# Bridging the gap between secondary and tertiary education

Findings from the Undergraduate Level 4 Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ)

A case study from a Post 1992 University
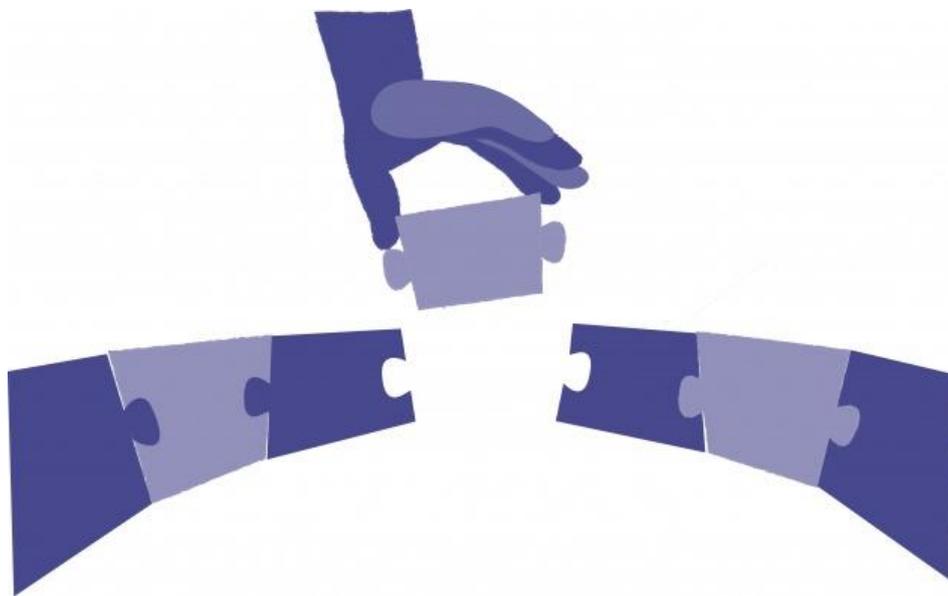
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Foreword

I have been undertaking Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate Taught (PGT) Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaires (PAQ) for many years. Through my transitions research and work, I understood that to improve the learning experience of students in, through and out of the student study journey, we had to understand their prior learning experiences and study expectations for university. The learning jump between school/college and HE can be quite wide especially for students with different entry qualifications and other demographic characteristics.

Student experience surveys such as NSS and PTES, which focus on the completing student, are helpful and can feed into development of initiatives for the next cohort. The HEPI/Advance HE Academic Student Experience Survey is invaluable in helping us understand the experience of students as they progress. The challenge though in such a changing environment is that cohorts can comprise different students' year on year with different skill bases and expectations, and every institution has their own cohort dynamics. If we can get the learning base and other expectations right at the start of a course then hopefully it will not only impact on a student's progression and attainment in, through and out of the study journey, but also impact on national metrics such as NSS, PTES, DHLE and TEF that are pivotal to the success of universities.

I formalised the PGT PAQ at national level when I created, led and managed the Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP) (HEFCE funded £2.7m) which consisted of 11 UK universities. However, prior study experience and expectation surveys undertaken pre-entry at Level 4 are not common and almost non-existent in the UK. The 'arrival' satisfaction surveys commonly undertaken within institutions tend to focus on the practicalities of arrival week and are commonly marketing driven with little focus on academic activities.

When I joined Bournemouth University as Associate Professor and Associate Dean for the Student Experience in the Faculty of Media and Communication, the University was committed to improving the study experience of its students and staff across the institution. With the support of the senior management team and working with colleagues from across the university, student representatives and the Student's Union, a Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire was adapted from my previous work. Having successfully piloted it with new level 4 undergraduate entrants in September 2018 within my faculty, it was rolled out across the institution in September 2019.

This report presents the key findings. It also explains the rationale behind the questionnaire and how it can be a powerful tool for change through correcting misconceptions by staff about new entrants' skill base and demonstrating to students that their prior learning and teaching experience, concerns and challenges are often shared by other students. It importantly highlights the gaps in enabling students to effectively make the transition from their previous learning experience at school or college to university.

This report has been written so readers can easily dip in and out of the different themed sections. Hopefully, as you read through the report, you will also see the complexity of issues and challenges that face students and staff.

In order to obtain a full understanding of the challenges facing us as individual educators and senior managers at both institutional and national level in improving, widening and sustaining undergraduate study, research using the Level 4 PAQ across many more institutions in the UK is required to help inform strategy, policy and pragmatic responses at all levels.

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Dedication

*The right to learn throughout life
is a human right*

Professor Sir David Watson
1949–2015

Figures and tables

Abbreviations and acronyms

Below are the common abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Academic feedback: Comments, advice and guidance given to students for their assessed and non-assessed academic work.

Aggregate sample: Total number of respondents of a survey under analysis. The aggregate sample creates a dataset.

Assessment (assessed and non-assessed work): Assessment refers to the wide variety of methods that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, and skill acquisition of students.

Chi square tests: A test that explores the relationship between categorical variables (e.g. gender, discipline) by comparing the frequencies observed in certain categories to the frequencies expected to get in those categories by chance.

Contact hours/independent study hours: Contact hours are the hours where students have some form of contact with staff in the learning processes. Independent hours are hours where students are expected to study by themselves or with other students outside of the contact hour learning process.

Dataset: A collection of related sets of information that is composed of separate elements and that can be manipulated as a unit by a computer. In this report, the different datasets correspond to different surveys

Domiciled status: The country where a student's permanent residence is when they are not studying. It can assume the following categories: United Kingdom (UK), Other European Country (EU and Overseas (OS).

Ethnicity: The fact or state of belonging to a social group that has a common national or cultural tradition. The questionnaire offered 20 ethnic groups, but for the purpose of analysis the five broad ethnic groups were used: Asian, Black, Mixed, Other, White.

Generational status: A student whose parents (or guardians) have not been to university is described as a first generation student and those that have had one or both parents attend is known as second generation.

Faculty: A division within a university comprising one subject area, or a number of related subject areas. The university at which this study was undertaken comprises four faculties.

Post-1992: Former polytechnics, central institutions or colleges of higher education that were given university status in 1992 through the Further and Higher Education Act 1992.

Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ): The survey that new incoming students into the academic year 2018 and 19 were invited to complete. It contained questions about their previous learning experiences, their PGT expectations and expected outcomes.

Qualitative: Qualitative methods are ways of collecting data that are concerned with describing meaning, rather than with drawing statistical inferences. They provide a more in-depth and rich description than statistical data.

Quantitative: The term quantitative data is used to describe a type of information that can be counted or expressed numerically. This type of data can be manipulated and statistically analysed, and is represented visually in graphs, histograms, tables and charts.

SPSS: SPSS is the acronym of Statistical Package for the Social Science. SPSS is one of the most popular statistical packages that can perform highly complex data manipulation and analysis with simple instructions.

SurveyMonkey: SurveyMonkey is a web-based survey tool that provides free, online and customisable surveys, as well as a suite of paid back-end programs that include data analysis, sample selection, bias elimination, and data representation tools. https://www.surveymonkey.com

Variables: A variable is defined as anything that has a quantity or quality that varies. The dependent variable is the variable a researcher is interested in and an independent variable is a variable believed to affect the dependent variable.

Part 1 Introduction

Rationale for the Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ)

There are three broad aims behind the Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ). Firstly, it is to assist in the evaluation of the prior learning experiences and future study expectations of students on entry to tertiary level study. If we understand these on entry, we are better placed to manage all stakeholders' expectations and provide targeted support in, through and out of the study journey (Morgan, 2013).

Secondly, the PAQ is designed to take entrants through a reflective learning journey to get them to start thinking about their upcoming studies. It also provides a meaningful pre-arrival activity and a parity of initial academic experience for all students across courses.

Thirdly, it is to provide staff across academic and professional support spheres with vital information that will assist them in developing and evolving their provision in order to bridge the perceived and actual skill and knowledge gaps of students. In the development of the PAQ at UG and PGT level over the years, student representatives have been involved in refining and enhancing the structure and order of questions.

After piloting the Level 4 PAQ in the Faculty of Media and Communication in September 2018 and January 2019 at Bournemouth University, the senior management team requested that it be rolled out across the remaining faculties in September 2019 for the new Level 4 intake. Ethical approval was granted. This report highlights the key learning and teaching related findings from the data.

Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised open and closed questions. It collected pertinent biographical data to check the representation of the sample and to provide detailed analysis of the questions asked with different student characteristics such as gender, domiciled status, generational status and entry route to study. It contained seven sections designed to obtain as much information as possible as to their prior experiences of higher education and their undergraduate expectations and aspirations. The sections were as follows:

- Previous study qualifications
- Previous study experience
- Motivations and challenges of undergraduate study
- Undergraduate study expectations
- Current learning expectations
- Attitudes towards undergraduate study
- Biographical details

The sections of the questionnaire were designed to make completion easy and to take respondents systematically through a logical set of questions that would be of benefit to them as well as the faculties. The questionnaire consisted of 51 questions (inclusive of 11 biographical questions) thus providing an extensive amount of information. The survey was executed using Survey Monkey.

Collection of Data

The Faculty of Media and Communication (FMC) undertook the PAQ as a pre-arrival activity. Students were asked to access and complete the questionnaire via the Pre-arrival pages on the University VLE. It was the second year of implementation. Due to implementation time constraints, the three other faculties, who were undertaking it for the first time sent students an email during the arrival period requesting completion. Pre-arrival completion at both UG and PGT level is the preference as it does generate a substantially higher rate of completion.

In this questionnaire, social economic class wasn't included in the survey. However, age, generational status, ethnicity, gender and domiciled status were collected. The questionnaire was anonymous at the point of completion so identification of an individual would not be possible. This approach was adopted to encourage engagement and honest answers by the respondents especially when providing the qualitative comments. Once downloaded and stored securely on a password protected laptop, the data was deleted off Survey Monkey.

Sample Representation

The questionnaire responses totalled 1603. For the purpose of analysis, only completed questionnaires have been used which total 1104. Questionnaire completion rates by respondents by faculty are as follows: Faculty of Management (FM)=70%; Faculty of Health and Social Science (FHSS)=63%; Faculty of Media and Communication (FMC)=89% and Faculty of Science and Technology (FST)=72%. The aggregate sample is largely representative of the University's student body in terms of domiciled status, age and gender. The dataset provides a robust and representative sample of Level 4 entrants

Basic aggregate respondent characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Domiciled status		
UK	1003	90.9%
EU	53	4.8%
OS	48	4.3%
Gender		
Female	655	59.3%
Male	437	39.6%
Non-binary	5	0.5%
Transgender	4	0.4%
Prefer not to say	3	0.3%
Ethnicity		
Asian	63	5.8%
Black	36	3.3%
Mixed	57	5.0%
White	923	83.7%
Other	25	2.2%
Generational status		
First	614	55.6%
Second	430	41.7%
Unsure	30	2.7%
Age group		
Under 18	5	0.5%
18	543	49.2%
19	284	25.7%
20	91	8.2%
21	47	4.3%
22-25	50	4.5%
26-30	38	3.4%
31-40	25	2.3%
41-50	12	1.1%
51-60	9	0.8%

Basic aggregate respondent characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Accommodation		
Staying at home and attending University	213	19.3%
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	91	8.2%
Staying local and moving into private rented accommodation	27	2.4%
Moving into the area and into university accommodation	698	63.2%
Moving to the area and into private rented accommodation	75	6.8%
Living status		
Living by myself	65	5.9%
Living with other students	814	73.7%
Living with friends	23	2.1%
Living with my parents/guardians	130	11.8%
Living with my partner/spouse	37	3.4%
Living with a partner/spouse and children	35	3.2%
Distance travelled from where you will be living to university		
Under 5 miles	617	55.9%
5-10 miles	182	16.5%
11-15 miles	49	4.4%
16-20 miles	19	1.7%
21-25 miles	13	1.2%
26-50 miles	64	5.8%
Over 50 miles	160	14.5%
Entry through clearing		
Yes	64	16.2%
No	925	83.8%
English as a first language		
Yes	964	87.3%
No	140	12.7%
English fluency		
Yes	1089	98.6%
No	15	1.4%

Quantitative and qualitative questionnaire analysis

The majority of the data collected was nominal which consists of items/values/responses assigned to well-defined classes or labels (e.g. gender: female and male). They are presented as a proportion or percentage of the total. Descriptive statistics plus a range of appropriate statistic tests were undertaken (mainly frequencies and Chi Square tests) using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to compare the difference in percentage between groups. The findings report different nominal variables such as mode of study route into study, discipline, generational status, domicile status, age and gender. Due to the small sample sizes, no analysis was undertaken by mode of study and ethnicity. Gender analysis was only undertaken with those who identified as female or male which comprised 99% of the aggregate sample.

Basic analysis and distribution to staff and students

In FMC, the basic frequencies by programme were circulated to Programme Leaders (PLs) within 1 week of the questionnaire closing. Where the programme cohort was below 10, PLs were sent the departmental level results. This was to ensure no identification of a student due to the small sample size. The findings helped inform academic colleagues on how to approach the first 2-3 weeks of teaching and could be used as a discussion piece in personal tutoring/academic advising group and individual meetings. Students received the departmental headline findings via a self-help sheet distributed during the 'Life at Uni 4 weeks in Q&A session' (a timetabled departmental session which students were asked to attend). These were interactive sessions led by the Head of Department and attended by PLs. I informally call this activity 'wobble week' sessions as through my research, I have identified that this is often the phase when students leave the 'honeymoon' period at university and doubt and reality starts to creep in. The findings presented to students are designed so they can view the diverse responses and see that they are not alone in prior learning experiences, expectations and concerns and anxieties. The self-help sheet (distributed via hard copy at the session and PDF via the VLE and email) signposts students to where help and support is available. The faculties of FHSS, FM and FST were sent their datasets along with the frequencies by department (as requested) within 24 hours of the survey closing. They were also sent the self-help sheet template for them to populate with their relevant data and circulate to students and staff as appropriate.

Part 2 Headline learning and teaching findings

The headline findings are provided below. More detail for each area can be found in Part 3.

Highest qualification on entry and year of attainment
For 68.3% of respondents, A-Levels were the highest qualification followed by 18.7% holding BTEC/Level 3 qualifications (inclusive of Diplomas and Access). Across all faculties, the majority of respondents obtained their highest qualification in 2018 or 2019. However, in FHSS 28.7% of attainment was achieved prior to 2017. This is due to the increased age in respondents.

Pre-entry status
In the year immediately prior to starting their undergraduate course, 63% of the respondents reported that they were in *study or training at school/college.*

Reasons for undertaking university study
The top three responses cited were *I was interested in the subject* (91.1%), *I wanted to continue studying* (59.2%), *to improve my employment prospects* (54.0%). There were differences by gender and domiciled status.

Accessing learning materials
For 82.7% of respondents, *handwritten notes* were the most common method of accessing learning materials at school/college followed by a *course handbook* with 79.2%. Only 52.9% accessed *information on a VLE* and 36.9% used *materials in a library*. Type of qualification and age noticeably impact on how learning materials are accessed.

Submission of coursework
For 72.6% of respondents, submission of coursework was *hardcopy with or without a cover sheet*. Only 35.8% had experience of *submitting work via a VLE* before starting university.

Feedback and feedback preference
Respondents understood what feedback meant in relation to their previous studies. For 78.4% of respondents, *written feedback (hard copy)* was the most common form of feedback provided followed by *face to face (individually)* with 75.6%. Feedback preference was 57.9% for *face to face (individually)* and 25.6% for *written feedback (hard copy).*

Reading feedback and approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark
Of the respondents, 88.3% stated that they had approached a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark that accompanied the feedback. For 21.6%, the reason was that they *did not understand the feedback*. There were no differences between domiciled groups or highest entry qualification.

Reading feedback and approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark
Of the 130 respondents who had not approached a teacher/tutor, 36.2% stated that they had *understood the feedback*, 31.5% had been *happy with the feedback* but 18.5% felt *uncomfortable asking for feedback*. Females were noticeably less likely to approach a teacher/tutor than males.

Revising for examinations
Only 31.9% undertook *independent revision for exams at home.* OS respondents were noticeably more likely to undertake *a mix of revision at school and home* compared to UK and EU domiciled respondents.

Overall concerns about starting university study

For 54.4% of respondents*, coping with the level of study* was their primary concern followed by *fitting in with class mates* with 45.2% then *lack of confidence about their ability to study* with 40.9%. There were notable differences by highest qualification, domiciled status and gender. Also, although females and males shared the same concerns, females were generally noticeably more concerned than males.

Confidence levels and anxiety levels

The top three areas where respondents were less confident were with *coping with the standard of work, managing money* and *coping with balancing life demands and study.* When examined by gender, there were differences. Females were noticeably less confident than males about *coping with the standard of work.* Males were noticeably less confident about *looking after their mental health and wellbeing.* There were noticeable differences in anxiety levels between females and males, and by domiciled status.

Study time

Respondents expressed diverse expectations regarding contact time and independent study hours by faculty and domiciled status.

Assessment preference

Of the respondents, 34.8% preferred *individual assessment* and 42.1% a *mix of exams and assessed coursework*. *Assessment by examination* was not a popular form of assessment and only preferred by 2.5% of aggregate sample.

Most useful types of feedback

Respondents stated that *academic feedback telling them what they did not do well* was the most important type of feedback. *Academic feedback telling them what they did correctly* was not considered important neither was *receiving feedback that encourages and raises their confidence*.

Perceived study strengths and weakness

The majority of responses fall into the *strong* or *adequate* categories for study strengths and weaknesses. Females and males throughout the scale have similar perceptions about capability for *study skills* and *literacy skills,* but males perceive their strength to be *very strong* or *strong* in three of the six study areas compared to females. The only study area where females perceived their strength to be greater than males was in the ability to *organise my study independently*.

Expected use of university support services

The top five university support services respondents thought they might use in order were *academic support* (49%) followed by *careers and employment* (47%), *sports facilities* (46.4%)*, health and wellbeing* (43.7%) then *financial advice* (28.5%). There were notable differences by domiciled status and highest qualification.

Accommodation

The majority of respondents are moving to the area and into university accommodation. However, just under a fifth of all UK domiciled respondents intended staying at home, and around one fifth of EU and OS respondents were moving to the area and going into private accommodation.

Distance travelled to university

Just over half of the respondents live under 5 miles away from the university. As the distance increases so does the number of older respondents. However, there were a substantial number of respondents in each age group who were travelling in excess of 50 miles to get to university.

Part 3 All learning and teaching findings

The findings reported below are the aggregate responses, and where there are noticeable differences between faculties and student characteristics, these are also reported. The analysis by highest qualification focuses on the dominant entry qualifications of the aggregate sample which are A-Level and BTEC/Level 3 Diploma. For the purpose of analysis, BTEC, Level 3 Diplomas and Access highest qualifications have been combined for all analysis that follows the 'previous study qualifications' section. It is shown as BTEC/Lev 3 thereafter. Notable statistical findings are highlighted in red.

Section 1   Previous study qualifications

All qualifications
Respondents were asked to select all the qualifications they had achieved prior to starting their undergraduate level 4 course (see Figure 1). A-Levels followed by BTEC/Level 3 qualifications then AS-levels are the most common qualifications held on entry across the aggregate sample. The 'Other' category contained primary international qualifications not listed.

Figure 1   All qualifications held prior to entry
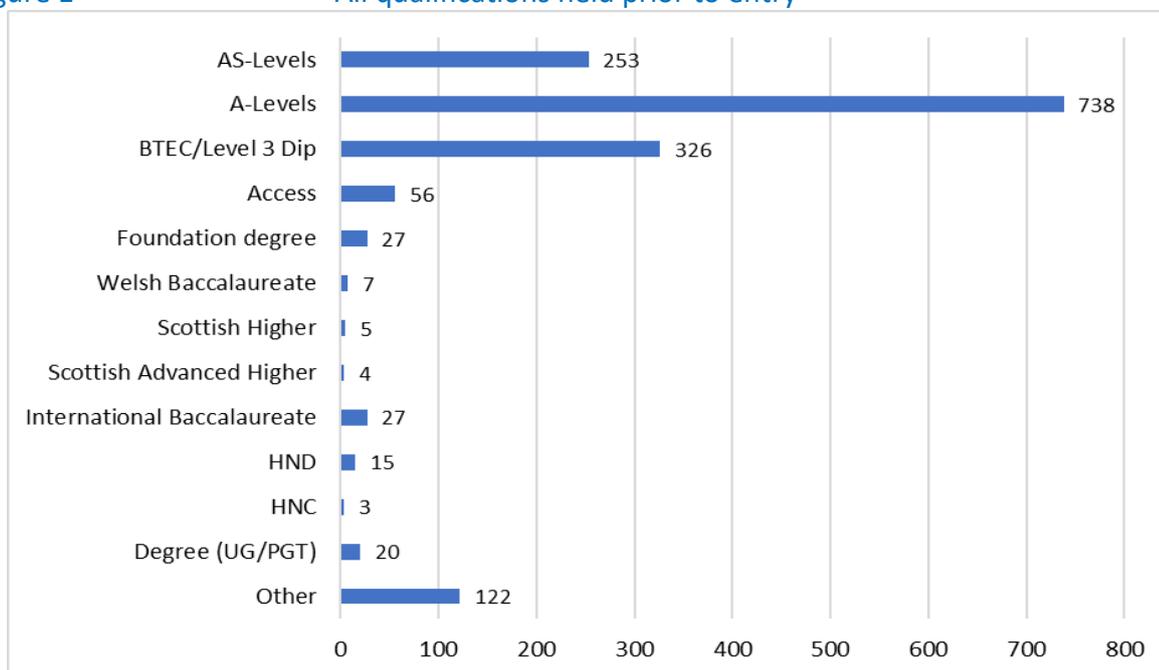
Highest entry qualification
Respondents were asked to select which was their highest qualification. Of the aggregate sample, A-Levels are cited the most frequently as the highest qualification on entry (58.0%) followed by BTEC/Lev 3 (18.6%) (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Highest qualification held prior to entry
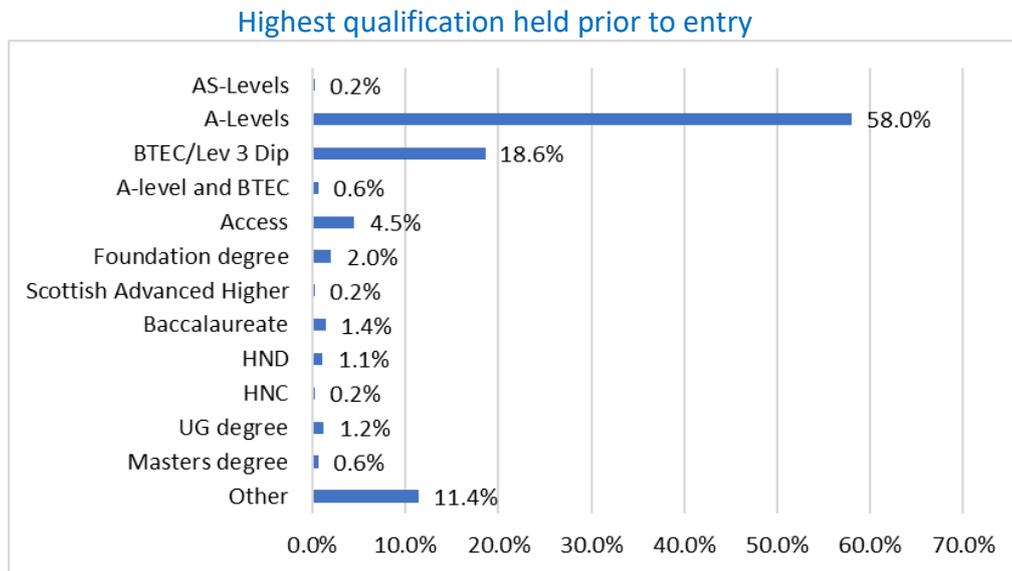
Within in each faculty, respondents whose highest qualification are A-Levels account for 62.9% in FMC, 60.5% in FM, 56.9% in FST but only 38.1% in FHSS (see Figure 3). BTEC/Lev 3 qualifications are similar across all faculties with 19% in FMC, 18.2% in FM, 20.2% in FST and 16.3% in FHSS. The most noticeable difference between the faculties is with Access qualification with 1.4% in FMC, 0.7% in FM, 4.0% in FST but 23.1% in FHSS. A-Levels, BTEC/Lev 3 and Access qualifications were almost entirely undertaken by UK domiciled respondents. Of those respondents who stated they held a 'degree' on entry, all those with a UG degree were over 22 years of age and those with a PGT degree were over 26 years of age.

Figure 3

Highest qualification by faculty
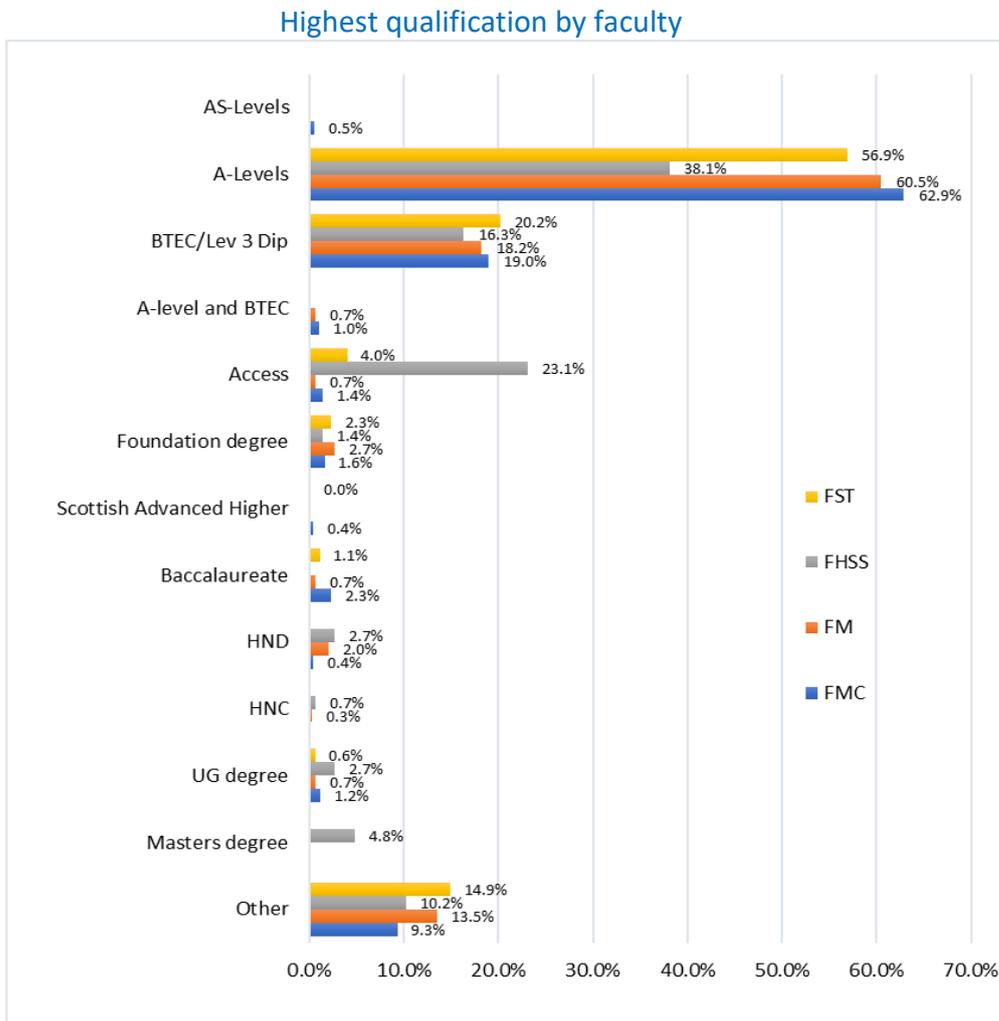
Year of attainment

Across all faculties, the majority of respondents obtained their highest qualification in 2018 or 2019. However, in FHSS 28.7% of attainment was achieved prior to 2017 and this reflects the older student population within the faculty. In terms of 'where' the highest qualification was studied and achieved, it was the UK for 96% of FHSS respondents, 90.5% for FMC, 91% for FST and 86.8% for FM respondents. These figures reflect the UK domiciled composition within each faculty.

Pre-entry status in year immediately prior to study

Respondents were asked to describe their pre-entry status the year immediately prior to starting their undergraduate course. Of the aggregate sample, 63% stated that they were in *study or training* immediately prior to starting their undergraduate study (see Table 1). Respondents in FHSS were substantially more likely to be *studying and working* or in *fulltime paid work* compared to the respondents in the other faculties.

Table 1   Pre-entry status by faculty

Faculty	Study or training (school/college	Studying and working	In FT work	In PT work	In voluntary or unpaid work	Unemployed	Looking after the family	Total
FMC	71.1% 345	5.8% 28	9.9% 48	9.1% 44	0.8% 4	2.9% 14	0.4% 2	100% 485
FHSS	39.5% 58	17.0% 25	26.5% 39	8.2% 12	0.7% 1	2.7% 4	5.4% 8	100% 147
FST	63.8% 111	8.6% 15	14.9% 26	8.0% 14	1.1% 2	2.9% 9	0.6% 1	100% 174
FM	60.7% 181	12.8% 38	13.8% 41	9.1% 27	0.7% 2	2.7% 8	0.3% 1	100% 298

Reasons for undertaking university study

When the respondents were asked to select all their reasons for undertaking undergraduate study, the top five responses were *I was interested in the subject* (91.1%), *I wanted to continue studying* (59.2%), *to improve my employment prospects* (54.0%), *I was encouraged by a former teacher/tutor* (19.0%) and *to prove I was capable of university study* (17.7%). There were no notable differences between A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 highest qualification groups. With gender, more males (24.1%) stated that they had undertaken undergraduate study to prove that they were *capable of university study* compared to females (13.1%) and more females (63.0%) stated that they *wanted to continue studying* than males (53.5%).

Section 2   Prior learning experience

Accessing learning materials at school/college

Respondents were asked to select all the ways in which they had accessed learning materials in their previous study at school or college. For the majority of respondents, *handwritten notes* and a *course text book* were the most common method of accessing learning materials. Of the aggregate sample, only 36.9% had accessed *books/materials in the school/college library*, 52.9% on a *school/college VLE* and 55.8% via other *electronic sources outside a VLE* (see Table 2).

Table 2   Accessing learning materials at school/college

Type of material	Frequency	Percentage
Handwritten notes from classes	913	82.7%
A course text book	874	79.2%
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	616	55.8%
Handout of book chapters and information	612	55.4%
Information on the school/college VLE	584	52.9%
Books/materials in the school/college library	407	36.9%

When respondents were asked which learning material they considered to be their main source, it was the *course text handbook* (see Figure 4).

Figure 4   Main source of learning material
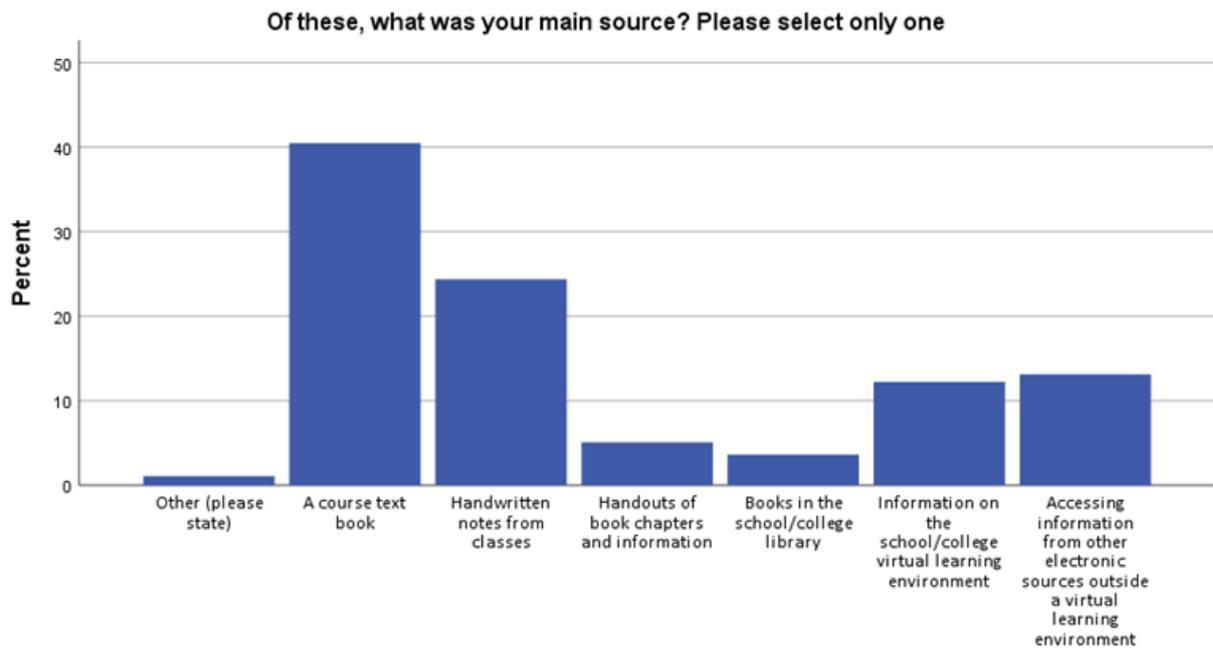
As the age category increases so does the use of libraries (see Table 3). Use of VLE or E-sources is similar across the across the ages. However, only around half of the respondents accessed information via these methods.

Table 3 Age and accessing learning materials

Type of material	18yr n=543	19yr n=284	20yr n=91	21yr n=47	22-25yr n=50	26-30yr n=38	31-40yr n=25
Handwritten notes from classes	86.2%	83.5%	79.1%	78.7%	70.0%	73.7%	56.0%
A course text book	84.2%	77.1%	74.7%	68.0%	74.0%	55.3%	64.0%
Accessing information from E-sources outside a VLE	57.8%	55.6%	59.3%	57.4%	44.0%	50.0%	40.0%
Handout of book chapters and information	56.9%	56.7%	45.0%	48.9%	56.0%	50.0%	48.0%
Information on the school/college VLE	50.5%	58.1%	57.1%	57.4%	52.0%	39.5%	52.0%
Books in the school college/library	30.6%	33.5%	42.8%	46.8%	58.0%	60.5%	68.0%

When examined by age and faculty, FHSS has a substantially higher number of respondents who have used a library compared to the other faculties (see Figure 5). This could be part explained by FHSS having a larger number of respondents who have undertaken an Access qualification at a college. Generally, a similar pattern of accessing learning materials is found across the faculties. However, respondents in FMC and FM reported a greater use of accessing *information on the school/college VLE* than those in FST and FHSS.

Figure 5 Access of learning materials by faculty
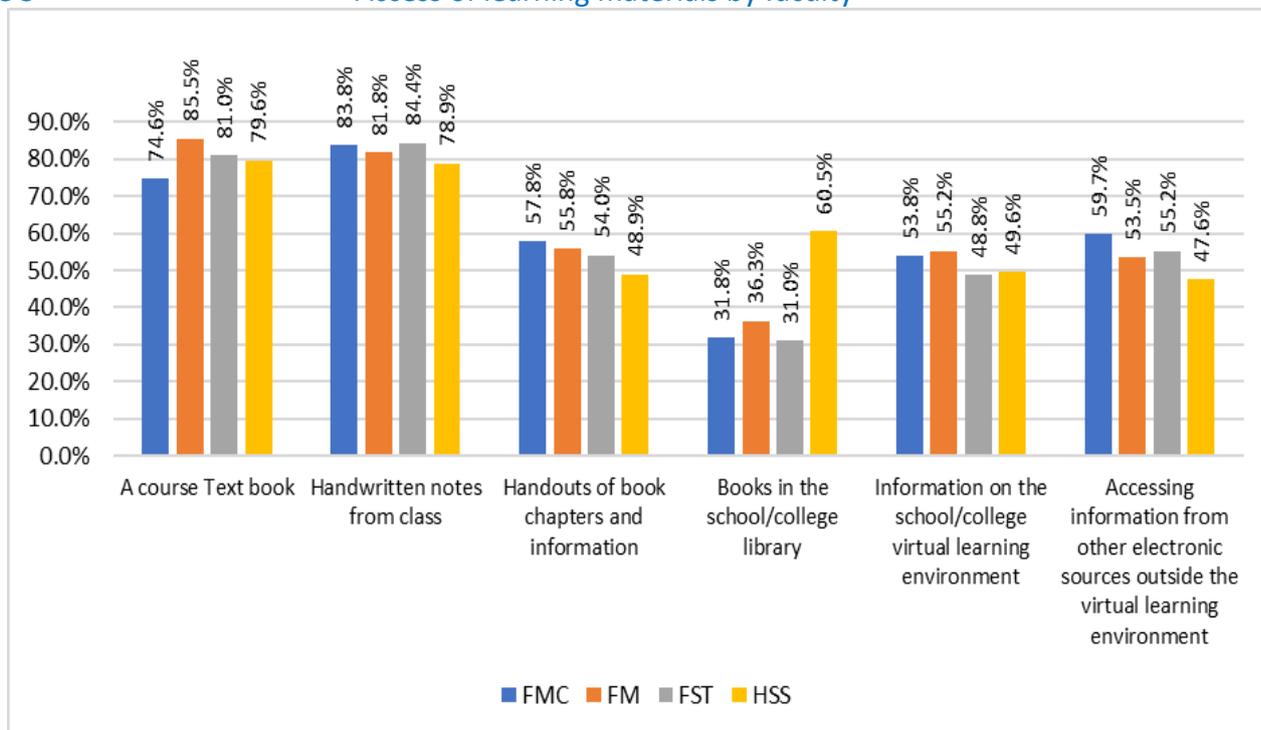
When access of learning materials is analysed by the highest qualification, there are notable differences (see Table 4). For A-Level respondents, the most common methods in accessing learning materials are via *handwritten notes in class* and a *course text book*. For BTEC/Lev 3 respondents, it is more diverse. *Handwritten notes* and *using information on the school/college VLE* are the top two sources. BTEC/Lev 3 are commonly taught in college and not schools, and generally have a VLE although it may not be as sophisticated as those used in HE. For both qualification groups, using *books in the school/college library* only account for just over one third of the respondents.

Table 4 Access to learning materials by qualification -all sources

Type of material	A Level n=640	BTEC/Level 3 n=206
Handwritten notes from classes	89.8%	68.7%
A course text book	91.3%	52.9%
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	57.7%	54.4%
Handout of book chapters and information	63.4%	38.2%
Information on the school/college VLE	49.2%	64.5%
Books in the school/college library	35.3%	38.6%

When respondents were asked to select a main source, there were no notable differences between domiciled respondents but there were between the A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 qualification groups (see Table 5). For A-Level respondents, the two main sources were a *course text book* followed by *handouts of book chapters and information*. For BTEC/Lev 3 respondents, it was more diverse.

Table 5   Main source of learning material

Type of material	A Level n=640	BTEC/Level 3 n=206
Handwritten notes from classes	26.7%	17.4%
A course text book	51.2%	23.9%
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	8.1%	23.9%
Handout of book chapters and information	47.7%	3.9%
Information on the school/college VLE	8.0%	20.8%
Books in the school/college library	0.8%	8.1%

Submission of coursework at school/college

Respondents were asked to select all the methods by which they submitted their coursework. For 72.6% of the aggregate sample, it was primarily done by *hard copy with or without a coversheet*. *Submission via email* was 34.5% and using an *online system/VLE* accounted for 35.8% (see Figure 6). Of the 3.4% who said 'Other', responses included pen drive, google docs and some other form of VLE. When examined by highest qualification response, of the 35.8% who did *submit via a VLE*, BTEC/Lev 3 accounted for 57% of responses compared for 23% of A-Level respondents.

Figure 6   Method of submission
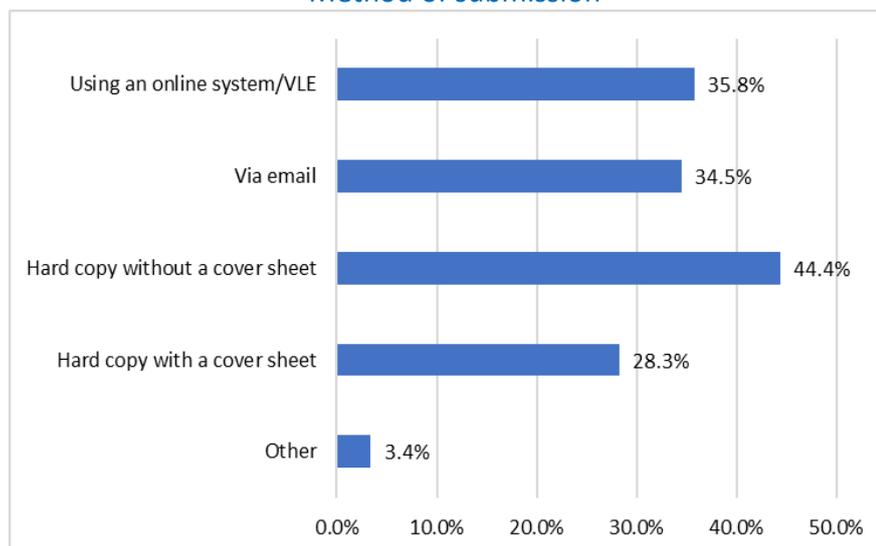
Understanding what is meant by feedback

When respondents were asked what the term 'feedback' meant to them in relation to their prior studies, the qualitative comments provided demonstrated that there was a general understanding that it was to raise their awareness of strengths and areas for improvement, and identify actions to be taken to improve performance.

Feedback method and feedback preference at school/college

Respondents were asked to select the methods for how they typically received feedback (for either non-assessed or assessed work). The top two responses for how feedback was commonly given were *written feedback (hard copy)* (78.4%) followed by *face to face (individually)* (75.6%). The small number of responses provided in the *'Other'* category was written feedback via blogs or the VLE. When asked to select one method as their preference for receiving feedback, *face to face (individually) with the tutor* (57.9%) was the top preference followed by *written feedback (hard copy)* (25.6%)*.* The same findings were found when analysed by each individual faculty.

Table 6   Feedback method and preference

Feedback method	Provided	Preference
Written feedback (hard copy)	78.4% 865	25.6% 283
Written feedback via email	35.3% 390	11.1% 123
Audio (verbally recorded)	3.9% 43	0.7% 7
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor (Individually)	75.6% 835	57.9% 639
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor (as a group)	34.2% 378	2.4% 27
Other	5.7% 63	2.2% 24

When analysed by domiciled status, methods of feedback were similar. However, when it came to preference, there were some small differences (see Table 7). All domiciled groups prefer *face to face with the teacher/tutor (individually)* as the primary method. However, OS domiciled respondents were less likely to prefer *written feedback (hard copy)* compared to UK and EU respondents, and more likely to prefer *written feedback via email*.

Table 7   Feedback preference by domiciled status

Feedback method	UK n=1003	EU n=53	OS n=48
Written feedback (hard copy)	26.1% 262	26.0% 14	14.6% 7
Written feedback via email	11.2% 112	7.5% 4	14.6% 7
Audio (verbally recorded)	0.8% 8	0	0
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor (Individually)	57.5% 577	60.4% 32	62.5% 30
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor (as a group)	2.3% 23	1.9% 1	6.3% 3

Using feedback to help in future assignments at school/college

When respondents were asked if they had used the feedback to help with future assignments, 99% of the aggregate sample stated that they had. When the qualitive comments were examined, similar statements to those expressed below were provided.

> *I felt as though feedback was a crucial part of developing my skills, whether written, oral or cognitive. Examples such as, using a different format for a presentation, or something as simple as using a different sentence structure. Feedback would not only support content knowledge, but practical application, and could be repeated as a learned habit or skill over and over. I could learn from my 'mistakes' or gain something I wouldn't be aware of otherwise. It also strengthened the tutor-student relationship, as learning partners.*

> *I think it is easier to understand your own weaknesses when they are pointed out, and it helped me to know how I needed to improve in my studies, as I would have found it harder to acknowledge my weaknesses and what I needed to do to improve them by myself.*

> *Feedback is necessary for improvement within a subject and it is a very useful tool for learning. Negative feedback also provided motivation to take a teacher's advice and incorporate it into my next piece of work in order to improve.*

Of the 11 respondents who stated that they had not read the feedback, explanations included not being engaged, feedback was generally given face to face rather than in writing, and it was not relevant.

> *Because I wasn't a very productive student.*

> *Because it was sometimes on small tasks that I found not beneficial to my final grade for the subject or I didn't perceive as relevant to any of the topics/ information needed for my course.*

> *I received positive feedback but was not given anything information to improve my work.*

> *One of my teachers gave pointless feedback that never helped.*

Reading feedback and approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark at school/college

When the respondents were asked if they had approached a teacher to discuss a mark that accompanied the feedback, 88.3% of the aggregate sample stated that they had. When asked for the reason, 71.5% stated that they wanted *more feedback on how to improve the mark* followed by 21.6% that *they did not understand the feedback* (see Figure 7). The comments in the 'Other' category included that there seemed to be a discrepancy between the feedback and the mark, so clarification was sought. There were no differences by domiciled group, gender or highest main entry qualifications.

Figure 7   Reasons for approaching a teacher/tutor
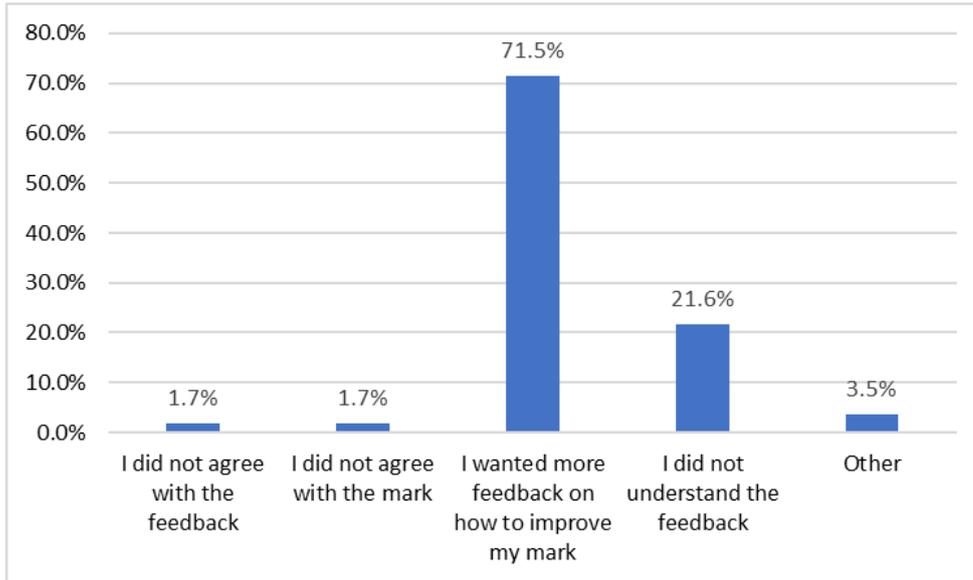
Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor

Of the 130 respondents who stated that they *did not approach a teacher/tutor*, the top two reasons given were *I understood the written feedback* (36.2%) followed by *I got the grade I expected/I was happy with my grade* (31.5%). However, 18.5% stated that they had not approached a teacher/tutor as they *felt uncomfortable asking for feedback*. When this was analysed by age, respondents 18-21 years old and those over 41 years of age were the age groups who felt most uncomfortable. Of the respondents who identified as a female, 20% stated that they did not feel comfortable approaching a teacher/tutor compared to 12.5% of those that identified as males. There were no domiciled differences but there were between the two main highest entry qualifications (see Figure 8). Only a slightly higher number of A-Level respondents felt uncomfortable compared to BTEC/Lev 3, but a noticeably higher number stated that they had *never thought of asking for feedback.*

Figure 8   A Level and BTEC/Lev 3 reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor
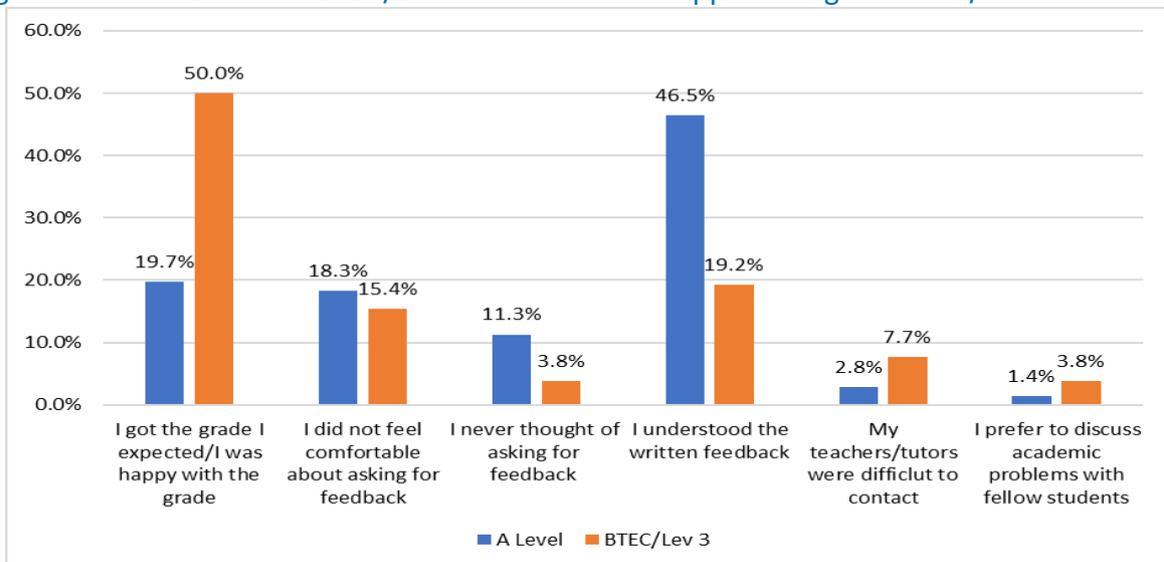
Revising for examinations

Of the aggregate sample, 31.9% undertook *mainly independent revision for exams at home* and 50.9% undertook a *mixture* of revision styles. As Table 8 highlights, there was little difference in revision style between the aggregate sample, A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondents.

Table 8   Revision method by highest entry qualification

Revision method	Aggregate n=1104	A Level n=640	BTEC/Lev 3 n=206
Mainly revision in classes at school/college	6.4% 71	5.2% 33	6.9% 18
Mainly independent study at home	31.9% 352	30.8% 197	32.0% 83
Mainly independent study at school/college	10.8% 119	12.7% 81	9.3% 24
A mix of the above	50.9% 562	51.4% 329	51.7% 134

However, there was a slight difference between domiciled groups with a higher proportion of OS domiciled respondents undertaking *a mix of revision* methods, EU domiciled respondents were more likely to undertake *independent study at home* and UK domiciled respondents more likely to undertake *independent study at school/college* (see Table 9).

Table 9   Revision method by domiciled status

Revision method	UK domiciled n=1003	EU domiciled n=53	OS domiciled n=48
Mainly revision in classes at school/college	6.0% 60	7.5% 4	14.6% 7
Mainly independent study at home	31.9% 320	45.3% 24	16.7% 8
Mainly independent study at school/college	11.3% 113	7.5% 4	4.2% 2
A mix of the above	50.8% 510	39.6% 21	64.6% 31

Section 3   Starting Level 4 study at university

Concerns about starting the course at university

There were 22 options relating to 'concerns about starting university study'. Respondents were asked to select any that applied to them. The top eight concerns from the aggregate sample are listed in Table 10. Two of the top three concerns related to study capability. *Concern about getting into debt* was cited by just over a quarter of all respondents.

Table 10   Overall concerns

Concern	Aggregate
Coping with the level of study	54.4% 601
Fitting in with new class mates	45.2% 499
Lack of confidence about ability to study	40.9% 452
Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	39.3% 434
Lack of information about how to study at university	36.1% 398
Getting on with fellow students	33.2% 366
Concerns about getting into debt	28.4% 314
Sufficient funding	23.6% 261

When examined by highest entry qualification, there were similarities and differences between A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondents (see Table 11). A much higher percentage of A-Level respondents (44.8%) reported concern about *getting used to moving away from home for the first time.* However, this is likely due to a higher percentage of BTEC/Lev 3 respondents staying at home whilst attending the university (30.5%) compared to A Level respondents (13.1%). A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondents were equally concerned about getting into debt and having sufficient funding.

Table 11   A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 concerns

A level top 8 concerns	n=641	BTEC/Lev 3 top 8 concerns	n=259
Coping with the level of study	57.0% 365	Coping with the level of study	53.7% 139
Fitting in with new class mates	47.7% 305	Fitting in with new class mates	42.9% 111
Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	44.8% 287	Lack of confidence about ability to study	39.0% 101
Lack of confidence about ability to study	40.8% 261	Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	32.8% 85
Lack of information about how to study at university	38.8% 248	Getting on with fellow students	30.5% 79
Getting on with fellow students	34.1% 218	Lack of information about how to study at university	27.4% 71
Concerns about getting into debt	30.8% 197	Concerns about getting into debt	25.1% 65
Sufficient funding	22.5% 144	Sufficient funding	25.1% 65

There were no generational status differences neither were there between the respondents who had come through clearing and those that had not. The order of concerns was the same as mentioned above. However, when the top concerns are examined by domiciled status, there are some notable differences between domiciled groups (see Table 12). Concern about *debt* and *sufficient funding* was a UK domiciled concern. *Getting used to living in a new country* was a major concern for EU and OS respondents. *High family expectations* was a concern for EU and OS domiciled students. *Fitting in with new class mates* was a concern for all domiciled groups.

Table 12   Concerns by domiciled status

Top UK domiciled concerns	n=1003	Top EU domiciled concerns	n=53	Top OS domiciled concerns	n=48
Coping with the level of study	56.2% 564	Getting used to living in a new country	56.6% 30	Lack of confidence about ability to study	54.0% 21
Fitting in with new class mates	44.8% 449	Fitting in with new class mates	51.0% 27	Getting used to living in a new country	48.0% 23
Lack of confidence about ability to study	40.9% 410	Lack of information about how to study at university	51.0% 27	Fitting in with new class mates	48.0% 23
Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	40.1% 402	Lack of confidence about ability to study	39.6% 21	Lack of information about how to study at university	41.6% 20
Lack of information about how to study at university	34.9% 351	Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	37.7% 20	Coping with the level of study	35.4% 17
Concerns about getting into debt	29.3% 294	Coping with the level of study	37.7% 20	Getting used to moving away from home for the first time	25.0% 12
Sufficient funding	24.0% 241	Getting on with fellow students	32.0% 17	High expectations from family and friends	23.0% 11
Concerns about committing time to study	15.6% 157	High expectations from family and friends	22.6% 12	Unsure if the course is right for me	16.6% 8

When examined by gender, many of the concerns were similar in terms of order. However, there were a few differences in terms of level of concern (see Table 13) . Male respondents were noticeably less concerned about *coping with the level of study* and *fitting in with new class mates* compared to females. Females were notably more concerned than males about their *ability to study*.

Table 13   Concerns by gender

Concern	Male n=437	Female n=655
Coping with the level of study	47.4% 207	58.8% 385
Fitting in with new class mates	37.5% 164	49.7% 326
Lack of confidence about ability to study	34.3% 150	44.8% 294
Lack of information about how to study at university	32.0% 140	39.1% 256
Getting on with fellow students	27.0% 118	36.6% 240

When examined by faculty, a similar pattern of responses occurred with females expressing greater concern than males. This is particularly noticeable in FST (see Table 14).

Table 14   Concerns by faculty and gender

	FMC		FM		FHSS		FST	
	F n=276	**M** n=194	**F** n=147	**M** n=150	**F** n=130	**M** n=17	**F** n=100	**M** n=69
Coping with the level of study	56.9% 157	48.5% 94	53.7% 79	46.6% 70	59.2% 77	52.9% 9	75.0% 75	49.3% 34
Fitting in with new class mates	53.9% 149	44.3% 86	47.6% 70	32.6% 49	29.2% 38	23.5% 4	70.0% 70	36.2% 25
Lack of confidence about ability to study	48.5% 134	35.6% 69	38.12% 56	30.0% 45	40.8% 53	41.2% 7	53.0% 53	42.0% 29
Lack of information about how to study at university	39.1% 108	29.9% 58	34.7% 51	36.6% 55	37.7% 49	11.8% 2	50.0% 50	36.2% 25
Getting on with fellow students	42.4% 117	30.9% 60	30.6% 45	20.6% 31	22.3% 29	17.6% 3	49.0% 49	34.8% 24

Anxiety levels relating to their concerns

Respondents were asked to rate their level of anxiety. The questionnaire was designed so that each respondent only saw the specific concerns they had ticked in the previous question. The option of 'unsure' was not included in this question as the aim was to get respondents thinking carefully about how they felt. For reporting purposes, the findings below show the anxiety levels for the top 10 concerns that had the most respondents (see Table 15). However, it must be noted when looking at anxiety levels that although some concerns had a small number of respondents (e.g. affordable childcare), their level of anxiety for that concern is important to acknowledge. The number of respondents reporting high levels of anxiety is quite notable.

Table 15   Levels of anxiety by concern

Concern	Very anxious	Anxious	Not very anxious	Not anxious at all	Total
Coping with the level of study	19.1%	59.6%	21.0%	0.3%	601
Fitting in with my new class	30.1%	44.7%	24.4%	0.8%	499
Lack of confidence about my ability to study	26.1%	52.2%	21.0%	0.7%	452
Getting used to moving away for the first time	21.0%	50.0%	27.0%	2.1%	434
Lack of information about how to study at uni	9.8%	56.8%	31.7%	1.8%	398
Getting on with fellow students	31.1%	45.6%	21.3%	1.9%	366
Concerns about getting into debt	19.7%	50.0%	29.3%	1.0%	314
Sufficient funding	29.5%	50.2%	19.5%	0.8%	261
Difficulties fitting study around PT work	9.7%	41.1%	45.7%	3.4%	175
Concerns about committing time for study	19.1%	53.2%	24.9%	2.9%	173

Confidence levels on starting university

Respondents were asked to think about how they felt about different aspects of starting their undergraduate course (see Table 16). The top three areas where respondents were less confident were with *coping with the standard of work, managing money* and *coping with balancing life demands and study.* When examined by domiciled status, confidence levels were similar apart from *coping with balancing life demands and study.* Of the OS respondents, 75% were 'very confident' or 'confident' compared to UK and EU respondents where it was 60.3% and 64.1% respectively.

Table 16	Confidence levels				
	Very confident	Confident	**Not confident**	**Not confident at all**	Unsure
Coping with the standard of work	5.0% 55	58.0% 640	21.6% 238	2.7% 30	12.8% 141
Getting involved in university life	13.8% 152	62.2% 687	17.4% 92	2.2% 24	4.4% 49
Making friends	13.3% 147	58.7% 648	18.6% 205	3.6% 40	5.8% 64
Managing money	11.1% 122	55.9% 617	21.4% 236	3.7% 41	8.0% 88
Looking for suitable accommodation (note half the sample completed after enrolment)	37.2% 411	51.0% 563	5.4% 60	0.5% 5	5.9% 65
Looking after my health and welfare	21.2% 234	60.0% 662	12.2% 135	2.9% 32	3.7% 41
Coping with travelling to university	28.5% 315	58.2% 643	9.3% 103	1.0% 11	2.9% 32
Coping with balancing life demands and study	8.0% 88	53.2% 587	27.4% 303	2.6% 29	8.8% 97

When examined by generational status, there were no notable differences between generational status and confidence levels. When examined by gender, there were differences in *coping with the standard of work* and *looking after my health and welfare* (see Table 17). Females were noticeably less confident about *coping with the standard of work* and men were more confident *looking after their health and welfare*.

Table 17		Confidence levels by gender							
Study	**Very confident**		**Confident**		**Not confident**		**Not confident at all**		**Unsure**	
	F	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**	**F**	**M**
Coping with the standard of work	4.4% 29	5.9% 26	54.0% 354	64.8% 283	25.5% 167	15.6%% 687	3.1% 20	1.4% 6	13% 85%	12.4% 54
Looking after my health and welfare	17.6% 115	26.8% 117	61.7% 404	58.1% 254	13.6% 89	9.6% 42	3.4% 22	2.1% 9	3.8% 25	3.4% 15

Although 86.7% of the aggregate sample stated they were confident about coping with travelling to university, when confidence levels are analysed against distance, confidence levels broadly reduce with distance travelled (see Figure 8).

Figure 8   Confidence and distance travelled
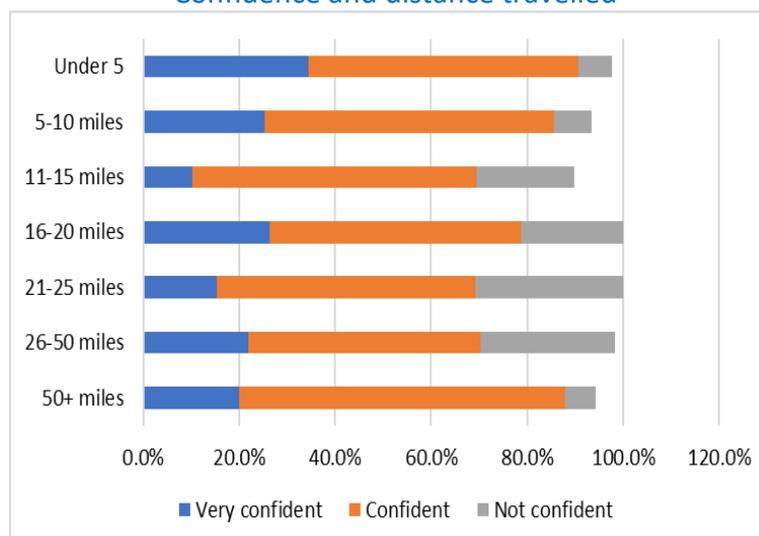
Section 4   Level 4 study expectations

Study time

Respondents expressed diverse expectations regarding contact and independent study (IS) hours. Of the aggregate sample, 28.5% were unsure about the contact hours for their course and 18.5% were unsure about the independent study hours they would be expected to undertake. The majority of respondents expected to undertake between 5-10 and 11-20 contact hours a week (31.7% and 31.2% respectively) and similarly with independent study hours (26.0% and 41.3% respectively). There were different expectations by faculty (see Table 18). FMC and FST were most unsure about contact hours.

Table 18   Contact and independent study hours by faculty

Hours	FMC n=477		FM n=297		FHSS n=147		FST n=174	
	Contact	IS	Contact	IS	Contact	IS	Contact	IS
1-4 hours	4.6% 22	2.5% 12	8.4% 25	1.7% 5	8.1% 12	1.3% 2	5.7% 10	0
5-10 hours	30.8% 147	23.0% 110	42.5% 126	35.0% 104	23.8% 35	19.7% 29	20.7% 36	22.9% 40
11-20 hours	31.0% 138	41.0% 195	24.9% 74	41.1% 122	35.4% 52	43.5% 64	39.7% 69	40.2% 70
Over 20 hours	1.3% 6	13.8% 66	0.6% 2	5.4% 16	10.2% 15	19.7% 29	0.6% 1	16.2% 28
Unsure	32.3% 154	19.7% 94	23.6% 70	16.8% 50	22.4% 33	15.6% 23	33.3% 58	20.7% 36

There were some different expectations by domiciled status (see Table 19). OS domiciled respondents were less sure of the contact hours, but EU respondents were less sure about the independent study hours expected. OS respondents were noticeably less likely to expect to have over 20 hours contact a week compared to UK and EU respondents.

Table 19   Contact and independent study hours by domiciled status

Hours	UK domiciled n=1003		EU domiciled n=53		OS domiciled n=48	
	Contact	IS	Contact	IS	Contact	IS
1-4 hours	6.2% 62	1.7% 17	11.3% 6	1.9% 1	6.3% 3	2.1% 1
5-10 hours	31.8% 317	25.7% 258	18.9% 10	28.3% 15	45.8% 22	29.2% 14
11-20 hours	31.5% 314	41.8% 419	41.5% 22	32.1% 17	14.6% 7	41.7% 20
Over 20 hours	2.3% 23	12.3% 123	1.9% 1	17.9% 9	0	12.5% 6
Unsure	28.4% 285	18.5% 186	26.4% 14	20.8% 11	33.3% 16	14.6% 7

Study style preference at university

Respondents were asked to select one method of how they would prefer to study on their university course. Of the aggregate sample, 70.7% stated they would like to study both *individually and in a group* but 22% stated that they would prefer to *study by themselves.* EU students were slightly more likely to *prefer to study individually* compared to UK and OS respondents (see Table 20). There were no differences by gender or A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondent preferences.

Table 20   Study preferences by aggregate sample and domiciled status

	Aggregate n=1104	UK domiciled n-1003	EU domiciled n=53	OS domiciled n=48
I prefer to study independently	22.0% 243	22.0% 221	26.4% 14	16.7% 8
I prefer to study in a group	7.3% 81	7.4% 74	9.4% 5	4.2% 2
I like to do both	70.7% 780	70.6% 708	64.2% 34	79.2% 38

There were some differences between faculties, but this could be influenced by domiciled status and previous educational experience (see Table 21). FST respondents were more likely to prefer to study independently .

Table 21   Study preferences by faculty

	FMC n=477	FM n=297	FHSS n=147	FST n=174
I prefer to study independently	19.5% 93	24.2% 72	16.3% 24	28.7% 50
I prefer to study in a group	5.7% 27	10.1% 30	8.2% 12	6.3% 11
I like to do both	74.8% 357	65.7% 195	75.5% 111	65.0% 113

When the qualitative comments were examined for respondents' preferences, the comments provided were reflective in nature. The comments below are representative of those offered.

A range of study methods offer different perspectives and approaches

A like studying on my own but if I need help with anything it's nice to be able to discuss it with peers

A mixture of both allows for input from others in parts you wouldn't normally think of, as well as studying alone allows you to get on with work without disturbance.

Although I prefer to study alone to avoid distractions, it is good to work in a group as long as you don't become distracted, as you can learn from each other

Being alone and improving and diving deep into more in-depth work is both fun and a preferred way of learning for me. But, being in a group and getting instant feedback, working together and being able to see how other people work and learn, is essential to improving.

I feel as if studying independently can be beneficial for someone who can't work well around others and so working individually can bring peace of mind to some. However, in a class I feel like there is more motivation to study and learn and most of all do well, this is due to people around you who are as motivated as you are and that can be a big help.

Assessment preference at university

When asked about assessment preference at university, 34.8% of the aggregate sample preferred *individual assessment* with 42.1% preferring *a mix of exams and assessed coursework* (see Table 22)*.* When examined by domiciled status and assessment preference, UK domiciled respondents were more likely to prefer undertaking *individual assessments,* EU undertaking *groups-based assessments* and OS respondents a *mix of assessment*. Assessment by exam was not a popular preference of assessment by any domiciled group.

Table 22   Assessment preference by sample and domiciled status

	Aggregate n=1104	UK domiciled n-1003	EU domiciled n=53	OS domiciled n=48
I prefer undertaking group based assessments	13.2% 146	13.0% 130	22.6% 12	8.3% 4
I prefer undertaking individual assessments	34.8% 384	35.7% 358	22.6% 12	29.2% 4
I prefer exams	2.5% 28	2.7% 27	1.9% 1	0
I prefer a mix of exams and individual/group assessments	42.1% 465	42% 421	36.6% 21	47.9% 23
Unsure	7.0% 81	6.7% 67	13.2% 7	14.6% 7

Of the respondents whose highest qualification were A-Level's, 43.6% preferred a *mix of assessments* followed by *individual assessments* 32.5%. For BTEC/Lev 3 respondents, assessment preference was 43.6% for *individual assessments* followed by a *mix of assessments* with 38.2%.

When examined by faculty there are some variations, but this could be influenced by discipline characteristics, domiciled status and highest entry qualifications (see Table 23). Although FHSS have the largest proportion of respondents whose highest qualification are BTEC/Level 3, the least preferred is individual assessment.

Table 23   Assessment preference by faculty

	FMC n=477	FM n=297	FHSS n=147	FST n=174
I prefer undertaking group based assessments	14.4% 70	16.8% 50	8.8% 13	7.5% 13
I prefer undertaking individual assessments	36.5% 177	36.6% 109	27.2% 40	33.3% 58
I prefer exams	2.1% 10	3.0% 9	2.0% 3	3.4% 6
I prefer a mix of exams and individual/group assessments	38.8% 188	37.6% 112	56.5% 83	47.1% 82
Unsure	8.2% 40	6.0% 18	5.4% 8	8.6% 15

Most useful feedback

Respondents were asked to rank in importance (where 1= most important and 6 = least important) the most useful type of feedback they expect to receive at university. Of the aggregate sample, *academic feedback telling me what I did not do well and how to improve* was the highest ranked followed by *academic feedback telling me what I did correctly* (see Table 24). Of the responses, *informal discussions with students outside of class* and *discussing academic feedback with students in class* were considered the least important.

Table 24   Most useful types of feedback

Type of feedback	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Generic feedback pointing to common mistakes across the cohort	6.7% 74	14.5% 160	17.2% 190	23.5% 259	16.7% 184	21.5% 237	100% 1104
Discussing academic feedback with fellow students in class	4.3% 47	12.9% 142	15.2% 168	25.6% 283	28.4% 314	13.6% 150	100% 1104
Informal discussions with fellow students outside of class	3.2% 35	6.1% 67	11.0% 121	14.9% 165	24.0% 265	40.9% 451	100% 1104
Academic feedback telling what I did not do well and how to improve	64.4% 711	17.6% 194	7.9% 87	4.0% 44	2.9% 32	3.3% 36	100% 1104
Academic feedback telling me what I did correctly	5.1% 56	29.1% 321	25.5% 282	16.2% 179	15.0% 166	9.1% 100	100% 1104
Receiving academic feedback that is encouraging and raises my confidence	16.4% 181	19.9% 220	23.2% 256	15.8% 174	13.0% 143	11.8% 130	100% 1104

When analysed by age, the importance of feedback was similar across all but two of types of feedback. For those in the age groups 26 and over, the importance of *academic feedback telling me what I did correctly* was notably higher than for the younger age groups, and for *feedback raising my confidence* it was notably higher amongst those in the age groups 22 years and above.

Perceived study strengths and weaknesses

When respondent's perception of study strengths and weaknesses are examined, the majority of responses fall into the *strong* or *adequate categories* (see Table 25).

Table 25   Perceived study strengths and weaknesses

Study	Very strong	Strong	Adequate	Weak	Very weak	Unsure
Quick assimilation of ideas	7.6% 84	37.7% 416	46.5% 513	5.3% 58	0.6% 7	2.4% 26
Ability to organise my study independently	13.4% 148	43.2% 477	34.7% 383	6.9% 76	1.4% 16	0.4% 4
Study skills	6.2% 68	42.6% 470	42.4% 468	6.8% 75	0.5% 5	1.6% 18
Knowledge of the subject I will be studying	7.7% 85	39.0% 431	42.5% 469	8.2% 90	0.8% 9	1.8% 20
Literacy skills	18.8% 207	44.5% 491	30.2% 333	5.2% 57	1.1% 12	0.4% 4
Numeracy skills	10.5% 116	33.2% 367	39.4% 435	13.5% 149	2.9% 32	0.5% 5

When examined by A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3, the responses are very similar and there are no notable differences in perception of strengths and weaknesses between these groups. However, when examined by gender, differences in study strengths and weaknesses start to emerge (see Table 26). Females and males throughout the scale have similar perceptions about capability for *study skills* and *literacy skills*. However, more male respondents perceived their strength to be 'very strong' or 'strong' in the areas of *quick assimilation of ideas*, *knowledge of the subject* and *numerical skills*. The only study area where females perceived their strength to be greater than males was in the ability to *organise my study independently*.

Table 26   Perceived study strengths and weaknesses by gender

Study	Very strong		Strong		Adequate		Weak		Very weak		Unsure	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Quick assimilation of ideas	6.9% 45	8.5% 37	30.7% 201	48.3% 211	52.5% 344	37.8% 165	6.9% 45	3.0% 13	0.6% 4	0.2% 1	2.4% 16	2.3% 10
Ability to organise my study independently	17.7% 116	7.3% 32	49.2% 322	34.6% 151	27.6% 181	45.1% 197	4.1% 27	11.2% 49	1.1% 7	1.6% 7	0.3% 2	0.2% 1
Study skills	6.3% 41	6.2% 27	43.5% 285	41.4% 181	42.0% 275	42.8% 187	6.3% 41	7.6% 33	0.3% 2	0.5% 2	1.7% 11	1.6% 7
Knowledge of the subject	5.6% 37	10.3% 45	35.4% 232	44.9% 196	46.4% 304	36.3% 160	9.6% 63	5.9% 26	0.9% 6	0.7% 3	2.0% 13	1.6% 7
Literacy skills	20.3% 133	16.5% 72	44.6% 292	44.6% 195	29.2% 191	31.6% 138	4.9% 32	5.5% 24	0.9% 6	1.1% 5	0.2% 1	0.7% 3
Numerical skills	8.7% 57	13.3% 58	30.4% 199	37.8% 165	42.3% 277	35.0% 153	15.3% 100	10.8% 47	2.9% 19	2.7% 12	0.5% 3	0.5% 2

With EU and OS respondents who may have varying language abilities and prior study experiences, there were some differences in relation to the 'very strong' to 'adequate' categories. These are highlighted in Table 27. Unsurprisingly, UK domiciled students were most likely to consider their *literacy skills* to be 'very strong' or 'strong' in comparison to EU and OS respondents. Of the 1104 respondents, 45 different languages were cited as a first language.

Table 27   Perceived study strengths and weaknesses by domiciled status

Study	Very strong			Strong			Adequate		
	UK	EU	OS	UK	EU	OS	UK	EU	OS
Quick assimilation of ideas	6.5% 65	26.4% 14	10.4% 5	38.1% 382	26.4% 14	41.7% 20	46.7% 468	43.4% 468	45.8% 22
Ability to organise my study independently	13.6% 136	15.1% 8	8.3% 4	44.2% 443	28.3% 15	39.6% 19	33.7% 338	43.4% 23	45.8% 22
Study skills	5.8% 58	11.3% 6	8.3% 4	42.7% 425	41.5% 22	41.7% 20	42.5% 426	37.7% 20	45.8% 22
Knowledge of the subject	8.1% 81	1.9% 1	6.3% 3	39.9% 400	26.4% 14	35.4% 17	41.5% 416	58.5% 31	45.8% 22
Literacy skills	19.2% 193	15.1% 8	12.5% 6	46.0% 461	24.5% 13	35.4% 17	29.0% 291	39.6% 21	43.8% 21
Numerical skills	10.6% 106	13.2% 7	6.3% 3	33.6% 337	22.6% 12	37.5% 18	39.5% 396	47.2% 25	29.2% 14

Expected use of university services

The top five university support services respondents thought they might use in order were *academic support* (49%) followed by *careers and employment* (47%), *sports facilities* (46.4%), *health and wellbeing* (43.7%) then *financial advice* (28.5%).

When examined by highest qualification, the main differences between A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondents were 48.1% of A-Level respondents were more likely to use *sports facilities* and 48.9% to use *careers and employment advice* compared to BTEC/Level 3 with 39.4% and 40.2% respectively. BTEC/Lev 3 respondents were more likely to use *additional learning support* with 15.4% compared to A-Level respondents with 8.3%.

When analysed by domiciled status, expected use of university services was similar apart from those highlighted in Table 28. UK domiciled respondents were most likely to use *finance advice* compared to EU and OS respondents. OS were most likely to use *careers and employment* and *health and wellbeing support* compared to UK and EU respondents. And EU and OS respondents more likely to use *language support* compared to UK respondents.

Table 28   Expected use of university services by domiciled status

Support	UK domiciled n=1003	EU domiciled n=53	OS domiciled n=48
Health and wellbeing	43.3% 435	41.5% 22	52.1% 25
Finance	29.0% 291	20.7% 11	27.1% 13
Careers and Employment	46.3% 464	52.8% 28	56.3% 27
Language support	2.3% 23	41.5% 22	20.8% 10

Section 5 Employability expectations due to university study

Course appeal

Respondents were asked to select up to five reasons about what they had found appealing about their chosen course. The top five reasons are *employment prospects* (50.2%), *placement opportunity* (48.3%), *course links with industry* (45.7%), course modules and then *course specific facilities/resources* (42.9%).

Perception of how employers view an undergraduate qualification

Respondents were asked how they thought employers viewed an undergraduate qualification. Whilst the majority of respondents felt that employers value an undergraduate qualification more that pre-university qualifications, there was notable amount of uncertainty when examined by highest entry qualification, domiciled status and faculties (see Table 29).

OS respondents were notably less sure about how employers valued an undergraduate degree compared to UK and EU domiciled respondents. BTEC/Lev 3 respondents were less sure compared to A-Level respondents (see Table 29).

Table 29 Perception of how employers view a degree by highest entry qualification and domiciled group

	UK domiciled n=1003	EU domiciled n=53	OS domiciled n=48	A-Level n=641	BTEC/Lev 3 n=259
Employers value an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications	69.6% 698	67.9% 36	43.8% 21	71.6% 458	66.0% 171
Employers value an undergraduate qualification in the same was as pre-university qualifications	6.6% 66	3.8% 2	12.5% 6	6.1% 36	7.3% 19
Employers value an undergraduate qualification less than pre-university qualifications	0.8% 8	0	2.1% 1	0.5% 3	0.4% 1
I am unsure how employers value an undergraduate qualification	23.0% 231	28.3% 15	41.7% 10	21.9% 140	26.3% 68

When examined by faculty, FST respondents were most likely to say that employers valued an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications, and respondents in FHSS more likely to be unsure (see Table 30).

Table 30   Perception of how employers view a degree by each faculty

	FMC n=477	FM n=297	FHSS n=147	FST n=174
Employers value an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications	69.7% 338	68.5% 204	57.1% 84	74.1% 129
Employers value an undergraduate qualification in the same way as pre-university qualifications	5.4% 26	7.0% 21	11.6% 17	5.7% 10
Employers value an undergraduate qualification less than pre-university qualifications	0.8% 4	0.3% 1	2.0% 3	0.6% 1
I am unsure how employers value an undergraduate qualification	24.1% 117	24.2% 72	29.3% 43	19.5% 34

When the qualitative comments are examined explaining the respondent's selection, clear reasons were provided. The key themes are listed below for those who feel employers do value an undergraduate degree over pre-university qualifications and those who are unsure.

Employers do undergraduate degree over pre-university qualifications
For these respondents, the responses fell into three broad categories. The comments selected below are reflective of the comments provided.

Demonstrates higher skills and knowledge

A degree is much more specialised compared to other pre-uni qualifications.

Because it is a higher level than A levels.

It must be seen as a more prestigious qualification!

A university degree is a higher achievement of any previous academic achievement I've undertaken, as well as being far harder to achieve so I can assume its valued as higher the previous qualification.
An employer may judge an undergraduate qualification more highly than a pre-university qualification because it shows you can manage your time well and be disciplined in your studying, which are skills needed in an undergraduate degree.

An undergraduate qualification shows more independence, a higher breadth of knowledge and with BPS accreditation, can open more career opportunities.

Because undergraduate qualification provides a deeper understanding of the student's chosen major, rather than pre-university qualifications only touch the surface.

Individual ability

Because it shows that I am committed to learning and studying.

I think undergraduate qualification can prove my ability whatever in study or social skills

Undergraduate qualifications are voluntary. However, pre-university qualifications are compulsory. This shows employers that people with undergraduate qualifications have determination, passion and a thirst for knowledge for the subject taken, giving university students better employment prospects than non-university students.

Undergraduate qualifications show you know more on the subject matter than you did pre-university and have had experience hence know exactly what you are getting yourself into and are confident you will be good at it.

People who attend university, particularly those who excel at university, are hard workers and willing to put in considerable time and effort into their futures which are traits many companies look for in a potential employee.

<u>Required for a chosen profession/career in general</u>

I conducted research before the course, as to whether or not it was necessary to obtain this degree versus a degree alternative diploma, through that I contacted a number of recruiters specialising in the specific event field and I was told that you have more career opportunities with a degree.

I was told employers don't care about university qualifications. I found out that they were wrong.

The majority of people applying for jobs these days are going to have an undergraduate qualification. Employers will almost automatically eliminate non-undergrads for skilled work. It is essential to be able to compete in such a cutthroat market.

In order to be a mental health nurse you need the relevant degree.

I'm seeking a career as an Educational Psychologist which means I will be needing a minimum of a master's degree, so my employer will in fact value my undergraduate qualifications more than my pre-university qualifications due to the fact that without my undergraduate qualifications I can't do my masters.

Unsure whether Employers do undergraduate degree over pre-university qualifications
For respondents who were unsure about whether employers valued an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications, the comments fell into three broad categories.

<u>Uncertainty as had not thought about it before</u>

I have never thought about this before and am unsure how to answer.

I'm just unsure. I have never thought about it. I just assumed employers did because of what I have been told at school.

<u>Uncertainty through limited experience</u>

I haven't been employed and I am not an undergraduate yet to be able to tell the difference of how they value the two types of qualification someone has.

I know how employers value it in my country, but I'm not sure about how they value it in the UK.

I think employers see an undergraduate qualification as a plus but I am unsure how they rank it against practical experience. I would say I don't know enough about how employers value those who have undertaken undergraduate courses to make a statement on the matter.

<u>Depends on the subject and career to be pursued</u>

I've been told by teachers that they are on an equal playing field, but by others, whether it be an adult or one of my friends saying that it shouldn't matter, however I believe that it's most likely down to what profession you do go into that will care the most about both qualifications.

It depends what field you would like to go into as some jobs do not require a degree but skills within your pre university qualifications.

A degree from university is becoming less important in the work place.

An undergraduate qualification is proof of relevant knowledge and experience in the field. However, it doesn't necessarily replace prior experience, connections and other factors.

Depending on the skills learnt they will value it more. But it does not mean if you don't have a degree you can't get the job.

Different employers may value different forms of qualifications more than others, or may not require you to have an undergraduate qualification.

A successful undergraduate qualification most likely suggests a higher level of ability, experience and dedication to the subject in question than would be suggested by a pre-university qualification. However, my subject in particular is heavily portfolio based, and employers will most likely value the quality of one's portfolio over the possession of a particular qualification.

Section 6   Accommodation and travel influences on learning and teaching

Accommodation

Respondents were asked to state where they will be living once they start their studies. As expected, the majority of respondents were moving to the area and into university accommodation (see Table 31). However, in terms of domiciled status there were some differences. Just under a fifth of all UK domiciled respondents intended staying at home, and around one fifth of EU and OS respondents were moving to the area and going into private accommodation.

Table 31   Accommodation in the first year by domiciled status

Type of accommodation	Aggregate	UK n=1003	EU n=53	OS n=48
Staying at home and attending University	19.3% 213	19.7% 198	3.8% 2	8.3% 4
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	8.2% 91	8.5% 85	5.7% 3	6.3% 3
Staying local and moving into private rented accommodation	2.4% 27	2.0% 2	9.4% 5	4.2% 2
Moving into the area and into university accommodation	63.2% 698	63.8% 640	60.4% 32	54.2% 26
Moving to the area and into private rented accommodation	6.8% 75	5.5% 55	18.9% 10	20.8% 10
Other	0.8% 9	0.5% 5	1.9% 1	6.3% 3

When examined by gender and highest entry qualification, there are some differences (see Table 32). Females (22.3%) are noticeably more likely to stay at home than males (12.8%) This is partly explained by 50.3% of FHSS respondents who are mostly female. When examined by highest qualification, more than twice as many BTEC/Lev 3 respondents (29.9%) compared to A-Level respondents intend staying at home and attending university (13.2%.

Table 32   Accommodation in the first year by gender and highest entry qualification

Type of accommodation	Male	Female	A-level	BTEC/Lev 3
Staying at home and attending University	12.8% 56	22.3% 146	13.2% 83	29.9% 75
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	11.9% 52	5.9% 39	9.7% 61	6.8% 17
Staying local and moving into private rented accommodation	2.9% 13	2.2% 14	1.7% 11	2.0% 5
Moving into the area and into university accommodation	64.7% 283	62.3% 408	70.4% 444	54.6% 137
Moving to the area and into private rented accommodation	7.2% 31	6.4% 42	5.1% 32	6.0% 15
Other	0.5% 2	0.9% 6	0	0.8% 2

Distance travelled to university

When the distance travelled to university is examined, just over half of the respondents live under 5 miles away from the university (see Table 33). However, the number of respondents living between 5-10 miles and over 50 miles is similar with 16.5% and 14.5% respectively. Just over one fifth of all respondents were commuting in excess of 21 miles.

Table 33   Distance travelled to university

Distance	Frequency	Percentage
Under 5 miles	617	55.9%
5-10 miles	182	16.5%
11-15 miles	49	4.4%
16-20 miles	19	1.7%
21-25 miles	13	1.2%
26-50 miles	64	5.8%
Over 50 miles	160	14.5%

There was little difference between gender and highest entry qualification. However, as one might expect, there was a correlation between age and distance (see Table 34). As the distance increased so did the number of older respondents. However, there were a substantial number of respondents in each age group who were travelling in excess of 50 miles to get to university. Although the vast majority of respondents were travelling less than 10 miles a day, a commuter student cannot just be defined by distance travelled but also the time it takes to travel the distance.

Table 34   Distance travelled by age

Age	16-20 miles	21-25 miles	26-50 miles	50 + miles
18	0.6%	0.7%	4.4%	16.8%
19	1.1%	1.4%	1.4%	14.1%
20	3.3%	0	3.3%	16.5%
21	2.1%	2.1%	10.6%	8.5%
22-25	6.0%	0	12.0%	4.0%
26-30	7.9%	2.6%	10.5%	13.2%
31-40	4.0%	12.0%	24.0%	8.0%
41-50	8.3%	0	8.3%	8.3%

Part 4   Discussion

The findings in this report highlight key differences in the prior learning experience and learning expectations of respondents at a Post 1992 University. The three most influential student characteristics from this particular institutional sample are highest entry qualification, domiciled status and gender. However, it is important to be mindful not to just look at these student characteristics in isolation as students possess multiple characteristics. This part of the report discusses the key areas highlighted.

Prior learning experience overview

The findings of the aggregate sample highlight that prior learning experiences remain largely 'traditional' amongst undergraduate Level 4 entrants. Accessing learning materials is mainly through a text book and handwritten notes , and the submission of coursework is predominantly hardcopy (with or without a cover sheet). The commonly held assumption is that students entering higher education today are 'digital natives'. These findings demonstrate that students maybe 'social digital natives' but they are not 'learning digital natives'.

The lack of experience of students having access to and knowing how to use a library to obtain information is evident. The Schools Network (SSAT) highlight the reasons for a reduction in libraries within schools across the UK. These include a requirement to use a core text, lack of resources and space constraints in an environment where the student population under 18 years of age is dramatically increasing (Williamson, 2020). Opportunities to obtain library experience prior to university is further exacerbated with the continuing loss of public libraries (800) throughout the country since 2010 (Guardian, 2019). Knowing how to use and access information in a library, which is a main source of information at university, is a skill that has to be taught. If it is not taught in schools and colleges then it needs to be taught on entry to university.

Feedback in schools and colleges is primarily provided through face to face (individual) discussion and written comments (hard copy) across all student characteristics. However, face to face (individual) was the preference for only 57.9% of respondents which highlights the diversity of preference in our student body. Engaging students in feedback and teaching them the numerous ways feedback is provided at university is critical. Often students are not aware that feedback is being provided. Year on year, feedback satisfaction levels reported in the National Student Survey (NSS) are poor.

Although respondents in this study stated that they had read their feedback, a common complaint by academic colleagues is that if a student gets a good mark or the mark they expect, they do not read it. At university level, Race comments that we waste a great deal of time providing feedback that isn't used (Race, 2020). Hattie and Clarke concur and argue *'That students are taught to receive, interpret and use the feedback provided is probably more important than focusing on how much feedback is provided by the teacher, as feedback given but not heard is of little use'* (Hattie and Clarke, 2018, p5).

Leading educator, Phil Race has long argued that; feedback needs to be dialogic not a monologue from tutor to student, we need to understand how students really learn, and we need to design effective assessment and feedback processes (Race, 2005; 2020; Taylor, 2008). When designing Level 4 assessment, there needs to be an awareness that students may not have adequate experience of sitting formal examinations or know how to undertake, structure and produce coursework for assessment at Level 4. We need to be mindful of the assessment structure in the first year of study to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn different assessment techniques (Brown, 2005; Kift, 2009) and importantly, understand why they are being asked to undertake it and the benefits.

The findings highlight that although BTEC/Lev 3 and A-Level respondents experience were similar in not approaching a teacher/tutor for feedback, BTEC/Lev 3 were noticeably more likely to say that this was due to them *getting the grade they expected/they were happy with their grade*, and that their *teachers/tutors were difficult to contact* compared to their A-Level counterparts. The college environment is different to school so access to tutors will be different. Female respondents were more uncomfortable asking for feedback compared to males. This is also reflected in their study confidence which is discussed later.

Most respondents undertook revision for examinations largely through a *mix of revision methods* rather than just *independent revision at home*. At university, although revision classes commonly take place, revision is generally an independent activity. There were a large number of respondents who had not experienced independent study, and many had only undertaken it *mainly in school/college*. This is a skill that needs to be experienced and learnt in a safe environment.

When prior learning experiences were examined by highest entry qualification, there were noticeable prior learning experience differences between A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 respondents. A-Level respondents reported having a fairly traditional prior learning experience compared to BTEC/Level 3 respondents (generally college taught) who had more diversity in accessing information and submitting their work. This potentially should enable the BTEC/Lev 3 student's learning experience in these areas to be less challenging at university because they have already had the opportunity to engage in some form of digital learning which is common place at university. However, this is clearly not enough of a learning advantage because nationally, BTEC students are three times more likely to withdraw from their university studies compared to A-Level students. HESA statistics show that withdrawal from higher education of UK domiciled students in 2016 (one year after starting university) holding the following qualifications on entry was 11.6% for BTEC, 10.8% for Access, 6.7% for a foundation course, 4.4% for A-Levels with at least BBC and 2.5% for A-levels with at least AAB (HESA, 2019). This may in part be explained by A-Levels comprising examinations whereas BTEC/Lev 3 is heavily assessed by coursework. Additionally, in the past three years, A-Levels have moved from a mix of exams and coursework back to primarily being by examination.

As part of university level study, students are required to engage in formative assessment. It is a valuable activity which provides a safe space to explore and learn without 'failing' (William, 2011; Yorke, 2006). However, formative assessment is not an activity routinely undertaken let alone embedded in schools which is why SSAT through its 'Deep Learning' resources are encouraging schools to be more proactive in using formative assessment (Williams and Settle, 2019). As a result, the challenge for universities is engaging students in a type of assessment that they do not have prior experience of, and as it does not contribute to their overall mark, understand its value.

When developing 'orientation' and 'introduction to study' approaches for new level 4 entrants, assumptions must not be made that students will 1) know how to use virtual learning environments, 2) that they have been exposed to and have experienced different types of assessment in their prior learning, and 3) understand that feedback at university is delivered in a variety of valuable ways. Learning how to study at university must be incorporated into the delivery of the course and not be crammed into the first 2 weeks of teaching when students experience overload (Morgan, 2012; Thomas, 2012).

Current learning expectations

Respondents had varying expectations of how they were going to study at university. In terms of expected contact and independent study hours, the findings varied between the faculties and by domiciled status. The majority of respondents expected to undertake between 5-10 (31.7%) and 11-20 (31.2%) contact hours a week with 28.5% being unsure. Similarly, with independent study, respondents expected to undertake between 5-10 (26%) and 11-20 (41.3%) with 18.5% being unsure. The national Student Academic Experience Survey 2019 highlights that 31% of students surveyed had an experience worse than expected at university because they had received fewer contact hours than expected (Neves and Hillman, 2019).

When it came to study preference, the majority of respondents liked to study independently and as part of a group, but noticeably EU respondents had a greater preference to study individually. Small group learning has many benefits including preventing students feeling isolated, providing opportunities to develop graduate skills such as interpersonal skills, and through applying theory in practice, it can bring learning to life (Race, 2020).

When asked about how they would like to be assessed on their course, a mix of exams and individual/groups assessments was favoured by 42.1% of respondents followed by 34.8% who preferred to undertake individual assessments. Examination was not popular across any student characteristic and maybe this is in part due to exams being the main method of assessment for A -Levels where the 'success' of a student relies on having a good examination.

At school/college, the main forms of feedback provided were *face to face (individually)* and *written (hard copy)*. At university, feedback comes in a variety of ways including discussing feedback with and having informal discussions with fellow students. However, both of these types of feedback were considered to be the least useful by respondents.

Lack of information about how to study at university was a main area of concern for 36% of respondents. This varied by domiciled group and highest entry qualification. As one may expect, EU (51%) and OS (41.6%) respondents were noticeably more likely to be concerned about *lack of how to study information* compared to those who were UK domiciled (38.8%). A-Level respondents (38.8%) were more concerned than BTEC/Lev 3 (27.4%). Student preparedness was explored in the Student Academic Experience Survey in 2019. It found that 23% felt 'slightly' or 'very unprepared', 44% 'slightly prepared' and only 16% 'very prepared' (Neves and Hillman, 2019). Research highlights that study confidence is directly linked to students preparedness on entry (Money et al, 2019; Hughes and Smail, 2014) and where '*students perceive there is a difference between their preparedness and the university's expectations, a decrease in confidence and lack of motivation can result* (Money et al, 2019, p.4).

Learning expectations at university on entry will be shaped by students' prior learning experiences. If incoming students are provided with easy to read and accessible information on what to expect (e.g. contact hours) and how to study at university (e.g. increased independent study) pre-arrival, it starts to shape expectations before they arrive, helps students mentally prepare for any differences and assists in managing satisfaction levels (Race, 2005; Morgan, 2013; Kift 2015). This needs to feed into a scaffolded 'introduction to study' approach. Providing clear information also enables the student to arrange different aspects of their university life whether that is arranging part-time work or participating in sports and societies.

Concerns and perceived confidence levels in starting level 4 study at university

High on the list of concerns of all respondents were their *ability to study* and *cope with the standard of work required*, as well as *fitting in with their new class mates*. Some concerns and confidence levels varied between student characteristics.

Understandably, EU and OS students were more likely to be concerned about *getting used to living in a new country* and the *high expectations of family* as a result of undertaking university level study in the UK. UK domiciled students were noticeably more concerned about *getting into debt* and having *sufficient funding*, and when examined by anxiety levels, they were exceptionally high. This contradicts the all too common statements that students are not worried about the debt incurred by their university studies. It also shows that they are very worried before they start their university course. Interestingly, there were no notable differences between A-Level and BTEC/Lev 3 responses.

When respondents were asked about their perception of their skill base, it is not a surprise that EU and OS respondents were more likely to say that that they had 'adequate' to 'very weak' literacy skills compared to UK domiciled respondents. Although English was not considered a first language by 12.7% of respondents, only 1.4% of the aggregate sample felt that they were not fluent in English. Forty five different languages were cited as a first language.

Where there was a noticeable difference in terms of concerns and confidence levels was with gender. Although males and females shared similar concerns, females were much more concerned than their male counterparts (approximately 10% more for each concern). This was very evident when analysed by faculty. With perceived strengths and weakness, males and females had similar perceptions about capability for study skills and literacy throughout the scale. However, males generally were more likely to think they had 'very strong' or 'strong' skills compared to females. Females were noticeably less confident than males about *coping with the standard of work* but interestingly, males were noticeably less confident about *looking after their mental health and wellbeing.*

Students may have concerns, but they may not necessarily translate into high anxiety levels. However, this study showed a notable level of anxiety across the different concerns amongst the respondents. This finding correlates with the Student Academic Experience 2019 Survey which found that anxiety levels have increased in the past 3 years amongst university students (Neves and Hillman, 2019). It is important to equip students with the knowledge to understand that anxiety and stress for short periods is normal, and to empower them to help themselves through seeking help if it becomes prolonged. However, this requires universities to have appropriate support mechanisms in place. There is a huge amount of work being undertaken in the area of supporting mental health and wellbeing across the sector. The Student Minds University Mental Health Charter is one of them which will hopefully help all students and staff (Hughes and Spanner, 2019). The charter has been developed by the sector and at its heart is a whole institutional approach.

As the UK and international undergraduate student body in the UK continues to expand, providing appropriate learning, language and cultural support is essential in enabling students to quickly settle into their studies. Personal tutors are pivotal in supporting the success of students and being gatekeepers to relevant support (Lochtie et al., 2018). However, personal tutors need effective support and information to undertake the role effective (McIntosh, 2018). In deciphering what information is required, Devis-Rozental (2018) applies the tourist metaphor in helping students gain a sense of confidence during the initial transition stage and highlights to staff the type of information that is critical to convey. The metaphor sees students as tourists getting used to a new country (the university), using different currency (marking criteria), understanding laws (policies and procedures), getting to grips with language (academic skills, technical vocabulary), reading guides (University staff - who does what?),

obtaining a map to navigate their way around (campus geography), understanding customs (independent learning, teaching styles), getting used to the time zone (timetable), knowing where to go for welfare (wellbeing centre, additional learning), and seeking out entertainment (clubs and societies) (Devis-Rozental, 2018). However, students have a lot to cope with so it is essential not to overwhelm them with too much information because the quality of transition can have long term effects both on the student experience (Tinto, 2003).

Being aware of students concerns and perceived levels of confidence by different student characteristics enables an institution to provide targeted support and advice along with scaffolded activities to help them settle into university. The sooner this can be achieved the sooner a student will be engaged and feel a sense of belonging. This is pivotal in retaining students, supporting progression and enabling successful outcomes (Morgan and Brown, 2009; Crosling et al., 2012; Morgan, 2012; Hughes and Smail, 2014). Managing new entrants' expectations requires honesty and them having 'real' students as their 'role' models.

Accommodation and travel

The study highlights the complex life of the student in terms of living and travel arrangements. Of the respondents, 63.2% *were moving to the area and into university accommodation* and 20% were *staying at home and attending university*. We know that students who live at home will have a different university experience to those in university accommodation. When examined by different student characteristics, there were notable differences. BTEC/Lev 3 respondents (29.9%) were twice more likely to stay at home and undertake university level study than their A-Level counterparts (13.2%). Females were also more likely to stay at home (22.3%) compared to their male counterparts (12.8%). However, this finding is influenced by one faculty who has a higher proportion of older female students.

A challenge for the sector is that the term 'commuter' student is ill defined (Maguire and Morris, 2018). Previously, postcodes have been used as a blunt measuring tool to categorise students. There is a greater understanding now that using miles travelled to university rather than postcode provides a clearer picture of the distance students are travelling. However, it is not just distance that needs to be considered, but also time taken to travel the distance (Maguire and Morris, 2018; Thomas and Jones, 2018). Assumptions about there being effective transport networks available to an institution from someone's place of dwelling needs to be avoided.

This study used mileage as a measure whilst being mindful of the transport network to both campuses. There was a correlation between age and distance. Generally, as the distance increased so did the age of the respondents. However, there were a substantial number of respondents across the age groups in all mileage brackets. The number of 18 and 19 year old respondents who reported that they would be travelling in excess of 50 miles within their age group was 16.8% and 14.1% respectively.

When it came to confidence levels about coping with the travel from a respondent's residence to university, confidence levels reduced with distance travelled. The HEPI Policy note 21 which looks at student wellbeing found that different lengths of commute did not increase anxiety levels, but did in terms of life satisfaction (Blackman, 2020). Students with a longer commute were the most dissatisfied. If universities want to encourage more mature students into higher education, there has to be an understanding that they are likely to be commuter students so 'access to learning' needs to be flexible. We also have to be mindful that with the £9K a year fees and cost of living, we potentially will have more students making the decision to stay at home and commute.

Although university accommodation is generally near a university, available space and cost may force accommodation providers in the future to build further away from a campus resulting in a commute. Middlesex University and Unite have accommodation which is a commute to the campus and they are proactively monitoring the experience of their students. Pokorny et al argue that in the UK, around 25% of students remain in their family home and it is set to rise in the UK to 50% by 2020 (Pokorny et al., 2016).

Additionally, we need to think about our returning students. As they progress in their studies and move out of university accommodation after their first year into private rental, they may be further away from the university which requires a commute. This can impact not only on their learning experience, but also result in lower satisfaction levels which in turn can impact on our NSS results. Research by Avery, Lees and Russell looked at student performance against travel time to university at their institution. They found that decisions on where a student lives whilst studying can impact on how they engage in their studies and their attainment. They found that students in halls got grades 5% higher compared to those living at home, students travelling for more than 90 minutes (on average) get grades 9% lower, 77% of students who travel 30 minutes or less pass all their modules on first attempt and 62% of students pass all on first attempt if they travel for 90 minutes or more (Avery et al.,2019). This led to changes in teaching delivery.

Attendance in class is important, but attendance does not necessarily equal engagement. We also need to be mindful that students may have to be strategic with their time and money. A student may make the decision to miss a lecture which is timetabled on a day when they have nothing else so they can undertake paid work. If we can effectively engage the student in their study early on in their course and equip them with independent study skills then there is scope to provide more learning flexibility without catastrophic consequences.

The Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire is invaluable in understanding the prior learning experiences and study expectations and concerns of our new entrants. As a result, we can develop targeted initiatives, information and advice to bridge the gap between secondary and tertiary education.

However, this is only part of the knowledge we need. As Money, Nixon and Graham argue, it is not only *'crucial to establish how prepared students are in relation to their academic confidence as they make the transition to university'* but it is essential to understand '*what schools do to develop this attribute in their pupils*' (Money et al., 2019, p.5) If the tertiary sector educators have a better understanding of the changes in the secondary system that have occurred in the past few years, and secondary educators understand how universities expect their students to engage and interact at Level 4, then we are better placed to lay the foundations for success.

Part 5   Concluding comments and next steps

Every student's learning journey is different and unique to them and as a result, students will enter higher education with different skills and prior experience. These will shape their expectations of study at university level. Differences are not weaknesses; they are just differences. Higher education in the UK has widened and diversified at all levels of study in the past 20 years. With the expected expansion of the 18 year old population from 2021-22 and Government policy, this is set to continue. Our role is to ensure that all students have the best opportunity to engage in and succeed in their studies. We can support this through being mindful of student differences, and bridging any differences effectively at the start of their study journey at university.

By understanding the prior learning experiences and expectations of our students, we can improve and evolve the student experience in, through and out of the study lifecycle.

To support the progression, retention and success of our students, it is essential to:
- Identify the prior learning experiences of our students.
- Be aware of how pre-university qualifications are delivered and assessed.
- Provide targeted and scaffolded support to bridge the skill differences.
- Avoid a one size fits all approach to learning and support.
- Avoid overwhelming students within the first two weeks with information.
- Build in an effective introduction across the first semester or term on how to study at university that supports the diverse learning experience of our students.

When we provide information to students, we need to think about the 3 Ts:
- Type of information needed.
- Targeting information
- Timely information.

Next steps

This study took place within a post 1992 institution which has a particular student body. The composition of the student body at an institution will impact on the responses and what needs to be addressed. Although this small study has provided valuable data and insight into previous learning experiences, a wider ranging study across different types of institutions with varying student cohorts would be incredibly valuable for the sector in order to fully understand the dynamics of prior learning experiences and expectations of our ever-expanding student community. It will provide a baseline of knowledge that can help evolve policy and strategy.

Importantly, HE interacting and collaborating with The Schools Network (SSAT) would be invaluable in creating a better understanding of student learning between secondary and tertiary levels. Through working together, we could be more effective in raising student aspirations to go to university, to support the widening participation agenda and provide targeted information that supports all participants whether they are the student or the educator.

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