Study expectations of different domiciled Postgraduate-Taught students in a UK post-1992-institution

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report the notable findings of students with different domiciled status. There is a lack of research and understanding of how prior study experiences and the expectations of new students that are due to embark on an MSc by coursework level (also known as postgraduate-taught [PGT]) can impact on their study and ability to persist and succeed. The research available has mainly been confined to post-experience surveys. By identifying prior study experiences and study expectations, education providers in higher education institutions can use these insights not only to attract more students but to improve retention rates and the overall student experience. The research undertaken in the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing at a London-based, post-1992 institution aims to provide valuable data and insights into this nationally and internationally neglected area.

Design/methodology/approach – New taught postgraduate students provided data on their previous study experiences, study expectations, opinions of postgraduate-level study and demographic data via a hard copy questionnaire which was distributed and completed during the orientation period in September 2012. It was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), and a range of tests were run on the data.

Findings – The findings in this paper and the project in general will be further explored and investigated as a result of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) awarding a major grant to the post-1992 university to undertake research into these areas amongst nine similar English universities.

Research limitations/implications – As the research was conducted over a one-year period, the findings are based on the limitations that such a time and financially limited project can offer. The institution at which the research was undertaken is a post-1992 institution that has high concentration towards teaching functions. The findings in this paper and the project in general will be further explored and investigated as a result of the HEFCE awarding a major grant to the post-1992 university to undertake research into these areas among nine similar English universities.

Originality/value – The research highlights the similarities and differences in prior study experiences and expectations of studying at PGT level between the UK-, the European Union- (EU) and Non-EU-domiciled respondents. The research offers potentially important findings for similar institutions that are currently looking to develop and expand their PGT provision.

Keywords Expectations, UK, EU, Domiciled status, Non-EU, Postgraduate taught

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Up until 2010, participation in postgraduate-taught (PGT) study in the UK had grown substantially, but little attention had been paid to what constituted a "high-quality

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student experience" at this level of study. At the undergraduate level, understanding students' prior learning experiences and expectations is known to be one of the important factors to consider when developing and delivering effective support for students (Thomas, 2012; Morgan, 2013). This was one of the motivations behind the research undertaken in the London-based post-1992 university and reported in this paper. Since 2011, PGT enrolments in the UK have experienced a dramatic decline as this paper will illustrate. As a result, this makes identifying prior study experiences and future study expectations even more pressing at this level of study, so education providers in higher education institutions (HEIs) can not only use these insights to hopefully reverse the current decline in participation but also attract more students, improve the overall student experience and increase retention rates.

Growth in postgraduate study

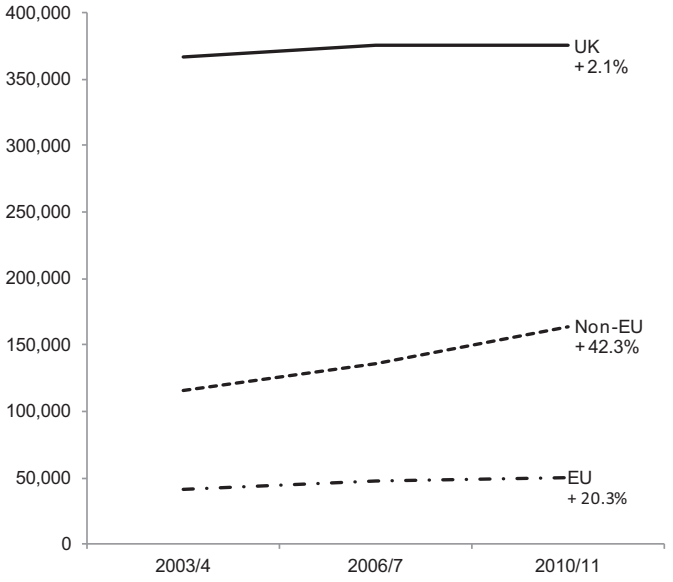
In 2003/2004, the number of students in the UK undertaking PGT qualification totalled 262,693, but, by 2010/2011, this had risen to 345,300 which is an increase of 31.5 per cent (HESA, 2013a, 2013c). The increase in the PGT student body at the post-1992 institution in which the research was undertaken experienced greater growth than that seen at the national level with an increase in enrolments of 57 per cent between 2003/2004 (4,395) and 2010/2011 (6,895) (HESA, 2013a, 2013c).

In 2011/2012, HESA statistics showed that students with "European Union-" (EU) and Non-EU-domiciled status in the UK HEIs made up 176,640 of the 309,425 full-time postgraduate enrolments which equated to 57 per cent (HESA, 2014). This was reflected in the post-1992 institution where 55.5 per cent of all full-time students held EU or Non-EU status (Post-1992 institution, 2012). The HESA statistics also showed that EU and Non-EU participation in part-time PGT study was nominal with only 33,070 of the 259,080 students enrolled on this mode of study (12.8 per cent) (HESA, 2014).This pattern was again reflected in the Post-1992 institution (2012), but the figure for EU participation was higher with 23.9 per cent.

Reasons for the growth

The reasons suggested for the increase in growth at this level of study are numerous. Bekhradnia from the Higher Education Policy Institute in 2005 suggested that not only has the growth in the PG student body been due to the overall expansion in Taught Master's and Taught Doctoral degrees, but it had been the Non-EU market that had helped the expansion (Bekhradnia, 2005). This argument appears to be substantiated when the HESA figures up until 2010/2011 are examined (Figure 1). Between 2003/2004 and 2010/2011, enrolments amongst Non-EU students grew by 42.3 per cent compared to 2.1 per cent for UK-domiciled students and 20.3 per cent for those from the EU.

Evidence suggests that postgraduate study is increasingly being undertaken for career advancement rather than self-fulfilment (Stuart *et al.*, 2008; Park and Kulej, 2009). The UK Government policies and strategies have also been suggested as contributing to the growth as they have specifically been aimed at improving the global market for higher education (Department of Education and Skills, 2003). As well as the potential financial gain for the individual by undertaking PGT study (Machin and Murphy, 2010; Higher Education Commission, 2012), there may have also been a change in the perceived value of the undergraduate degree within the employment market. One possible reason why the postgraduate population has increased in recent years



Source: HESA (2013a, 2013b, 2013c)

Figure 1. Growth in domiciled postgraduate enrolments in UK HEIs 2003/2004 to 2010/2011

according to Wakeling (2005) is that "as the bachelor's degree becomes ubiquitous, its relative advantage in the labour market is diminishing" (cited by Wakeling, 2005, p. 506). The explanations for the increase in the popularity of the full-time mode include the growing number of international students who tend to study full-time; the current harsh economic climate, resulting in people investing in education (Putman, 2001); and less people studying part-time mode due to inflexibility at work or employers unable to contribute to the fees or provide time off for their employees (Higher Education Commission, 2012; Morgan, 2013).

Current status and issues facing the sector

In 2010/2011, postgraduate student enrolment figures in the UK HEIs reached their peak. Since 2011/2012, the total number of enrolments has been on a downward trajectory with an 8.9 per cent decrease across all domiciled groups as highlighted in the last column of Table I. All domiciled groups have experienced a decrease, but the most noticeable decline has been amongst the UK-domiciled category with 10 per cent between 2010/2011 and 2012/2013 (Table I). This national decline was also reflected in this post-1992 institution's PGT enrolment figures.

The PG sector has been and still is an important revenue-earner for the UK, but it is unclear at present whether the national and institutional decrease is a temporary one or a long-term trend. The figures for the past three years give weight to the concern that this downward trajectory is part of a longer-term trend.

UK HEIs are not only competing against one another for a share of the PGT market, but they are facing rivalry from international markets. And in an increasingly consumer-led environment where students have a choice of where to study,

understanding the student experience at the PGT level is highly likely to become critical to an organisation's survival. With a reduction in the UK Government funding and resource constraints, delivering a high-quality student experience has never been more challenging. If HEIs are to successfully continue to recruit students from different domiciled status groups, then the expectations and concerns of each of those groups need to be examined, acknowledged and addressed.

Rationale for the research

Extensive research has been undertaken in the field of the student experience, and learning and teaching at undergraduate level, but there is limited research, albeit growing, in PGT study (Wakeling, 2005; Green, 2005; HEFCE, 2006; Stuart *et al.*, 2008). The Higher Education Commission, in a recent report, went as far as to describe the postgraduate student experience as being the "forgotten part of the sector" (Higher Education Commission, 2012, p. 17). Organisations such as the 1994 Group, the National Union of Students and the Russell Group have called for further research into PGT study. The UK Higher Education Academy (HEA) is at the forefront in investigating PGT and research students' experiences and vastly contributing to the growing body of literature. However, their work primarily focuses on end-point student evaluation. There is a lack of understanding of the drivers, motivators and barriers for all students into PGT study, let alone those from different domiciled groups. Without this knowledge, it is difficult to develop appropriate and effective mechanisms to recruit, support and help them succeed. This makes the need for pre-entry experience and expectation data as urgent as that of post-experience data that is routinely collected. It was due to the paucity of literature that the faculty undertook their own research looking at prior learning experiences and expectations of all their new science, engineering and computing PGT students in an attempt to improve the entry and progression experience of their students. The work was an extension of the research that had taken place over three years in the School of Engineering before the merger of three faculties into the Faculty of Science, Engineering and Computing.

Literature on postgraduate students

Valuable research projects funded by the HEA have looked at various general aspects of PGT study including widening participation to postgraduate study (Stuart *et al.*, 2008) and Master's-level assessment (Brown, 2012, 2013). The most recent HEA-funded research project undertaken by Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson entitled "Transitions to higher degrees across the UK" is the first comprehensive research

Table I. Domiciled status participation of all enrolled postgraduate students in UK HEIs between 2010/2011 and 2012/2013

Domicile group	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	% change between 2010/2011 and 2012/2013 (%)
UK	375,030	358,800	337,575	−10%
EU	49,795	49,465	45,835	−8%
Non-EU	163,890	160,245	153,025	−6.3%
Total	588,715	568,510	536,435	−8.9%

Source: HESA (2013c, 2013d, 2013e)

undertaken that provides an analysis of national, institutional and individual differences in student transitions to PG study in the UK (Wakeling and Hampden-Thompson, 2013). Wakeling, who is a key commentator in the postgraduate student experience field, has also explored the social barriers of engaging and succeeding in postgraduate study, as well as research into widening participation within postgraduate research (Wakeling, 2005, 2009; Wakeling and Kyriacou, 2010).

However, there is very limited literature available that focuses on domiciled status differences. At the undergraduate level, evidence shows that supporting the transition into study in the academic and non-academic spheres, and understanding the study expectations of students can impact on the resilience and success of the student (Thomas, 2012; Morgan, 2013). For example, it is known that language can be a key determinant of educational disadvantage (Thomas and Quinn, 2006), as well as different cultural values (Clarke *et al.*, 1999; Heaney, 2008) and approaches to learning (Brown and Joughin, 2007; Morgan, 2013). Although it is intuitive to suggest that the same could be applicable at the PGT level, there is extremely limited national or international research to draw upon to confirm that this is the case. Those undertaking postgraduate study tend to be mature students, and it is known that these students at the undergraduate level, as with international students, come with a range of expectations, levels of expertise and life stresses and concerns. As a result, although this was a relatively small research project, the findings can usefully contribute to the growing literature and understanding of PGT students' prior learning experiences and expectations. With the recent changes in the UK HE landscape, the questions posed in this research regarding the expectations of students of different domiciled status studying at the PGT level offer important contributions to debate on the future of PGT study in the UK.

Aims and objectives of the research project

The aims and objectives of the post-1992 institution in which the research was undertaken included:

- collecting baseline data on the prior learning experiences and expectations of new PGT students starting their postgraduate-level study within the faculty; and
- identifying any particular issues that could impact on the successful engagement of students (if any) such as domiciled status and determining what interventions or activities could be put in place to assist them.

The respondents participating in the study were all undertaking Masters of Science qualifications that Fall within the UK definition of a Taught Higher degree. That is, it "includes doctorate and master's degrees not studied primarily through research and postgraduate bachelor degrees at level M" (HESA, 2013f).

Methodology

Data were collected via a hard-copy questionnaire to maximise completion rates during the orientation and induction period for new students in September 2012. Students were informed about the purpose of the survey in the general welcome session and were given the opportunity to complete the voluntary and anonymous questionnaire during their school-specific sessions.

The questions in the survey were developed as a result of the findings from the PG surveys, the focus group research and final-year undergraduate intentions surveys

undertaken in the School of Engineering at the University between 2009/2010 and 2011/2012. Previous surveys had highlighted that previous study experiences and study expectations could impact on the student experience and that demographic variables such as domiciled status, gender, route into study (entry immediately from university or work) and age could have an important impact, but, as previous sample sizes had been so small, no substantive conclusions could be drawn. As a result, the questions in the survey explored new students' previous study experiences, study expectations and opinions of postgraduate-level study as well as collecting demographic data.

The questionnaire was designed to collect data to assist staff within the faculty to understand and improve the postgraduate experience, and also act as a personal development activity for new PGT entrants by requiring them to reflect on how they "wanted to" or "expected to" learn at the postgraduate level. To encourage participation in the survey, 50 Amazon vouchers worth £20 each were allocated across the eight schools and randomly allocated to those respondents who had completed the survey.

The questionnaire included closed (e.g. those using a five-point Likert-type scale) and open-ended questions. The questionnaire went before the Faculty's Ethics Committee.

Data analysis

The data collected was entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and chi-square tests were run on the data. Due to the sample size, the results were not weighted to take into account the non-participation bias of the small percentage that did not complete the survey. Although the results reported in this paper are descriptive in nature, it does not detract from the importance of the findings in light of the aims and objectives of the faculty.

The findings

It was essential to gain an understanding of the similarities and differences between the domiciled groups, as well as other key characteristics such as generational status, age and gender and entry route. The notable and some non-significant findings relating to the respondents' domiciled status and other characteristics are reported. Some of the implications arising out of the key findings will be briefly discussed later in the paper. In some of the findings, sample percentages and respondent figures have been provided alongside the domiciled statistics. However, it is important to note that the sample figures do not always equate to the domiciled statistics, as not all respondents divulged their domiciled status.

Sample composition

Across the eight schools, 233 questionnaires were completed. This accounted for approximately 90 per cent of those who attended the main "Welcome and Orientation" programme in September 2012 and for 54 per cent of the September cohort intake.

Of the sample who declared their domiciled status (225), 48 per cent (108) classified themselves as UK-domiciled, 16.9 per cent (38) as EU and 35.1 per cent (79) as Non-EU-domiciled. In terms of generational status of the UK-domiciled respondents, 50.9 per cent (55) classified themselves as first-generation students (first in the family to go to university). For those who were EU- and Non-EU-domiciled, the figures were lower with 40.5 per cent (15) and 46.8 per cent (42), respectively. There was little difference between domiciled status and gender within the second-generation group, but in the UK-domiciled sample, there were noticeably fewer first-generation females than in the

EU and Non-EU sample. Of the first-generation respondents who classified themselves as UK-domiciled, 67.3 per cent (37) were male and 32.7 per cent were (18) female. Of those who were EU-domiciled, 40 per cent (6) were male and 60 per cent (9) were female. For Non-EU respondents, 56.8 per cent (21) were male and 43.2 per cent were (16) female.

Starting university

Entry route into PGT study

Respondents were asked what they had been doing immediately prior to starting their PGT studies. For the sample, of the 233 respondents who answered this question, the most popular entry route was coming *straight from work* into study with 39.5 per cent (92), followed by straight *from university with* 36.5 per cent (85). Those having *taken a year out* accounted for 16.3 per cent (38), with 7.7 per cent (18) classifying themselves as *other*. However, when the entry route is examined by domiciled status, there were some noticeable differences between the groups. Of the 222 respondents who provided their domiciled status, UK and Non-EU respondents' entry route was similar to the sample findings, but for the EU respondents, the most popular route was *straight from university* with 55.3 per cent (Table II).

Reasons for undertaking a postgraduate qualification

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

When the reasons are analysed by available domiciled status data, *improving knowledge of the subject* was slightly more important for Non-EU respondents than for the EU and the UK respondents. For those classified as EU, *providing more career options* was substantially more important than for those who were UK- and Non-EU-domiciled (Table III).

Important factors when choosing a university at which to study a PGT course

Respondents were asked to state what had been important to them when choosing a university at which to undertake a postgraduate taught degree. For the sample, *course content* was the primary reason cited with 70.1 per cent (164). The second reason with 33.5 per cent (73) was the *cost of fees* and the third reason was the *university teaching reputation* with 24.9 per cent (51). The *university's research reputation* was not deemed significant. When the reasons for choosing a university are examined by the domiciled

Entry route	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
University	31.5% (34)	55.3% (21)	35.5% (27)
Work	41.7% (45)	21.1% (8)	48.7% (37)
Year Out	16.7% (18)	10.5% (4)	13.2% (10)
Other	10.2% (11)	13.2% (5)	2.6% (2)
Total	100% (108)	100% (38)	100% (76)

Table II. Entry route by domiciled status

status, some interesting findings arise. Although the reasons cited are the same as for the whole sample, course content is considerably more important to those who declared themselves as having either EU or Non-EU-domiciled status as opposed to those who were UK-domiciled (Table IV).

The *cost of fees* was the second most cited reason by all domiciled groups, but they were considerably more important for the EU respondents with 48.6 per cent (18) compared to those classified as UK with 33 per cent (34) and Non-EU with 29 per cent (20). The third reason cited by respondents was the *teaching reputation of the university*. When *cost of fees* was examined by domiciled status, it was deemed noticeably more important by EU and Non-EU than UK-domiciled students with 31.3 per cent (10), 28.8 per cent (19) and 19.4 per cent (19), respectively.

Funding of postgraduate studies

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

Table III.
Top three reasons for undertaking PGT-level study

Reasons	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
Reason 1			
Improve knowledge of subject	65.4% (70)	*65.8% (25)*	*71.4% (55)*
Reason 2			
Provide more career options	48% (47)	67.7% (21)	58.1% (36)
Reason 3			
Improve chances of getting a graduate job	32.1% (25)	24% (6)	16% (8)
Required for career	26.9% (21)	24% (6)	30% (15)

Table IV.
Primary reason choosing a university at which to study PGT

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

When funding is examined in terms of domiciled status, respondents who declared themselves as either EU- or Non-EU-domiciled were noticeably more likely to receive parental assistance with funding for PGT study than their UK counterparts. For UK-domiciled respondents, it was 33.6 per cent (36); for EU-domiciled, 55.3 per cent (21); and for Non-EU, 48.1 per cent (37).

It could be logical to conclude that those coming straight from *university* were more likely to receive assistance from parents because of possible accrued undergraduate debt, the inability to obtain a loan or to have accrued enough savings to pay for their PGT course. This was reflected in the sample findings. Of the respondents who stated that their parents were helping them fund their studies, 53.7 per cent (51) were coming *straight from university*, 25.3 per cent (24) were coming *straight from work* and 13.7 per cent (13) were coming from a *year out*. However, when the data were examined by those who were receiving parental support by domiciled status and entry route, EU respondents coming *straight from work* and *a year out* were considerably less likely to receive parental support compared to the UK and Non-EU respondents (Table V).

Postgraduate study expectations

Quality of study

Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they *agreed* or *disagreed* with a range statements to determine whether expectations were higher at the PGT than at the undergraduate level (Table VI). In Table VI, the *strongly agreed* and *agreed* responses are combined to provide a more accurate overview of levels of "agreement" for each statement. Of the sample, 90.1 per cent (209) *strongly agreed/agreed* that they *expected a higher quality of delivery* and *service* at the PGT level than at the undergraduate level, and 21.6 per cent (50) *did not know what to expect*. It could be argued that these findings are not surprising.

However, when the statements are examined by available domiciled status, a number of interesting findings arise. Of the UK-domiciled respondents, 86.7 per cent (91) *strongly agreed/agreed* that they *expected to learn in a more independent way* compared to 65.8 per cent (25) of all of EU-domiciled and 68.9 per cent (53) of Non-EU-domiciled respondents. Of the UK domiciled respondents, 74 per cent (77) *strongly agreed/agreed* that they would *not tolerate poor quality L&T* compared to 54.9 per cent (22) of EU-domiciled and 57.4 per cent (43) of Non-EU-domiciled respondents. It appears that UK-domiciled respondents were more likely to *know what to expect at PGT level* as only 15.1 per cent (16) *strongly agreed/agreed* with the statement that they *do not know what to expect* compared to 29 per cent (11) for EU-domiciled and 27.6 per cent (21) of Non-EU-domiciled respondents.

Entry route	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
University	52.8% (19)	71.4% (15)	44.4% (16)
Work	25% (9)	4.8% (1)	38.9% (14)
Year out	16.7% (6)	4.8% (1)	13.9% (5)
Other	5.5%	19% (4)	2.8% (1)
Total	100% (36)	100% (21)	100% (36)

Table V.
In receipt of parental support by domiciled status and entry route

Quality statements	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
My expectations in terms of the quality of delivery and service at the postgraduate level will be higher than at the undergraduate level	91.5% (97)	89.4% (34)	88.3% (68)
Should be treated in a manner that reflects my academic achievement	62.3% (66)	70.2% (26)	64.4% (49)
I expect to learn in a more independent manner	86.7% (91)	65.8% (25)	68.9 (53)
I will be less tolerant of poor-quality learning and teaching at the postgraduate level than at the undergraduate level	74% (77)	54.9% (22)	57.4% (43)
I expect more value for money at the postgraduate level than at the undergraduate level	71.7% (76)	68.4% (26)	72.8% (56)
I expect a more individualised study experience at the postgraduate level	86.7% (91)	86.8% (33)	76.7% (59)
I do not know what to expect when studying at the postgraduate level	15.1% (16)	29% (11)	27.6% (21)

Table VI. Quality of study statements – combined strongly agreed and agreed responses

Anxiety levels entering university as a postgraduate student

Respondents were asked to rate their overall anxiety level in starting PGT study. The anxiety level for the sample was quite high with 70.2 per cent (163) of the respondents stating that they were *anxious or very anxious*. Respondents were then asked to rate how they felt about a number of aspects regarding starting university at PGT-level study (Table VII). In this question, the *not anxious* option was removed and replaced with *slightly anxious* to ascertain more accurately the respondents' level of anxiety.

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

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

Table VII. Anxious and very anxious domiciled responses

Current learning expectations

Awareness of when academic feedback is being given

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of when academic feedback was being provided. Of the sample, 87.4 per cent (198) stated that they felt they were *aware* when feedback was being given. Less than 4 per cent (5) stated that they *did not feel the need* to read feedback. Of the respondents, 96 per cent stated that they *would use to the feedback to help them in other assignments*. Domiciled status did not appear to be a significant factor.

Preferred method of academic feedback and expectation of receiving written feedback

For each academic feedback method used within the faculty, respondents were asked to rate their preference by selecting either *most preferred method*, *an acceptable method* or *least preferred method*. The findings cite the *most acceptable method* provided by the respondents. For the sample and for respondents from all domiciled groups who declared their status, *face to face* was the most popular method followed by *paper* then *email*. *Audio* was the least preferred method (Table VIII). However, for Non-EU respondents, the difference between those preferring *face to face* and *paper* was less distinct than that for the UK and EU respondents. *Email* feedback was cited more as a preferred method by EU and Non-EU respondents than those who were UK-domiciled.

The respondents were asked when they expected to receive feedback after handing in a piece of assessed or non-assessed work. Of the sample, 80.7 per cent (188) stated they expected to get their feedback *within 2 weeks* of handing in their assignment, 18.9 per cent (44) *within 4 weeks* and 0.4 per cent (1) *within 6 weeks*. When examined by domiciled status, fewer UK respondents expected feedback within two weeks, with 75 per cent (81) compared to 84.2 per cent (32) of EU and 86.1 per cent (68) of Non-EU students.

Expected contact hours (face-to-face) with tutors and level of independent study

Respondents were asked to state the level of contact hours they expected to receive and how much independent study they were expected to undertake. In terms of contact hours, 34.2 per cent (27) of Non-EU respondents expected 5-10 hours contact a week compared to 22.2 per cent (24) of UK and 21.1 per cent (8) of EU respondents. UK respondents expected to undertake 21 plus hours of independent study a week with 40.7 per cent (44) compared to 28.9 per cent (11) for EU and 29.1 per cent for non-EU respondents.

Perceived study strengths of respondents

Respondents were asked to rate their skills in terms of *very strong*, *strong*, *weak* or *very weak*. For the sample, the majority of respondents stated that their skills were *strong*.

Method	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
Paper	38% (38)	44.1% (15)	55.3% (42)
Email	35.6% (36)	48.6% (17)	48.6% (36)
Intranet	17.2% (16)	25% (8)	18.1% (13)
Audio	4.2% (4)	–	4.2% (3)
Face to Face	69.9% (72)	74.3% (26)	59.7% (46)

Table VIII. Most preferred academic feedback preference at the PGT-level study

However, when the data are examined by available domiciled status data, few EU and Non-EU respondents appeared to be confident that their literacy and numeracy skills were *very strong* (Table IX). This was also reflected in the *weak* and *very weak* responses by the EU and Non-EU respondents.

Attitudes to postgraduate study

Value of a postgraduate qualification to employers compared to an undergraduate degree and skill enhancement

When respondents were asked whether they thought employers valued a PGT qualification over an undergraduate degree and whether the qualification would enhance their skill base, there were no differences between the three domiciled status groups. Of the sample, 85.3 per cent (198) stated that they thought employers would prefer a PGT qualification over an undergraduate one and 93.5 per cent (216) felt that the qualification would help enhance their skills and knowledge base as well as develop a higher-level skill set which employers were demanding today.

English as first language

Respondents were asked if they considered English to be their first language. When domiciled status of the respondents who classified themselves as UK-domiciled was examined, 40.8 per cent (42) stated that English was *not* their first language. Of the respondents who classified themselves as EU- and Non-EU-domiciled, 10.8 per cent (4) and 37.7 per cent (23), respectively, stated that English *was* their first language. Within the sample, 42 different languages (excluding English) were reported as a first language.

Discussion

The findings above highlight some important issues that merit further discussion. Similarities between domiciled group responses include the reasons provided for undertaking a PGT degree, the factors considered when choosing a university at which to study a PGT course and fee levels. There were differences in the areas of the funding of PGT study, study expectations, anxiety levels and perception in study skill strength and these will now be discussed in more detail.

Funding

There is currently no method of recording the funding methods of PGT students within UK HEIs to help understand the possible funding behaviours and cultural characteristics of students studying at this level. Bank development loans have not

Table IX.
"Very strong" study skill domiciled responses

Responses	UK-domiciled	EU-domiciled	Non-EU-domiciled
Quick assimilation of ideas	15.9% (17)	15.8% (6)	16.7% (13)
Ability to organise my study independently	29.6% (32)	23.7% (9)	21.8% (17)
My study skills	8.5% (9)	7.9% (3)	14.3% (11)
Knowledge of subject studying at University	14.2% (15)	23.7% (9)	11.7% (9)
Literacy skills	26.9% (29)	7.9% (3)	15.4% (12)
Numeracy skills	30.6% (33)	21.1% (8)	19.2% (15)

been readily available for many years in the UK and there is currently little funding for PGT study. This may, in part, explain why a third of UK respondents in the study were receiving parental support to fund their studies, although the figure was noticeably higher for the EU and Non-EU respondents. There is increasing evidence to suggest that the parents are influential in their son or daughter's expectations at undergraduate level in receiving high-quality experience due to their support such as financial aid (e.g. Foskett *et al.*, 2006; Watson, 2007). If parental funding is commonplace across the sector at PGT level, it is worth querying to what extent, if any, there are parental influences on attitudes and expectations of PGT students. Knowledge of funding behaviour is powerful information in enabling institutions to manage student and possibly parental expectations as well as assisting HEIs in developing appropriate recruitment strategies. For example, an institution may offer an EU or Non-EU student who has studied at their institution on another course a reduction on a PGT fees. In the absence of a readily-discernible funding model and a possible national downward trend of PGT enrolments, an institution offering loans to high-quality PGT students to support and sustain levels of PGT recruitment may need to be a future consideration for some.

Study expectations

It is not surprising that the respondents wanted a high-quality learning and teaching experience at PGT level, but it was interesting that EU and Non-EU respondents were noticeably less likely to expect to study in a more independent way, and also less likely to know what to expect at PGT level compared to UK-domiciled respondents. This could be as a result of a different educational culture experience. Non-EU students expected less contact time a week than the UK and the EU students, and the UK respondents substantially expected to undertake more independent study than those who were EU and Non-EU.

It is recognised at the undergraduate level that effectively managing student expectations by providing targeted support, information and advice and supporting the transition into study in the academic and non-academic spheres can impact on the resilience and success of the student (Morgan, 2013; Thomas, 2012). Again, it is worth examining if this is any different for those studying at the PGT level. The sample in this research demonstrates that academic and demographic diversity is observable within the student body. Students may have been away from university study for a while, they may have previously studied in a further education college environment or they may have obtained their PGT place through Accredited Prior Learning. Students who are from other domiciled backgrounds to the one in which they will be studying may have been exposed to very different learning environments. It is highly probable that they will base their future learning experience on their past one. As a result, the academic skill base and expectations of the student body is likely to be diverse with implications for the recruiting HEI. Learning how to study at university is a nuanced skill and students need to be taught how to effectively engage in active learning in the academic and non-academic spheres at each level of study.

Anxiety levels

Every level of study brings different academic requirements and pressures, and students need to be informed about them (Morgan, 2012). Additionally, students today

at either the undergraduate or postgraduate level have competing life demands whether they have to balance their studies with the demands of having children, being carers of parents, needing to undertake paid work or having to commute long distances to the university. For students studying in different countries who are away from family and friends, this can bring added stress and anxiety.

Although anxiety levels were quite high amongst all the respondents, especially in relation to coping with the standard of work, it was noticeable that EU and Non-EU respondents were noticeably more anxious in the non-academic spheres. The UK respondents, unlike those who were EU- and Non-EU-domiciled, are more likely to have social networks such as family and friends nearby. There is compelling evidence demonstrating the relationship between depression and anxiety as a result of "life stress" and achievement in undergraduate students (Andrews and Wilding, 2004; Wong *et al.*, 2006), so it is highly likely that this occurrence could also apply to PGT students. Providing targeted academic and non-academic information and support to students in a timely manner throughout the student journey may not only reduce anxiety levels but also enable students to be proactive in dealing with their own anxiety.

Perceived skill base

The respondents' perception of the different skills they possessed was largely similar amongst the UK, the EU and Non-EU respondents. However, it was not surprising that those who classified themselves as EU and Non-EU felt that their literacy and numerical skills were not as strong as they could be. Students who undertake study at the PGT level in a language that is not their primary one can experience difficulties if there is inadequate support. In this study, 42 different languages other than English were identified as a "first" language. The challenge for an institution is how to support a student body with such diverse language capabilities. As the study illustrated, students may be "home domiciled" but may not speak or write English as their first language. A student studying at the PGT level does not automatically mean that their spoken or written English is strong. Also, a student's perception of their skill base may not necessarily accurately reflect their actual skill base.

Evidence suggests that low skill base levels for those entering higher education at undergraduate level can increase transition difficulties (Richardson, 2003) and student's expectations may be distorted by their previous experience (Bamber and Tett, 2000). This research suggests that similar issues may also arise at the PGT level. Identifying weak areas in a student's skill base and bridging the gap by providing extra support when and where it was needed could be a useful approach.

Implications

Domiciled status is clearly an important characteristic at PGT level and its impact on expectations and attitudes, which could correlate with resilience and retention, requires further exploration. The postgraduate student body, like the undergraduate one, cannot be treated as a single homogenous group; therefore, it merits ongoing research at a programme and faculty level to recognise and understand their multiple perspectives. However, for most HEIs in the current environment, the lack of an effective funding model may prove to be the primary challenge in the recruitment of PGT students.

Conclusion

Although this is a small research project, as the area has not been investigated in any depth nationally or internationally, the findings do contribute to the UK sector and other international markets with different domiciled status students in understanding the expectations of new students at the PGT level across academic and non-academic spheres. This study proposes that the expectations of PGT students from different domiciled backgrounds are complex and require carefully aligned support approaches. Supporting and managing the transition process of different groups of students is critical. The findings reported in this paper will be further explored in greater detail in a major HEFCE-funded project across nine English universities, one Welsh and one Scottish institution.

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