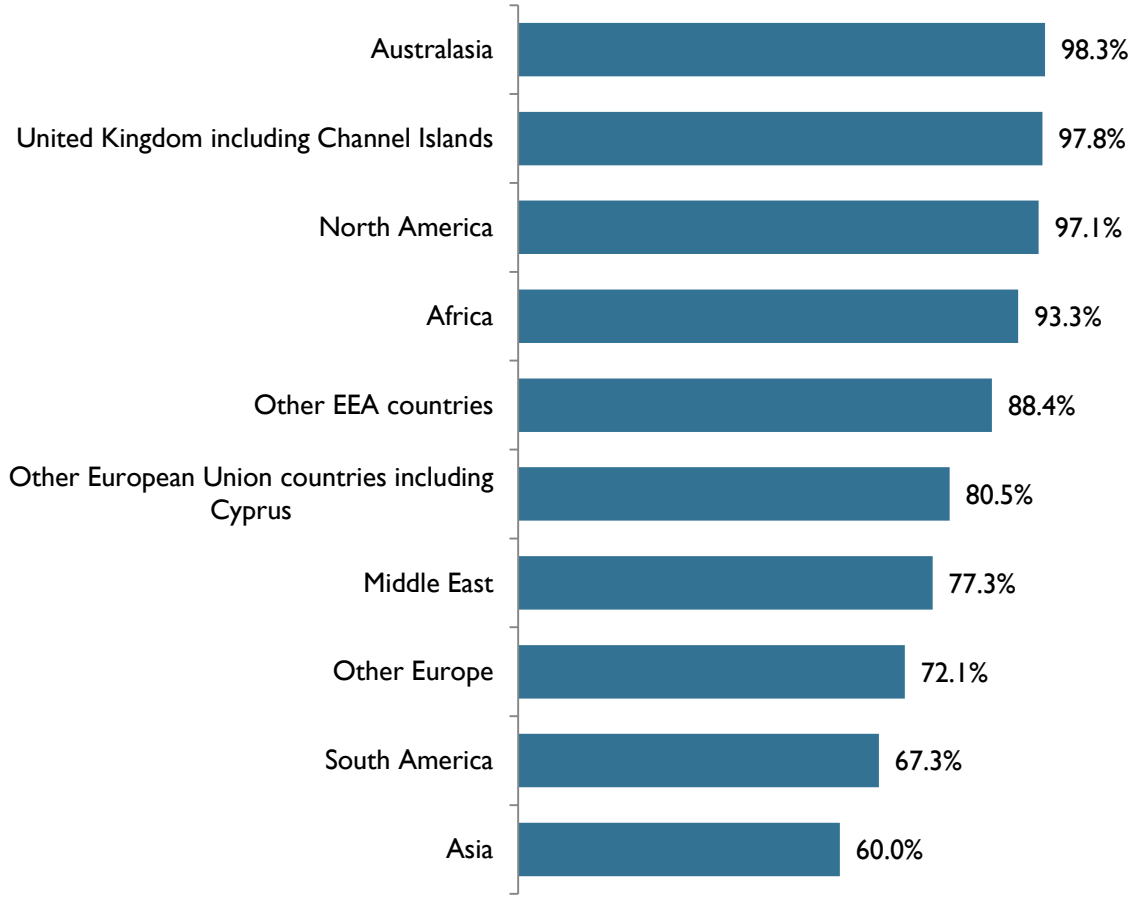

N = 3,675 - 20,661 Questions 1 to 17 and 37

Students who previously studied at their current institution (and have thus elected to stay on or return) tend to be the most satisfied with the quality of the course (mean = 4.18) while those who previously studied in an EU institution are the least satisfied (mean = 4.02).

## 7.2 English language skills

PTES 2014 also introduced a new question on English language skills and support for those who do not consider themselves to have been fluent when they first started their course. The vast majority of students (87.2%) considered themselves to be fluent in English when starting their studies. As would be expected, this varies considerably in relation to country of domicile, with students from Asia, South America, the Middle East and non-EEA European countries less likely to consider themselves fluent than those from elsewhere (Figure 7.2.1).

Figure 7.2.1 Students who considered themselves to be fluent in English when they started their course



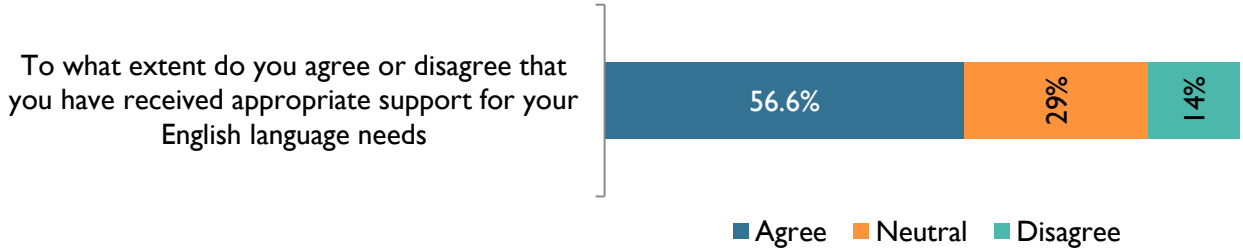

N = 62,637

Question 27 and 29

Just over a half (57%) of students who did not consider themselves fluent in English when they started their course agreed that they have received appropriate support for their English language needs. However, almost one-third were neutral about the support received (Figure 7.2.2).

As Figure 7.2.3 shows, there are not many statistically significantly differences in experience between students who were fluent in English when they started and those who were not fluent. Those who were not fluent tend to rate resources and services and organisation and management higher than their fluent in English counterparts, but they also rated engagement less positively.

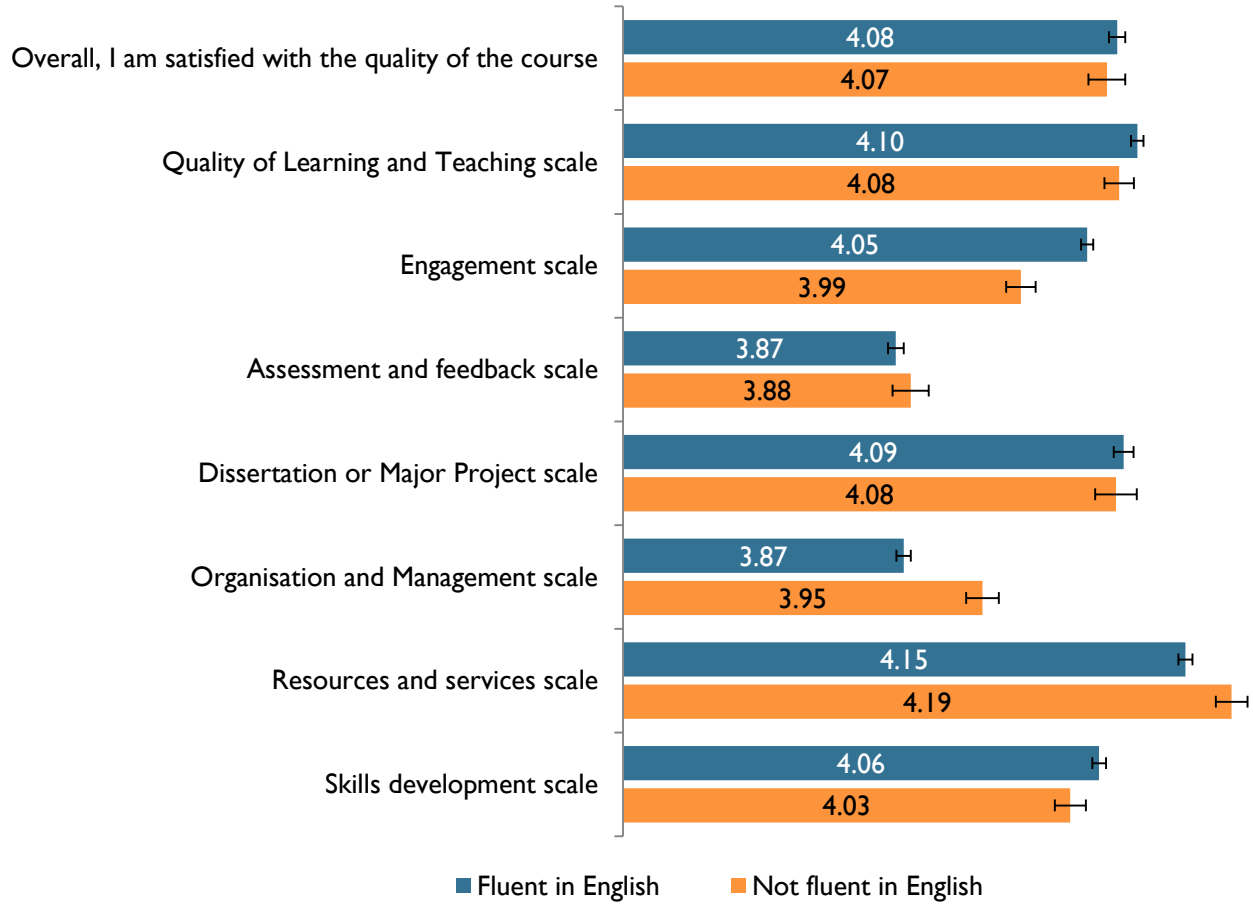
Figure 7.2.2 Support for English language needs (experienced by students not fluent at the start of their course)




N = 7,171

Question 27

Figure 7.2.3 Student experience dimensions by fluency in English at the start of the course




N = 5,583 - 56,535

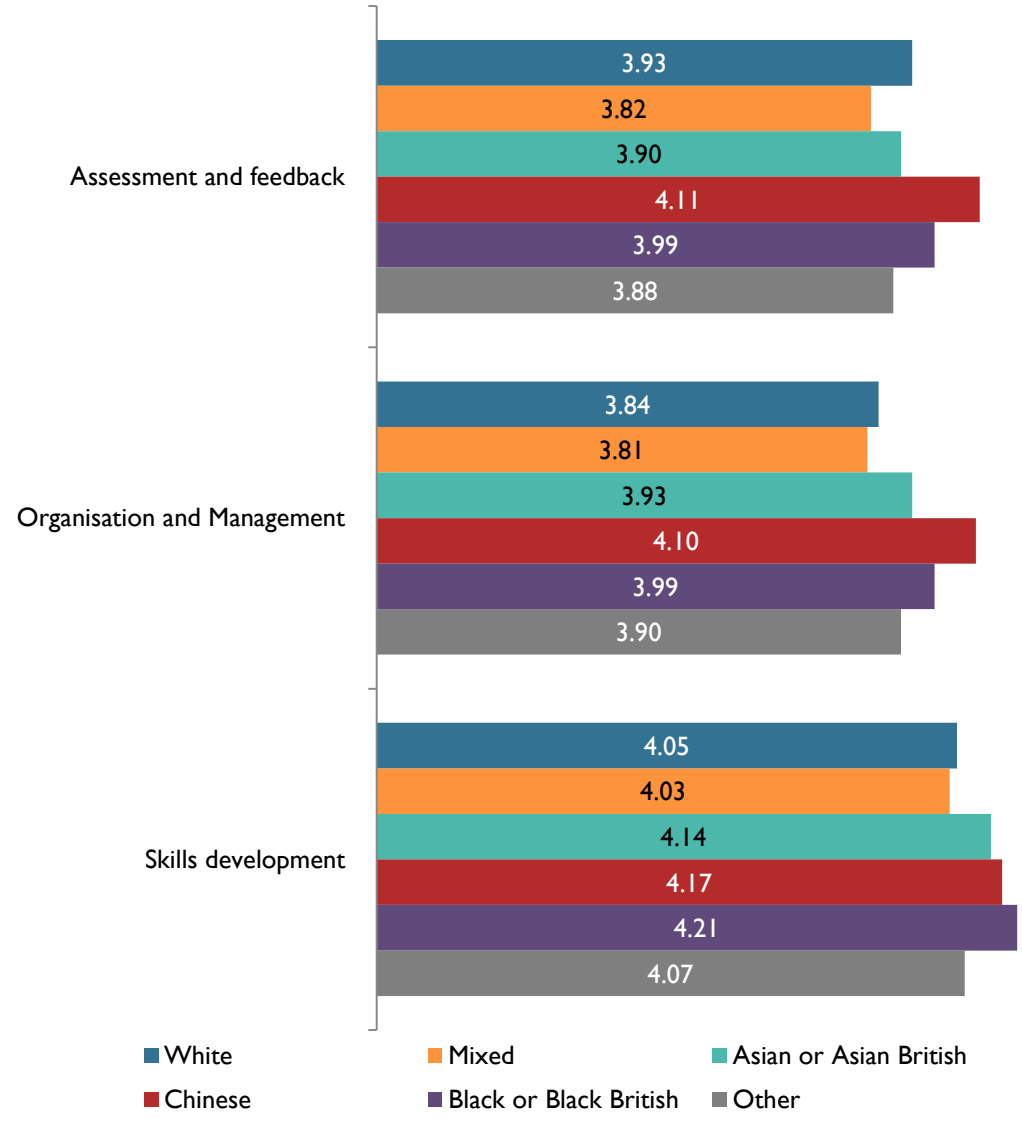
Questions 1 to 17 and 27

## 7.3 Ethnicity

PTES 2014 included a new question asking students to state their ethnic group. While all students were asked to complete this question, we have restricted the analysis to UK-domiciled students for whom the relationship between ethnicity and participation in higher education may be different from internationally mobile students.

Figure 7.3.1 shows the scales where the differences in experience between students of different ethnicities were greatest, with data for all scales in Table 7.3.2. It should be noted that these categories aggregate a range of diverse ethnicities who can have quite different experiences, for example within the Asian or Asian British category. Nonetheless Black or Black British and Chinese students tend to be the most satisfied with the majority of different aspects of student experience. While the vast majority of differences in experience between students of different ethnicity were statistically significant, effect sizes were almost negligible, with the exception of organisation and management where a small effect size was found.

Figure 7.3.1 Scales with the largest differences between ethnic groups




N = 625 - 26,843

Question 5, 11, 15 and 30

Table 7.3.2 Mean scale scores by ethnicity (UK-domiciled students only)

| | Teaching and learning | Engagement | Assessment and feedback | Dissertation or major project | Organisation and management | Resources and services | Skills development | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| White | 4.13 | 4.09 | 3.93 | 4.10 | 3.84 | 4.14 | 4.05 | 12,848 - 27,186 |
| Mixed | 4.11 | 4.04 | 3.82 | 4.08 | 3.81 | 4.13 | 4.03 | 403 - 749 |
| Asian or Asian British | 4.13 | 4.04 | 3.90 | 4.05 | 3.93 | 4.14 | 4.14 | 1,124 - 2,034 |
| Chinese | 4.20 | 4.14 | 4.11 | 4.22 | 4.10 | 4.27 | 4.17 | 689 - 961 |
| Black or Black British | 4.23 | 4.14 | 3.99 | 4.14 | 3.99 | 4.23 | 4.21 | 818 - 1,572 |
| Other | 4.12 | 4.06 | 3.88 | 4.13 | 3.90 | 4.11 | 4.07 | 386 - 662 |

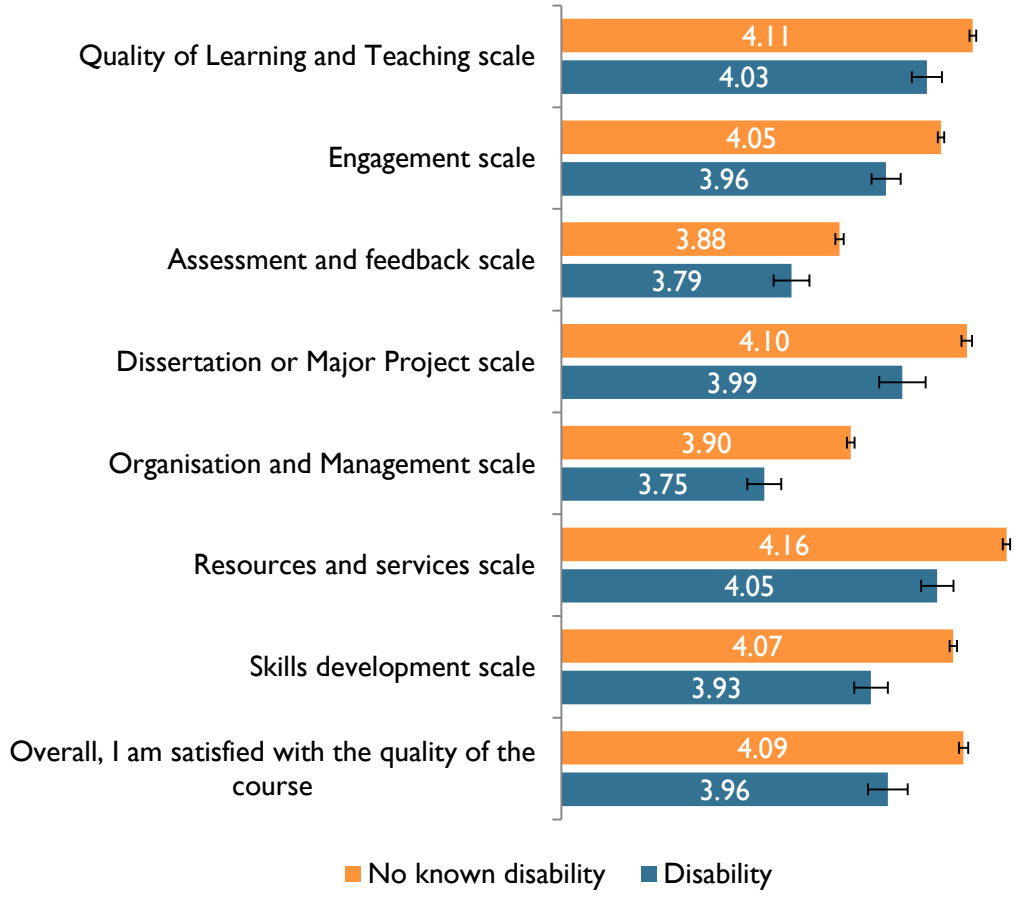
Table 7.4.1 Mean scale scores by type of disability

| | Teaching and learning | Engagement | Assessment and feedback | Dissertation or major project | Organisation and management | Resources and services | Skills | Overall satisfaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Physical impairment or mobility issues | 4.15 | 4.04 | 3.95 | 4.06 | 3.82 | 4.04 | 3.98 | 4.09 |
| Deaf/serious hearing impairment | 4.04 | 4.03 | 4.00 | 4.02 | 3.81 | 4.19 | 3.98 | 4.06 |
| Blind/serious visual impairment | 4.07 | 3.91 | 3.87 | 4.00 | 3.85 | 4.09 | 3.86 | 4.04 |
| Long standing illness or health condition | 4.05 | 3.97 | 3.85 | 3.97 | 3.78 | 4.07 | 3.96 | 3.98 |
| Specific learning difficulty | 4.02 | 3.95 | 3.77 | 3.96 | 3.70 | 3.99 | 3.97 | 3.94 |
| Mental health condition | 3.99 | 3.91 | 3.73 | 3.95 | 3.73 | 4.06 | 3.80 | 3.91 |
| Social/ communication impairment | 3.95 | 3.93 | 3.80 | 4.07 | 3.80 | 4.13 | 3.89 | 3.90 |
| No disability | 4.11 | 4.05 | 3.88 | 4.10 | 3.90 | 4.16 | 4.07 | 4.09 |

## 7.4 Disability

Table 7.4.1 and Figure 7.4.2 show the differences in experience between students with no known disability and those declaring a disability. Students with no known disability are more likely to rate their experience more highly across the whole range of scales than those with a disability. The differences are particularly stark for organisation and management, skills development and overall satisfaction. Table 7.4.1 shows how the mean thematic scale scores, as well as overall satisfaction, vary by type of disability. In general, those students with physical disabilities have a more positive experience than those with specific learning difficulties, mental health conditions and social/communication impairments, although blind students rate 'Engagement' and 'Skills' development notably less positively than deaf students and those with physical impairment or mobility issues. Students with social/communication impairments rate their experience of their dissertation and resources and services particularly highly, despite lower scores on other scales.

Figure 7.4.2 Student experience dimensions by disability



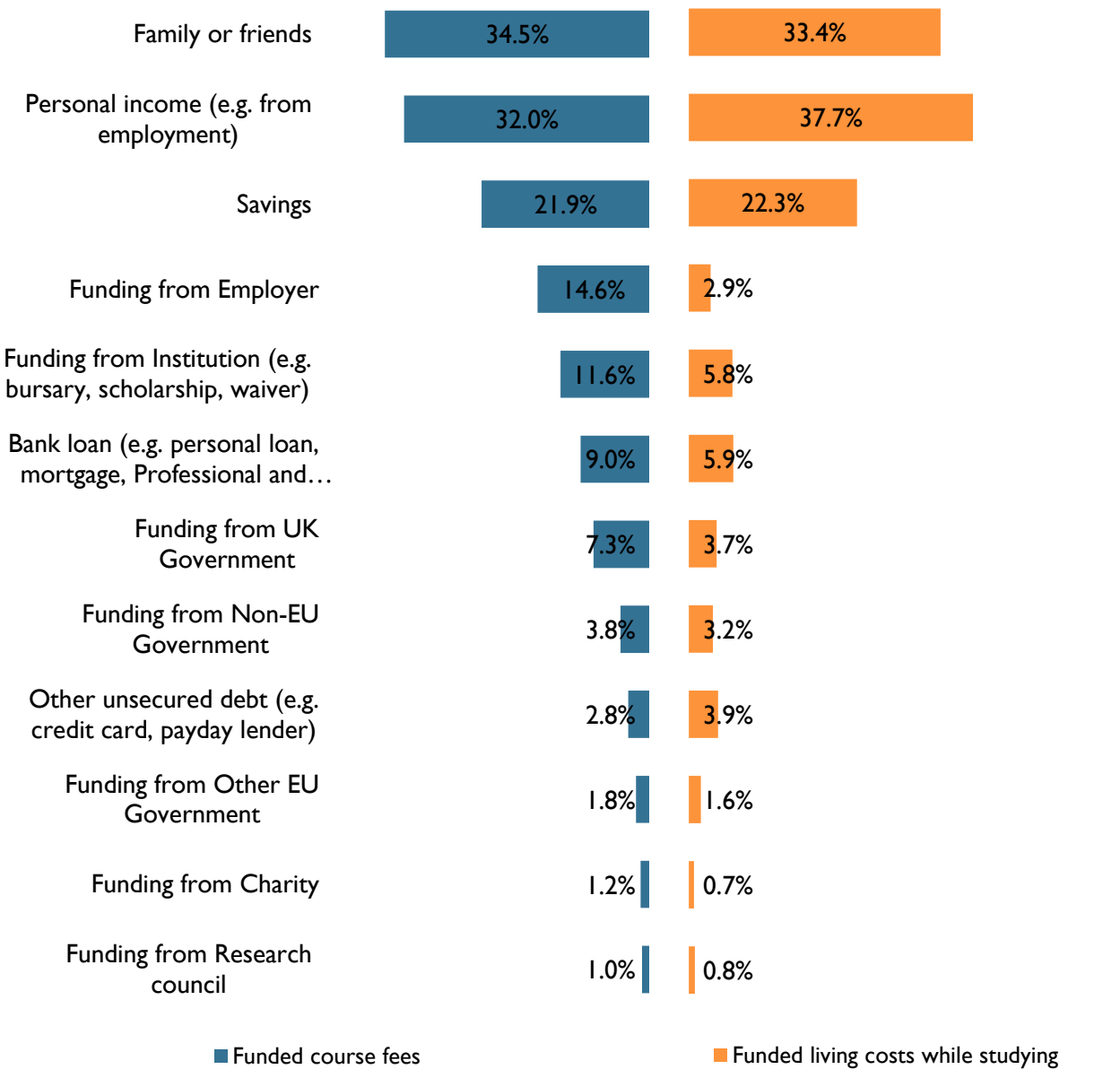

N = 2,192 - 61,007

Questions 1 to 17 and 26

## 7.5 Source of funding

As Figure 7.5.1 shows, family or friends, personal income and savings are the main sources of funding when it comes to paying for both course fees and living costs while studying. Other sources are less common and, where they are provided, focus mainly on fees. Government funding (whether UK or international) and especially UK Research Council funding, represents a small proportion of the overall funding. The results suggest that taught postgraduate study is largely restricted to those who are both able and prepared to fund their studies from personal sources. This potentially raises a number of concerns about the affordability of entry to many professions and especially progression onto a PhD (and possible academic career) for which a Masters degree is regarded as an essential stepping stone in many subject areas.

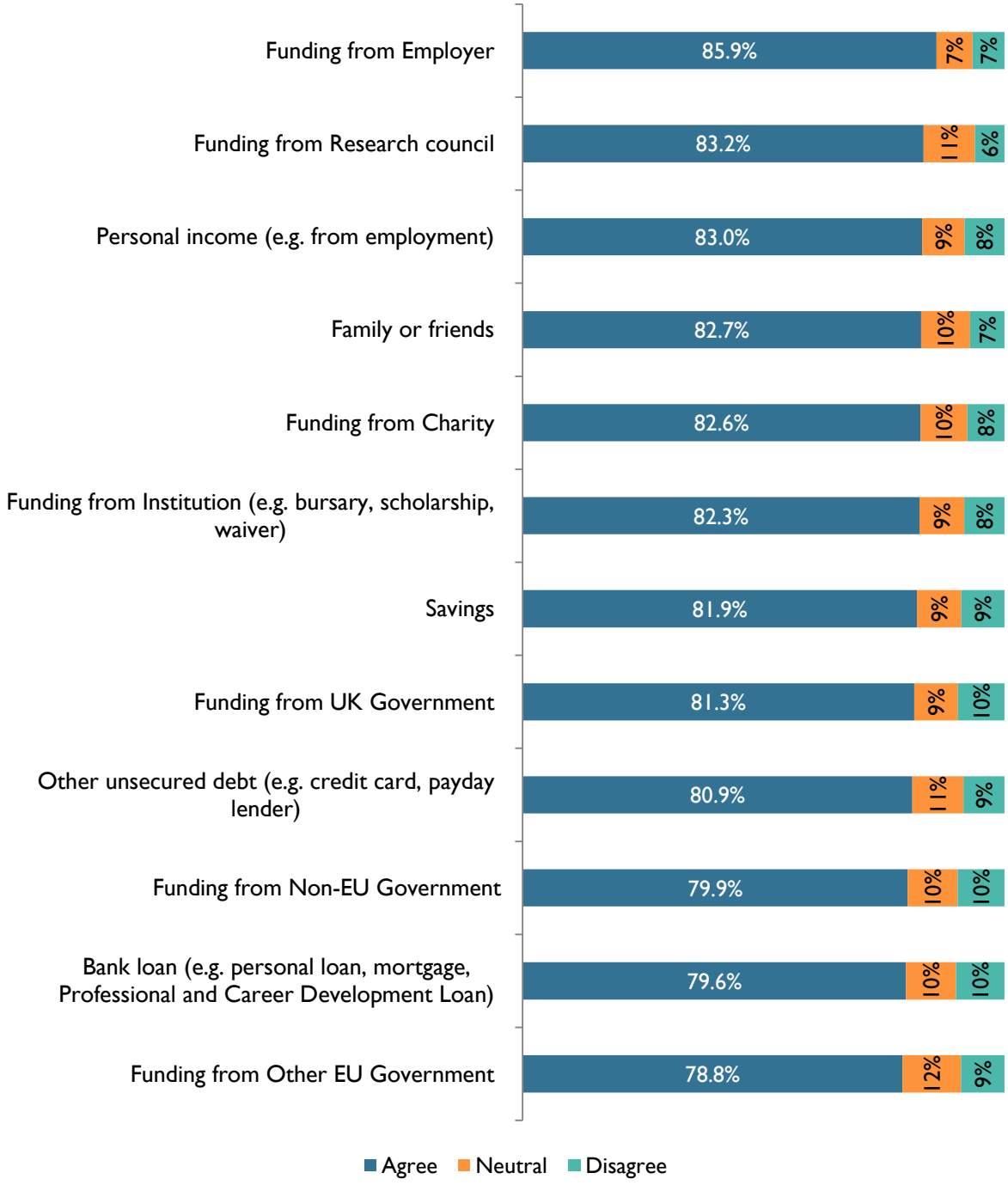
Figure 7.5.1 Source of funding (fees and living costs)




N = 67,510 Question 39

Overall satisfaction varies modestly by source of fees as shown in Figure 7.5.2, with those students funded by employers the most likely to be satisfied. It should be noted that fees are often funded by more than one source. Discipline, mode of study and age are likely to underpin some of the differences shown in the graph.

Figure 7.5.2 Overall satisfaction by source of fees




N = 668 – 23,119

Question 17 and 39

# 8. Comparison of PTES with the National Student Survey (NSS)

PTES has a number of comparable questions with the NSS, with weighted comparisons shown in Table 8.1.1. PGT students rate staff enthusiasm more highly than undergraduates. Feedback is also apparently perceived more positively in PTES, though this may reflect wording difference between the surveys. Perceptions of resources and assessment arrangements are more negative in the PTES, along with overall satisfaction (by almost 4%). As shown in Section 6.5, "The programme is well organised and is running smoothly" is strongly correlated with overall satisfaction and the relatively negative perceptions of organisation among PGT students could help to explain lower overall satisfaction compared with undergraduates, although further investigation would be required to confirm such a causal relationship. Analysis indicates that those students least positive about organisation tend to be younger, full-time postgraduates.

Table 8.1.1 Comparison between PTES 2014 and NSS 2014 for comparable questionnaire items[8]

| Question | PTES | NSS | PTES - NSS | Effect Size |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Feedback on my work (written or oral) has been useful (NSS Q8 similar) | 73.1% | 67.5% | 5.6% | 0.46 |
| Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching (NSS Q3) | 89.9% | 87.3% | 2.5% | 0.41 |
| The course is intellectually stimulating (NSS Q4) | 86.1% | 86.1% | 0.0% | 0.00 |
| The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance (NSS Q5) | 75.4% | 75.4% | 0.0% | 0.00 |
| Feedback on my work has been prompt (NSS Q7) | 66.1% | 67.1% | -0.9% | 0.07 |
| I have been able to access subject specific resources necessary for my studies (NSS Q18 similar) | 82.5% | 83.5% | -1.0% | 0.13 |
| Any changes in the programme or teaching have been communicated effectively (NSS Q14) | 77.6% | 79.4% | -1.9% | 0.19 |
| Staff are good at explaining things (NSS Q1) | 87.7% | 90.3% | -2.7% | 0.47 |
| Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair (NSS Q6) | 73.2% | 76.0% | -2.8% | 0.33 |
| I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course (NSS Q10 similar) | 75.0% | 78.4% | -3.4% | 0.43 |
| Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course (NSS Q22) | 82.9% | 86.5% | -3.7% | 0.52 |
| The programme is well organised and is running smoothly (NSS Q15) | 74.2% | 77.9% | -3.7% | 0.32 |
| I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to (NSS Q17) | 86.4% | 90.2% | -3.8% | 0.65 |
| The timetable fits well with my other commitments (NSS Q13 similar) | 77.6% | 81.7% | -4.0% | 0.50 |
| The library resources and services are good enough for my needs (NSS Q16) | 83.3% | 88.9% | -5.6% | 0.71 |

It should be noted that differences will partly reflect the population demographics, context and methodology of the surveys. For example, overseas students form nearly half (47.2%) of the taught postgraduate population compared to 18.1% of the undergraduate population. The perception of overseas students changes the scores significantly for some statements. However, some differences do appear to remain for different populations and this comparison raises questions over why the taught postgraduate experience, particularly around organisation and resources, appears to be less positive than the experience of undergraduates.

[8] First degree students only, matched and weighted to PTES 2014 on institution and JACS Level 1 subject, where response was 22 or higher for both surveys (n = 9622).

# 9. Using PTES to inform enhancement

It is important that survey data are not considered to be the last word on the student experience. Surveys give extensive information that is useful as an initial indicator of where things are going well and where enhancements are required.

Institutions may wish to compare their own results with the national analyses contained in this report. It should be remembered that most of the analyses aggregate the responses for all institutions across all subject areas, and institutions should take care when comparing their own results with these. For example, to avoid the impact of significant discipline effects, institutions should compare their results at subject level with the results for the same subject area at other institutions, and particularly with results for benchmarking groups of similar institutions (which will also reduce the impact of cohort effects).

This year, to make benchmarking even more meaningful, the HEA has introduced a custom benchmarking add-on service, whereby institutions can create their own benchmarks in addition to the standard groups which continue to be provided. Subject to a minimum of six institutions in a group, these permit institutions to compare their scores with the aggregate results of their main comparators and/or competitors, such as those within a city-region or particular subsets of existing mission groups.

A meaningful interpretation also requires an understanding of context. The extensive qualitative comments also gathered by PTES allow further exploration of issues by institutions, as do module evaluations, course reviews and external examiners' reports. However, formal and informal discussions with students and with staff are also vital to understand the actual existence and nature of any problems (or best practice) and the types of enhancement that might be implemented. 'Closing the loop' with students is also helpful to show that their feedback (or that given by their predecessors) is taken seriously and has a positive impact. This can further improve response rates and help to create a virtuous circle/cycle of feedback-informed enhancement.

The HEA Surveys team offers a consultancy service to institutions to support the use of surveys for enhancement at postgraduate taught level, as well as for undergraduate and postgraduate research programmes. For further information please contact surveys@heacademy.ac.uk

# Appendix 1 Results tables

| | %Agree | %Neutral | %Disagree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Teaching and learning scale** | | | | |
| Q1_a Staff are good at explaining things | 87.5% | 7.5% | 5.0% | 66,823 |
| Q1_b Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching | 89.8% | 7.0% | 3.2% | 66,553 |
| Q1_c The course is intellectually stimulating | 85.7% | 9.2% | 5.1% | 66,902 |
| Q1_d The course has enhanced my academic ability | 85.8% | 9.0% | 5.2% | 66,693 |
| Q1_e The learning materials provided on my course are useful | 82.0% | 11.9% | 6.1% | 66,285 |
| Q1_f There is sufficient contact time (face to face and/or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning | 67.3% | 16.9% | 15.8% | 66,379 |
| Q1_g I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course | 75.3% | 13.9% | 10.8% | 66,643 |
| **Engagement scale** | | | | |
| Q3_a I am encouraged to ask questions or make contributions in taught sessions (face to face and/or online) | 87.3% | 8.9% | 3.8% | 66,029 |
| Q3_b The course has created sufficient opportunities to discuss my work with other students (face to face and/or online) | 76.9% | 14.2% | 8.9% | 66,298 |
| Q3_c My course has challenged me to produce my best work | 80.5% | 12.7% | 6.9% | 66,742 |
| Q3_d The workload on my course has been manageable | 72.7% | 15.4% | 11.9% | 66,559 |
| Q3_e I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience | 74.5% | 16.3% | 9.2% | 66,452 |
| **Assessment and feedback scale** | | | | |
| Q5_a The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance | 75.3% | 12.6% | 12.1% | 66,625 |
| Q5_b Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair | 73.4% | 17.4% | 9.1% | 65,344 |
| Q5_c Feedback on my work has been prompt | 66.2% | 16.9% | 17.0% | 65,609 |
| Q5_d Feedback on my work (written or oral) has been useful | 73.6% | 15.5% | 10.9% | 65,403 |

| | %Agree | %Neutral | %Disagree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Dissertation or Major Project scale** | | | | |
| Q9_a I understand the required standards for the dissertation / major project | 80.4% | 11.6% | 8.0% | 45,993 |
| Q9_b I am happy with the support I received for planning my dissertation / major project (topic selection, project outline, literature search, etc) | 70.6% | 16.3% | 13.2% | 42,762 |
| Q9_c My supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my dissertation / major project | 83.0% | 12.1% | 4.9% | 40,636 |
| Q9_d My supervisor provides helpful feedback on my progress | 76.2% | 16.4% | 7.4% | 38,024 |
| **Organisation and management scale** | | | | |
| Q11_a The timetable fits well with my other commitments | 77.5% | 12.8% | 9.7% | 66,412 |
| Q11_b Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively | 77.5% | 11.9% | 10.6% | 65,173 |
| Q11_c The course is well-organised and is running smoothly | 73.9% | 14.3% | 11.7% | 66,763 |
| Q11_d I was given appropriate guidance and support when I started my course | 76.4% | 13.6% | 10.0% | 66,530 |
| Q11_e I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run | 59.5% | 23.9% | 16.6% | 65,586 |
| **Resources and services scale** | | | | |
| Q13_a The library resources and services are good enough for my needs (including physical and online) | 82.9% | 9.6% | 7.6% | 65,791 |
| Q13_b I have been able to access general IT resources (including physical and online) when I needed to | 86.1% | 8.8% | 5.1% | 65,147 |
| Q13_c I have been able to access subject specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software) necessary for my studies | 82.3% | 12.3% | 5.5% | 62,034 |
| Q13_d I am aware of how to access the support services at my institution (e.g. health, finance, careers, accommodation) | 77.4% | 15.1% | 7.5% | 61,966 |

| | %Agree | %Neutral | %Disagree | N |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Skills development scale** | | | | |
| Q15_a As a result of the course I am more confident about independent learning | 81.7% | 13.6% | 4.7% | 66,520 |
| Q15_b My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course | 73.8% | 18.3% | 7.8% | 66,377 |
| Q15_c My research skills have developed during my course | 81.5% | 13.0% | 5.4% | 66,086 |
| Q15_d My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my course | 74.1% | 19.3% | 6.6% | 65,543 |
| Q15_e I have been encouraged to think about what skills I need to develop for my career | 75.5% | 15.5% | 9.0% | 65,551 |
| Q15_f As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career | 77.9% | 15.0% | 7.1% | 65,640 |
| **Overall satisfaction** | | | | |
| Q17_(overview) Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course | 82.6% | 9.3% | 8.0% | 66,824 |
| **Information provided by institution to help course choice** | | | | |
| Q22_a Information provided by your institution: easy to find | 86.1% | 9.1% | 4.8% | 64,946 |
| Q22_b Information provided by your institution: useful | 87.4% | 9.3% | 3.4% | 64,519 |
| Q22_c Information provided by your institution: sufficient | 79.6% | 13.4% | 7.1% | 64,327 |
| Q22_d Information provided by your institution: accurate | 79.7% | 13.9% | 6.5% | 63,890 |
| **English language support** (base: students not fluent in English at commencement) | | | | |
| Q27_(no) You have received appropriate support for your English language needs | 56.6% | 29.0% | 14.4% | 7,171 |

# Appendix 2 Interpreting the results and the analyses

**Reporting 'experience'**

PTES experience questions generally have five answer options ranging from 'definitely agree' to 'definitely disagree' (with a positive statement). For ease of reporting and interpretation, the results for individual items have been compressed into a three-point scale ('agree', 'neutral' and 'disagree'). 'Scale scores' aggregate the answers for all question items in each scale relating to a key dimension of the student experience. Categories (from 'definitely disagree' to 'definitely agree') are converted into numbers (from one to five) and averaged. This assumes that the response categories are equally spaced, while a single mean score may be misleading where opinions are polarised. Nonetheless, scale scores permit more detailed analyses than summary 'percentage agree' scores, and are also a convenient shorthand, often more reliable than relying on responses to a single question.

**Types of analysis**

PTES also collects information about the student themselves – such as their age, gender, mode of study and discipline – allowing us to examine relationships between student characteristics and their experience. The analyses in this report are mostly bivariate – for example, the relationship between mode of study (full-time/part-time) and experience. Note that a simple bivariate relationship does not reveal causality and there may be a range of other characteristics underpinning any observed differences in experience (for example, age, employment and source of funding in the case of mode of study).

In order to assess the extent to which different dimensions of student experience affect overall satisfaction, multivariate analyses have also been employed:
1. Stepwise linear regression treats overall satisfaction as a dependent variable (variable being explained) and dimensions such as teaching and learning or skills development as independent variables (variables explaining the dependent variable). The results from stepwise regression are presented in Section 5 of this report and summarised in Table 5.2.2. In step 1, teaching and learning was been found to be the most important factor affecting the overall experience, explaining around 60% of the total variability in overall experience. In further steps additional factors are added in the order of decreasing importance. This approach can downplay important factors (e.g. engagement) where there are high correlations between independent variables.

2. Principal axis factoring was used to model a 'core student experience' factor responsible for explaining variations in the scales. The core factor accounted for 55% of the variance across the summary scales and the results are shown in Table 5.2.3. For the overall analysis, determinant of the correlation matrix = 0.004, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy = 0.941, Bartlett's test was significant ($p<0.001$), indicating factor analysis was suitable. Summary scales are not factor weighted averages, however previous analysis indicates they are robust as factors and a weighted summary scale would not differ by any significant amount.

**Statistical significance**

Statistical significance testing suggests how confident we are that different experiences among the survey sample reflect those of the wider taught postgraduate population. In common with most surveys, we cannot be sure that those who chose to respond constitute a random sample even though all postgraduate taught students in participating institutions were eligible to take part. This means that caution should be exercised where a pattern is suggested to be statistically significant because tests do not account for possible non-response bias. Nonetheless, significance testing is a useful way of drawing attention to the dangers of reading too much into small differences, and error bars give a guide to what may be a meaningful as opposed to random difference. Error bars describe the range within which we would be 95% confident that the true figure for that factor lies had a random sample been obtained. Note that even minor differences in experience between student groups and disciplines are statistically significant, simply because of the very large sample size in PTES. Statistical significance should not be assumed to mean that the difference is substantively important.

# Appendix 3 PTES 2014 questionnaire

## Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey – PTES 2014

### Welcome

This survey asks about your experiences of your taught postgraduate course. Your responses will be combined with those of others to help inform your institution about the experience of taught postgraduates. This will help improve future support for the learning of postgraduates like you. The results are also used nationally to help advise policy and help improve learning and teaching of taught postgraduates across the sector.

Many thanks for your participation;

Dr. Paul Bennett (Head of Surveys, Higher Education Academy)
Professor Karen O'Brien (Vice Principal (Education), King's College London; Chair of the PTES Advisory Group)

### Data Protection

All data collected in this survey will be held securely. Results are confidential to your institution, though your institution may choose to share or publish aggregated, anonymous results. All participating institutions have agreed not to identify any individuals when reporting their results internally or externally, and to use their best efforts to ensure that no individuals can be identified by implication. The full PTES dataset will be available to the Higher Education Academy in order to conduct national level analysis, and all results will be reported in an aggregated and anonymised form.

### Notes for completion

If a question does not apply to you, or you cannot offer any opinion on it, then please leave blank or mark "Not applicable". The questionnaire should take **around fifteen minutes** to complete. Please note that it is not possible to return to a page once it has been completed. When you arrive at the **final 'thank you' page**, you will know that your responses have been recorded on our database.

Where "course" is used in the questionnaire, this refers to your whole programme of study at your institution e.g. MA Archaeology, MSc Scientific Measurement, PGCE, Diploma in Democracy.

After each section you will be asked for any further comments on the issues covered, to enable staff to gain a better understanding of what has gone well and what has worked less well. **Please do not identify yourself or other individuals (including staff) in your comments.**

Once you click 'continue' you will be directed to the first section of the survey.

## Section A: Teaching and Learning

1. **Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding teaching and learning on your course?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. Staff are good at explaining things | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. The course is intellectually stimulating | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. The course has enhanced my academic ability | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| e. The learning materials provided on my course are useful | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| f. There is sufficient contact time (face to face and/or virtual/online) between staff and students to support effective learning | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| g. I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

2. **If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section B: Engagement

**3. Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding engagement on your course?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I am encouraged to ask questions or make contributions in taught sessions (face to face and/or online) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. The course has created sufficient opportunities to discuss my work with other students (face to face and/or online) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. My course has challenged me to produce my best work | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. The workload on my course has been manageable | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| e. I have appropriate opportunities to give feedback on my experience | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**4. If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section C: Assessment and Feedback

**5. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding assessment and feedback on your course?** (Feedback includes oral and written feedback given in both formal and informal contexts)

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The criteria used in marking have been made clear in advance | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. Feedback on my work has been prompt | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. Feedback on my work (written or oral) has been useful | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**6. If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section D: Dissertation or Major Project

If you are unsure what Dissertation or Major Project refers to, it could include a long-essay, independent research project, laboratory project, or other major supervised assessment task that forms an important part of your overall course.

7. **Are you currently planning, undertaking, or have completed, a dissertation or major project as part of your course?**
   - ○ Yes (Please answer the questions below)
   - ○ No (Please skip the questions below and click 'continue' at the bottom of the page)

8. **If 'yes', what stage of your dissertation or major project are you currently at?**
   - ○ Planning
   - ○ Currently doing
   - ○ Completed

9. **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding your dissertation / major project?** (If you have not had experience of an item then please select 'Not applicable or Too soon to say')

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable or Too soon to say** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. I understand the required standards for the dissertation / major project | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I am happy with the support I received for planning my dissertation / major project (topic selection, project outline, literature search, etc) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. My supervisor has the skills and subject knowledge to adequately support my dissertation / major project | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. My supervisor provides helpful feedback on my progress | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

10. **If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section E: Organisation and Management

**11. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the organisation and management of your course?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The timetable fits well with my other commitments | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. The course is well organised and is running smoothly | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. I was given appropriate guidance and support when I started my course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| e. I am encouraged to be involved in decisions about how my course is run | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**12. If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section F: Resources and Services

**13. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the learning resources and support services at your institution?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The library resources and services are good enough for my needs (including physical and online) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. I have been able to access general IT resources (including physical and online) when I needed to | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. I have been able to access subject specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software) necessary for my studies | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. I am aware of how to access the support services at my institution (e.g. health, finance, careers, accommodation) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**14. If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section G: Skills Development

**15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the development of skills on your course?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. As a result of the course I am more confident about independent learning | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. My research skills have developed during my course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| e. I have been encouraged to think about what skills I need to develop for my career | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| f. As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**16. If you have any further comments on these issues then please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## Section H: Overview

**17. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement about your overall experience of your course?**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**18. Please comment on one thing that has been most enjoyable or interesting on your course:**

……

**19. Please comment on one thing that would most improve your experience of your course:**

……

**[Space for institutional questions]**

## Motivations

**20. My main motivations for taking this postgraduate course were: *(please select all that apply)***

- ☐ To enable me to progress to a higher level qualification (e.g. PhD)
- ☐ To progress in my current career path (i.e. a professional qualification)
- ☐ To change my current career
- ☐ To improve my employment prospects
- ☐ As a requirement to enter a particular profession
- ☐ To meet the requirements of my current job
- ☐ For personal interest
- ☐ Other *(Please specify)*……..

**21. I am studying for this qualification at this particular institution because of: (*please select all that apply*)**

- ☐ Overall reputation of institution
- ☐ Reputation in chosen subject area / department
- ☐ Reputation of the course tutors
- ☐ It was recommended to me
- ☐ Graduates from this institution have good career and employment prospects
- ☐ I have studied at this institution before
- ☐ Location of institution
- ☐ The content of the course
- ☐ The way the course is structured or assessed
- ☐ My employer advised or encouraged me to do it
- ☐ Delivery of the course is flexible enough to fit around my life
- ☐ Funding was available to study this particular course
- ☐ The cost of the course compared to other institutions
- ☐ It is the only institution offering this course
- ☐ Other *(Please specify)*……..

**22. Would you agree or disagree that the information provided by your institution (including course specific information) to help you choose your course was…**

| | Definitely agree | Mostly agree | Neither agree nor disagree | Mostly disagree | Definitely disagree | **Not applicable** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. easy to find | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| b. useful | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| c. sufficient | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| d. accurate | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

**23. If you have any further comments on the information provided by your institution, please provide them here. Please be as specific as possible:**

## About yourself

To help us understand whether provision at this institution and across the sector is meeting the needs of all postgraduates, we would now like to ask some questions about you and your course. As with the rest of the survey, all reporting will be anonymous and your responses will be treated confidentially.

**24. What is your age?**

- ○ 25 years old or younger
- ○ 26-30 years old
- ○ 31-35 years old
- ○ 36-40 years old
- ○ 41-45 years old
- ○ 46-50 years old
- ○ 51-55 years old
- ○ 56 years old or older
- ○ Prefer not to say

**25. What is your gender?**

- ○ Male
- ○ Female
- ○ Prefer not to say
- ○ Other (Please specify)…….

**26. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?** (for example dyslexia, long-term illness, mental health condition, physical impairment)

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to say

**If yes, please choose one or more from the following options:**

- ☐ Social/communication impairment such as Asperger's syndrome/other autistic spectrum disorder
- ☐ Blind/serious visual impairment uncorrected by glasses
- ☐ Deaf/serious hearing impairment
- ☐ Long standing illness or health condition such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy
- ☐ Mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder
- ☐ Specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia, or AD(H)D
- ☐ Physical impairment or mobility issues, such as difficulty using your arms or using a wheelchair or crutches
- ☐ A disability, impairment or medical condition that is not listed above
- ☐ Prefer not to say

**27. When you started your course, did you consider yourself to be fluent in English?**

- ○ Yes (please skip the question below)
- ○ No (please answer the question below)
- ○ Prefer not to say (please skip the question below)

**If 'No', to what extent do you agree or disagree that you have received appropriate support for your English language needs**

- ○ Definitely agree
- ○ Mostly agree
- ○ Neither agree nor disagree
- ○ Mostly disagree
- ○ Definitely disagree
- ○ Not applicable

**28. For fees purposes, is your normal place of residence registered as:**

- ○ UK (including Isle of Man and Channel Islands)
- ○ Other EU
- ○ Non EU

**29. Where is your normal place of residence?**

[List of countries]

**30. What is your ethnic group? (Please choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background):**

- ○ White / White British..... English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- ○ White / White British..... Irish
- ○ White / White British..... Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- ○ White / White British..... Any other White background
- ○ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups..... White and Black Caribbean
- ○ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups..... White and Black African
- ○ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups..... White and Asian
- ○ Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups..... Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background
- ○ Asian / Asian British..... Indian
- ○ Asian / Asian British..... Pakistani
- ○ Asian / Asian British..... Bangladeshi
- ○ Asian / Asian British..... Chinese
- ○ Asian / Asian British..... Any other Asian background
- ○ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British... African
- ○ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British... Caribbean
- ○ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British... Any other Black / African / Caribbean background
- ○ Other ethnic group..... Arab
- ○ Other ethnic group..... Any other ethnic group
- ○ Prefer not to say

## About your course

*For these questions, please respond in relation to the taught postgraduate course you are currently studying.*

**31. I am registered for the qualification of:**

- ○ MA
- ○ MBA
- ○ MSc
- ○ Other Taught Masters (e.g. LLM, MPhil, MRes)
- ○ Postgraduate Certificate (including PGCE)
- ○ Postgraduate Diploma
- ○ Other *(Please specify)*……..

**32. Please indicate which of the following most closely matches your discipline.**
**Please note** that **a)** if you are undertaking teacher training, you should select 'Teacher Training' rather than the discipline you aim to teach; **b)** if you are studying management or business in relation to a particular discipline then you should select that discipline (e.g. nursing, tourism, computer science):

==========

- ○ Teacher Training (please indicate this if you are undertaking Teacher Training, not the discipline that you teach)
- ○ Education studies (including Research Skills in Education, and Academic Studies in Education)
- ○ Social Work (including Child Care and Community Work)

==========

- ○ Medicine and Dentistry
- ○ Medical Science and Pharmacy (including Anatomy, Neuroscience, Pharmacology, Physiology and Pathology)
- ○ Nursing (including Midwifery)
- ○ Other subjects allied to Medicine (for example: Aural and Oral sciences, Nutrition, Public Health, Medical Technology)

==========

- ○ Biology and related Sciences (including Biochemistry, Ecology, Genetics, and Microbiology)
- ○ Sports Science (including Sport Coaching, Sport Development, Sport Studies)
- ○ Psychology
- ○ Veterinary Sciences (for example: Pre-Clinical and Clinical Veterinary Medicine)
- ○ Agriculture and related subjects (for example: Food & Beverage Studies, Animal Science, Environmental Conservation)

==========

- ○ Physical Science (for example: Physics, Chemistry, Forensic and Archaeological Science, Geology)
- ○ Physical Geography and Environmental Science
- ○ Mathematical Sciences (including Statistics and Operations Research)
- ○ Computer Science
- ○ Mechanically-based Engineering (including Aerospace Engineering, Production & Manufacturing Engineering)
- ○ Electronic and Electrical Engineering
- ○ Civil and Chemical Engineering (and other Engineering not covered above)
- ○ Technology (for example: Biotechnology, Maritime Technology, and Materials Technology)

==========

- ○ Architecture, Building and Planning
- ○ Human and Social Geography
- ○ Sociology, Social Policy and Anthropology
- ○ Politics (including International Studies)
- ○ Law
- ○ Economics

==========

- ○ Business (including Marketing)
- ○ Management (including Human Resource Management)
- ○ Finance and Accounting
- ○ Tourism, Transport, Travel (and others in Business and Administrative studies not covered above)

==========

- ○ Media studies (including Media Production)
- ○ Communications and Information studies (including Publishing and Journalism)
- ○ English-based studies (for example: English Language, English Literature, Scots Literature)
- ○ European Languages and Area studies
- ○ Other Languages and Area studies
- ○ History and Archaeology
- ○ Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies

==========

- ○ Art and Design
- ○ Performing Arts (including Music, Dance, and Drama)
- ○ Other Creative Arts (for example: Cinematics, Photography, Crafts)

==========

- ○ Combined

**33.** *** **Which Department do you belong to?** *** *This is a question for each institution to map their departmental structure.*

**34. What are you currently registered as?**

- ○ Full-time
- ○ Part-time
- ○ Currently not registered (e.g. finished the course) was full-time
- ○ Currently not registered (e.g. finished the course) was part-time

**35. I am:**

- ○ Primarily a face to face learner [e.g., based at my institution]
- ○ Primarily a distance learner [e.g. work based learner, OU student]

## About your education and career

**36. When you started your current course, what was your highest level qualification:**

- ○ Qualifications below undergraduate degree
- ○ Undergraduate degree or equivalent
- ○ Postgraduate degree (e.g. MA)
- ○ No academic qualifications but professional experience
- ○ Other *(Please specify)*……..

**37. Prior to your current PGT course, how long has it been since you completed an academic course (at any level)?**

- ○ Not applicable (please go to question 38)
- ○ Less than one year
- ○ Between one and three years
- ○ Between four and nine years
- ○ Ten years or over

**If you have previously completed an academic course, was the academic institution at which you studied**

- ○ The institution at which you are now studying
- ○ Another UK institution
- ○ An institution in the EU, outside the UK
- ○ An institution outside the EU
- ○ Not applicable

**38. Are you currently in paid employment?**

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

**If yes, how many hours of paid employment do you undertake in a typical week?**

- ○ 1-10 hours
- ○ 11-20 hours
- ○ 21-30 hours
- ○ More than 30 hours

**39. Please indicate all the ways that you have funded your course fees and living costs while studying**
(please leave blank if you have not used a type of funding)

| | Funded course fees | Funded living costs while studying |
|---|---|---|
| Personal income (e.g. from employment) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Bank loan (e.g. personal loan, mortgage, Professional and Career Development Loan) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Other unsecured debt (e.g. credit card, payday lender) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Savings | ☐ | ☐ |
| Family or friends | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Charity | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Research council | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Institution (e.g. bursary, scholarship, waiver) | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Employer | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from UK Government | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Other EU Government | ☐ | ☐ |
| Funding from Non-EU Government | ☐ | ☐ |

## Contact us

**The Higher Education Academy**
**Innovation Way**
**York Science Park**
**Heslington**
**York**
**YO10 5BR**

**+44 (0)1904 717500**
**enquiries@heacademy.ac.uk**

www.heacademy.ac.uk|www.twitter.com/heacademy



The Higher Education Academy (HEA) is the national body for learning and teaching in higher education. We work with universities and other higher education providers to bring about change in learning and teaching. We do this to improve the experience that students have while they are studying, and to support and develop those who teach them. Our activities focus on rewarding and recognising excellence in teaching, bringing together people and resources to research and share best practice, and by helping to influence, shape and implement policy - locally, nationally, and internationally.

The HEA has knowledge, experience and expertise in higher education. Our service and product range is broader than any other competitor.



To request copies of this report in large print or in a different format, please contact the communications office at the Higher Education Academy: 01904 717500 or pressoffice@heacademy.ac.uk

The Higher Education Academy is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946.