



Higher viewpoints: studying Higher Education in a Further Education College

An analysis of student experiences

Paper 3: The Experiences of Full Time students studying HE in English FE Colleges

1. Introduction

This paper explores the perceptions of Full Time (FT) students studying Higher Education in Colleges of Further Education. A total of 429 students from a wide range of courses at 14 colleges completed an on-line questionnaire across May and June 2013.

The subsequent analysis set out to identify potential differences in perceptions between students who have moved directly from college-based FE to college-based HE, either within the same college or between colleges and those who have entered the FE sector specifically to study for a higher level qualification. Some questions could have been expected to reveal different views depending on the age of the respondents: in these instances we undertook a further analysis which compared the responses of mature students (aged 25+) and younger entrants (18-24.) We also specifically examine the views of those in their first year of study: these students face a higher fee repayment and might be expected to be more demanding of their colleges.

Within the response group of 429 students, 283 had joined the college to study for an HE qualification. A smaller group of 146 students had continued on from an FE qualification. We refer to these as “new entrants” to the college and “direct progressors” respectively.

2. Background

The survey is a companion piece to two other surveys of the student experience of HE in FE, all of which were conducted between January and July 2013. Full-time students make

up just under half (49.5%) of all young students undertaking prescribed HE in FE¹. Many of these students are from HE “cold spots”, geographical areas which have traditionally had low levels of participation in HE. Whilst older students are more likely to study HE on a part-time basis, our survey results suggest that those who do enrol FT hope to find an environment which is able to meet their expectations. This group of students has taken a considered decision to study Full Time; most of its members also work part-time and they see HE as a means to better job prospects. However, they also expect to be able to study in an HE setting with tutors who understand the lifestyle of older (25+) students. FE colleges continue to make a significant contribution to widening participation in HE²: it is important that the needs of those over the age of 25 are kept in focus as colleges develop their HE strategies.

Colleges recruited well to their Student Number Control (SNC) targets when compared to universities. In order to maintain and develop their HE offer and grow student numbers within a closed system, colleges have to offer value for money. Their potential students are more likely to be debt averse, to come from families without a tradition of participation in HE and to have an instrumental view of HE i.e. they see a higher level qualification as a means of securing better job prospects and they study primarily for that purpose. Our study may prompt college staff to assess their own provision in those areas of the survey which have attracted significant or surprising responses.

As we have noted in previous papers within this project, it is difficult to be precise about the terms “Full time” and “Part time” when referring to student modes of attendance. Some of our students stated they were working full time whilst following a FT course: most worked part time to help meet their costs of living and studying. Almost all were following courses of Prescribed HE (Higher National Diplomas, Foundation degrees and Honours degrees). In some cases, they were in their first year and had thus committed to repaying a fee which could be twice that incurred by students in their second or third years on the same course. This simple fact was likely to influence their view of the quality of their experience of HE in FE. We have thus set aside a section of this report to analyse the responses made by first year students to particular questions and compare them to those given by second and third year students.

Our respondents came from 14 colleges and a spread of HE programmes traditionally found within the sector. In contrast to the analysis of responses from Part Time students, relatively few were from the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths)

¹ Widening Participation and non-continuation indicators for FE Colleges. HEFCE 2012/20

² *ibid*

subjects. This is not unexpected as these subjects more likely to be studied on an HNC or part-time Foundation degree (Fd) basis within HE in FE.

3. Overview of the survey results

The overall sample was made up of 63% female and 37% male students. The majority were aged 18-24.

Age	Frequenc y	%
18 - 24	240	55.9
25+	189	44.1
Total	429	100.0

Those joining the college for an HE course were generally older than those continuing on from an FE course – 57% were over the age of 25. In comparison, 81.5% of those continuing from an FE course were aged 18-25. Most students embarked on their HE course with “A” Level or BTEC National qualifications.

Which course did you follow before entering HE?	Frequenc y	%
GCE A Level	110	25.6
BTEC National	131	30.5
Other Level 3 course eg City and Guilds, NVQ	80	18.6
Access to HE	68	15.9
Accredited Prior Experience and/or Learning	40	9.3
Total	429	100.0

Those continuing from an FE course were more likely to have an Access to HE qualification (20.5%) than those new to the college (13.4%)

When did you finish your last course?

The majority of respondents completed their Level 3 courses within 4 years of beginning an HE programme. The overall picture is as follows:

When did you finish this course?	Frequency	%
2012 (continued straight from FE course)	146	34.0
2 to 4 years ago	172	40.1
5 or more years ago	71	16.6
Missing	40	9.3
Total	429	100.0

Of the new entrants, just over 60% did so within two to four years of finishing their previous course. Of these, 38% had previously attended the same FE college. Amongst those continuing directly from an FE course, 50% had remained in their original college. This suggests that if colleges wish to engage with students to encourage progression to Full time HE they should aim to do so within five years of the completion of a Level 3 course. Although the information available is not conclusive, this may imply that continued contact with prospective students after the completion of their FE courses will aid recruitment.

Did you give up a full time job to attend this course?

Across both types of student, only 96 respondents stated that they gave up a full time job to study. Those joining the college for the first time were more likely to have done so: just under 27% of this group (76 students) had previously been in full time employment.

Type of course

Our respondents were following a range of courses. These broadly followed the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) categories found in an earlier study³ three years ago. Most were drawn from Art and Design; Education; Business, Computing and IT, Land-based and Hospitality and Travel and Tourism courses. A smaller set of respondents were studying Social work, Sports Science and single or combined Honours (Hons) in Humanities subjects. As noted previously, relatively few Full time students were pursuing STEM subjects.

³ Strategic options, Operational challenges. MEG 2010

Of those progressing internally within colleges 55% were studying for a Foundation Degree. New entrants to the college were more evenly divided between those studying for a Hons degree (46.3%) and a Fd (42%).

Overall, a majority of students were studying towards a Foundation or an Honours degree (89%).

Present course	Frequency	%
National Vocational Qualification	10	2.3
Higher National	25	5.8
Foundation degree	200	46.6
Honours degree	182	42.4
Professional Qualification	12	2.8
Total	429	100.0

Current year of study

32% of survey respondents were in their first year, 28% were second year students and 40% were in their final year. Analysis reveals that over 47% (47.3%) of progressing students were in their first year of study. Just under 45% of incoming students were in their final year.

How did you fund your studies?

Both categories of student showed a high reliance on Student Loans Company (SLC) funding. Overall, 77% were in receipt of SLC support. 41% of students also drew down Maintenance Grant. Family support was the next most likely source of help for both groups. Amongst the new entrants, only 10% were entirely self-funded. 20 students (5%) also made the point that they were in part-time employment whilst studying and that this enabled them to meet their costs of living.

A larger proportion of continuing students took out a loan from the SLC (84%) in comparison to new entrants (74%). This may be partly attributed to continuing students being more aware of the funding options available to them.

How did you fund your present course?	Frequency	%
Entirely Self funded	37	8.6
Family	49	11.4
Bank Loan	6	1.4
National Scholarship	3	.7
Sponsorship	26	6.1
Personal Loan/Borrowings	3	.7
<i>Maintenance Grant</i>	175	40.8
<i>Loan from SLC</i>	331	77.2

(Note that the sum of frequency count is 630, while total number of respondents is 429. Students were allowed to choose multiple responses.)

Split by age, the responses are slightly different:

How did you fund your course	18-24 (Frequency and percentage of 18-24 students)	25+ (Frequency and percentage of 25+ students)
Entirely Self funded	10 (4.2)	27 (14.3)
Family	31 (12.9)	18 (9.5)
Bank Loan	4 (1.7)	2 (1.1)
National Scholarship	0	3 (1.6)
Sponsorship	4 (1.7)	22 (11.6)
Personal Loan/Borrowings	2 (0.8)	1 (0.5)
<i>Maintenance Grant</i>	98 (40.8)	77 (40.7)
<i>Loan from SLC</i>	208 (86.7)	123 (65.1)

Predictably, those who are older are more likely to be entirely self-funded and to have attracted sponsorship from their employers or elsewhere. Significantly fewer had taken out a student loan from SLC.

Choice of college

“Job, flat and family are all here” was the student comment which summed up many of the responses.

College location was the main determining factor for all students, followed by the college offering the students’ preferred course of study. Other factors such as college reputation, previous study at the same college and even level of fee had a smaller impact. These factors were similar for both continuing students and new entrants. Location of the college was ranked as 1 by 34.2% of direct progressors and by 39.6% of in-coming students. Likewise, preferred course of study was ranked as 1 by 30.8% of continuing students and by 33.2% of new entrants.

Why did you choose to study HE at your particular HE college?	Rank 1	Rank2	Rank3
Location	162(37.8)	117(27.3)	85(19.8)
My friends/family study(ied) here	12(2.8)	25(5.8)	38(8.9)
Reputation of the College	47(11.0)	50(11.7)	68(15.9)
Offered my preferred course of study	139(32.4)	98(22.8)	53(12.4)
Lower fee than other colleges	23(5.4)	71(16.6)	67(15.6)
I've studied for other courses here	45(10.5)	37(8.6)	53(12.4)
Missing	1(0.2)	31(7.2)	65(15.2)
Total			

Why did you choose your particular course?

New entrants to the college place career development issues at a high priority. 68.9% of respondents from this group indicated that the course was part of a career plan, suggesting a clear purpose behind the decision to study FT. Those continuing their studies had a different approach: personal interest was the prime factor, followed by the course being a means to an end (i.e. a better job). Progression from a related FE course is given significantly lower priority by new entrants but 26% of continuing students said that this was a factor.

College staff may conclude that building progression pathways to HE qualifications (and then marketing them strategically) is a useful means of attracting student enrolments from individuals already studying at the college.

Only a very small percentage of respondents in both groups indicated that they studied for social reasons. This may reflect the impact of fees or other calls on the income of an older group of entrants – those who were returning to study were the least likely to do so for this reason.

Overall, a majority of students (65.5%) chose their course because it could help them achieve their career plan, followed by personal interest (58.5%) in the programme.

Why did you choose your particular course?	Frequency	%
It was of personal interest to me	251	58.5
<i>I have a career plan and the course will help me achieve it</i>	281	65.5
It is the natural progression route from my last (FE) course	82	19.1
I need something to fill my time and to enable me to meet people	19	4.4

(Again the frequency count sum is 633, as students were allowed to choose multiple options.)

Disincentives to study

Financial concerns dominated all responses to this question. Course fees were believed by a significant number of respondents (41%) to have been a potential disincentive to

study. Amongst those returning to study from elsewhere, 42.8% gave this factor a rank of 1 when asked this question. Other costs of study such as living costs and housing were also considered important, along with uncertainty about job prospects post-graduation.

Factors such as caring for others were given lower priority by both groups.

Which of the following factors might have preventing you from undertaking an HE course?	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3
<i>Course fee too high</i>	178 (41.5)	67 (15.6)	60 (14.0)
Increased levels of personal debt	40 (9.3)	73 (17.0)	62 (14.5)
<i>Affording other costs eg living costs, rent</i>	76 (17.7)	97 (22.6)	83 (19.3)
Caring for others (children, elderly relatives, etc)	22 (5.1)	27 (6.3)	24 (5.6)
Uncertainty about jobs post-graduation	54 (12.6)	80 (18.6)	82 (19.1)
Lack of confidence in your ability to cope with higher level	58 (13.5)	55 (12.8)	66 (15.4)
Missing	1 (0.2)	30 (7.0)	52 (12.1)

Respondents who were progressing on from a Level 3 course were noticeably more confident of their ability to cope with the demands of an HE course than those returning to study. This is to be expected: these students were more likely to know what to expect and might have fewer doubts that they could sustain momentum throughout a higher level course.

Split by age, both groups ranked the level of course fee as the strongest factor that may have prevented them from pursuing HE. Slightly more young students (42.1%) ranked this as Rank 1, compared to 40.7 25+ students. Caring for others was ranked as Rank 1, 2 and 3 by 2.1%, 2.9% and 2.5% of 18-24 students respectively whereas a notably higher proportion of 25 + students ranked it as Rank 1, 2 and 3 (9.0%, 10.6%, 9.5% respectively).

Experience of HE course so far

Students from all backgrounds said that their course took up more time than they expected. Interestingly, nearly 53% of those progressing from FE said that they are required to give more time to private study than they anticipated. For colleges this may imply a need for better information during recruitment and enrolment, with appropriate induction and support on issues such as time management and study techniques. It also raises issues about how well students are prepared for the move from studying at Level 3 to embarking on a programme of Higher Education.

Most students, regardless of their age or their degree of familiarity with a college environment, seem to have made an accurate judgement about their ability to cope with higher level study. Only a minority (17%) said that the work was harder than they had anticipated.

So far is your HE course	Frequency	%
Harder than you expected?	71	16.6
<i>Takes up more time than you expected?</i>	140	32.6
Requires you to study more on your own?	218	50.8
Total	429	100.0

Does your course encourage you to draw on your real life experiences?

70% of students from all backgrounds report that their course encourages them to draw on real life experiences. New entrants were particularly keen to evidence this, with over 100 giving examples of how their current and past experiences were used to the benefit of themselves and their peers.

“I have spent 20 years in the industry. This has enabled me to bring real life practice into the course.”

“I work in the profession which I’m studying.”

“Art is a very personal subject and without the input of our real life experiences it would lack body and essence.”

Continuing students stressed the value of live briefs, which often involved the challenge of solving a real-time problem in a commercial business within a specific time frame.

Hours of attendance

The majority of students (61%) spend up to fifteen hours per week in college. A significant proportion, (27) spend up to a further five hours per week. The survey did not distinguish between classroom based subjects, such as business studies and applied subjects such as Art and Design. Further work may thus need to be done on this aspect of HE in FE before definitive conclusions can be reached.

I attend College for	Frequenc y	%
Up to 15 hours per week	262	61.1
Between 15 and 20 hours per week	115	26.8
Over 20 hours per week	52	12.1
Total	429	100.0

These hours compare very favourably with the university-based student workloads set out in a recent report by HEPI⁴

Part time work/hours worked

Over half the students (57%) in the survey undertake part time employment whilst studying Full Time. Of those individuals, 53% work for more than 16 hours per week. Strikingly, a higher proportion of 18-24 students (58.3%) confirmed that they worked on a part-time basis in comparison with 25+ students (55.0%)

However, students entering the college without having studied there before (and hence usually after a break in study) report a higher incidence of significantly longer working hours (35% compared with 21% in progressing students).

This has implications for colleges in their approach to course design and delivery. Facilitating part time employment by flexible course design may help and encourage some learners to participate. It may also promote employability and time management skills. On the other hand, it may need to be appropriately managed to ensure that

⁴ The Academic Experience of Students in English Universities: 2013 Report. Which? and HEPI May 2013.

students are aware of the demands of study and plan their lives accordingly (see earlier section).

Preference for Part time study?

Across the whole sample, 80% of those responding said they chose to study Full Time, indicating that this approach to higher level study was a first choice for them. However, amongst students entering the college for the first time, a higher proportion (23%, compared to 11% of continuing students) indicated that they would have preferred a Part Time route.

Relevance to work

A large proportion of FT students (65%) indicated that their course was either very relevant or essential to their work and career. This may suggest that course of study and qualification are closely linked in students' minds to their future prospects. It has relevance for the perceived work-relatedness of the curriculum and the destinations of successful students. Essentially students regard their course and qualification as a means to an end (e.g., better employment prospects) and may attribute less importance to the intrinsic value of study.

The responses of some students suggested that they were following a nominally FT course but still working long hours outside of their college life.

Relevance of the course to work	Frequency	%
Very relevant to the work I do	132	30.8
Not related to what I do	101	23.5
Provides useful background to my job	50	11.7
Essential if I am to progress in my career	146	34.0
Total	429	100.0

Course fee

As might be expected, very few students believed that their course fee was too low. Just over 44% considered that the fee charged was too high whilst 55% believed the fee to be about right. Within this, a higher proportion of new entrants to the college were of the view that their course fees were too high, perhaps reflecting higher expectations.

Is the course fee	Frequency	%
Too High?	191	44.5
Too Low?	2	.5
About Right	236	55.0
Total	429	100.0

Given concerns within colleges over fee levels and their impact on recruitment, this may appear to be an anomalous result. However, the sample contains students drawn from across three years of study during which period the approach to funding shifted fundamentally. Fees are in most cases higher for first year students and they receive loan funding via the SLC. Students in their second and third years enrolled at a time when fees were lower but they were also able to draw down student loans.

Further analysis was undertaken to determine any differences in response by year of enrolment. Contrary to expectations, this suggested that the responses of current first year students vary only slightly from those in their second and third years of study – and not necessarily in the way that may have been expected. Further details are provided in the Addendum to this report.

What would help you to learn better?

As in our companion study of Part Time students, those on Full Time HE programmes believed that their learning could be improved by *increasing the number of taught contact hours, more individual tutor support and more time for private study*. It is notable that these preferences were similar for both groups- new entrants gave a Rank 1 to more class contact hours (29%), 2 to private study time (16.4%) and 3 to individual study support (25.3%). Continuing students favoured more class contact hours (31.1%), private study time (14.8%) and individual study support (24.7%).

What would help you to learn better?	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank3
More class contact hours	131 (30.5)	81 (18.9)	65 (15.2)
More private study time at college	66 (15.4)	58 (13.5)	63 (14.7)
More evening or weekend sessions	12 (2.8)	15 (3.5)	21 (4.9)
More on line or distance learning	44 (10.3)	50 (11.7)	53 (12.4)
More individual study support from my tutors	107 (24.9)	92 (21.4)	61 (14.2)
Summer schools or other more intensive periods of study	18 (4.2)	25 (5.8)	31 (7.2)
A less intensive course offered over a longer period of time	24 (5.6)	22 (5.1)	18 (4.2)
A shorter duration course eg three years study in two	25 (5.8)	40 (9.3)	37 (8.6)
Missing	2 (0.5)	46 (10.7)	80 (18.6)

There was little enthusiasm for either shorter cycle provision (three year programmes delivered over two years) or extended provision. Most students seem to accept the traditional two (Fd/HND) or three year delivery model (Hons). Similarly, study outside the standard working or college week at weekends, evenings or via summer schools was not considered desirable. Online or distance learning received an equally low level of enthusiasm.

This response was partly heralded by the review of the Online Learning Task Force in 2011. Writing in “Collaborate to Compete” the Task Force team were keen to promote online learning, but very much aware that it had to be part of a suitably-resourced and strategic decision on the part of an HE provider:

“Students do not expect online learning to be a poor substitute for other forms of provision. They want it to be a way to guarantee quality engagement that comes in addition to time in front of a lecturer. It is a way to ensure that they can study anywhere, and at anytime, which is becoming a more common expectation of students as they study alongside other commitments.”⁵

⁵ Collaborate to Compete. HEFCE 2011.

A more recent commentary⁶, looking at the role of Moocs in the delivery of HE, reflected this view.

“When beginning a new lecture series, I often ask a new group of students how they would like to learn. Would they like me to offer online forums to discuss the course? Perhaps they would like video or audio podcasts, or both, to watch and listen to at their leisure. Teaching through Facebook and Twitter I’ve now added to the list. But the answer, overwhelmingly, - and to my surprise – is that most students prefer to come to a traditional lecture with complementary online material to add to their learning..... So in an age of accelerating technological innovation, the desire of students to come together to listen to a lecturer has to tell us something - that the role of physical universities and face-to-face teaching has a central place, still, in the student experience.”

Taken as a whole, the responses suggest that students are accustomed to and are happy with a more traditional approach to course delivery. Colleges may need to consider how much this reflects innovative approaches to teaching and learning, as well as the approach taken to the use of digital technologies by teaching staff.

Life outside college

Overall 44% of students stated that their course timetable took into account other responsibilities outside college. However this headline figure masks the fact that a large number of other students felt that timetabling arrangements were not tailored to their non-college lives. Surprisingly, the students who continued from an FE course were most likely to think that their HE course interfered with their social lives. Those joining a programme from elsewhere were more content with their study arrangements.

A review of this question by age supported this finding. Students aged 25+ were relatively more satisfied with their timetable (52.4%) compared to 37.5% of 18-24 students. A relatively higher percentage of 18-24 students (33.8%) said that their college work interfered with their social lives more than they had expected, in contrast with 23.8% of mature students who confirmed the same.

In response to this (and to similar areas within this survey) HE teaching staff should explore student expectations about time and intensity of study and organise timetables accordingly.

⁶ FutureLearn and free courses: is this what students really want? Stephen Caddick, The Guardian September 2013.

Your course and your life outside college	Frequency	%
<i>My timetable takes account of the fact that I have other responsibilities</i>	189	44.1
My course tutors do not always take into account the other demands	115	26.8
My college work interferes with my social life more than I expected	125	29.1
Total	429	100.0

Experience at the College

a. *Pre-course course careers guidance*

Overall, just over 50% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed they had received clear and impartial careers advice and guidance before starting the course. However, a significant number, 29%, did not express a view whilst just under 20% disagreed. Those students progressing internally in their college reported a higher use of such services. These students are perhaps better advantaged in terms of pre-course careers guidance: 68% of continuing students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, compared with 44.8% of new entrants

b. *Pastoral support*

Just over half the students who responded to this question stated their agreement or strong agreement about the availability of college based pastoral support. A notable proportion expressed no view (i.e., they neither agreed nor disagreed.)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, a significantly larger number of internally progressing students (67.8%) knew about the availability of this support in contrast to 42.1% of new entrants.

c. *Careers guidance at College*

77.4% of progressing students voiced satisfaction with the careers guidance available to them. This compared to 57% of those entering with the specific intention of

studying HE in the college. Overall, 64% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they had access to good and impartial college-based careers advice.

d. College library

Although Full Time students expressed overall agreement that college libraries are well resourced, a smaller proportion strongly agreed with that proposition than in companion studies of EU/International students and Part Time students carried out as part of the same research project. New entrants were least satisfied. This suggests that some students consider that college libraries could be better equipped to deal with their particular study needs. Whilst 82.9% of directly-progressing students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 68.5% of new entrants agreed or strongly agreed.

In comparison with their opinions on other services, noticeably fewer students selected 'neither agree nor disagree'. This reflects the fact that they may or may not use other services - but the library is crucial for all students.

e. Should there be a separate HE library?

There is strong support (66%) for separate study facilities for college HE students. Similar proportions of 18-24 (67.1%) and of 25+ students (66.7%) confirmed their preference to have a separate library for HE students.

f. Should there be separate academic and social facilities for HE students?

Detailed analysis of this question has proved difficult given that both academic and social facilities are included. However, 71% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this question, suggesting that most Full-time students consider separate facilities for HE students to be desirable

There was little distinction between the responses of older and younger students, suggesting that the need for a separate identity as HE students was shared by all participants.

g. Do you make use of the college's sporting facilities?

Overall, very few students (12.6%) make use of college sporting facilities. Continuing students are more likely to do so than new entrants. Even amongst this group there is less interest than may have been expected, given that they are more familiar with

what has college has to offer and could thus be more likely to spend more time on site. Only 10.6% of new entrants used the college sports facilities.

h. Does the college form an important part of your social life?

Perhaps surprisingly, attendance at college does not form an important part of the Full time student's social life. Overall, only 33% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that this was an important factor in their lives. This was particularly the case for those who had not attended the college previously – only 27.5% of this group agreed or strongly agreed that the college was a focus of their social activity compared with 43% of continuing students

The college seems to play a more important role for 18-24 students. 40% of 18-24 students either agreed or strongly agreed with this statement in comparison with 24.3% students who were aged 25 years or older.

Taken with the previous three responses (e, f, and g), there are clear implications for the facilities colleges provide for their FT HE students and also for the expectations those students have of their life at college.

i. A suitable environment for mature students?

Just under half of all respondents (49%) agreed or strongly agreed with this question. Students entering the college for the first time were slightly less positive. A notable proportion of 25+ students (29.6%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the college offered a suitable environment for mature students with 25% having no particular view.

j. I can make my views about the course known

Both groups of students generally agreed that they were able to make their views known, with continuing students expressing greater satisfaction about this. Again, new entrants were less certain. Only 53% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they could make their views known easily, compared with just over 69% of continuing students.

k. My teachers are supportive

Both categories of student were in agreement that they found their teachers supportive with over 83.4% expressing agreement or strong agreement. Only 6.8% were in disagreement. The same result occurred when the respondents were split by

age: 85% of 18-24 students supported this statement. A slightly smaller proportion of mature students (81.4%) believed that their teachers are supportive but overall the answers to this and subsequent questions concerning teaching skills reflect well on college staff.

l. My tutors are up to date with their subject

A similar proportion of students believed that their tutors are up to date with their subject. 83.7% of all FT students agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, whereas only 6.8% disagreed. A relatively higher percentage of new entrants (8.5%) felt that their tutors were not up to date with their subject compared with 3.4% of direct progressors.

m. My teachers are good teachers

A high proportion (85%) of respondents stated that they had good teachers. Both groups had similar levels of confidence in their teachers. 85.8% of the 18-24 group believed that their tutors are good teachers, whereas 82.5% of the 25+ age group confirmed the same.

n. My tutors are enthusiastic about their subject

A similar proportion agreed that their tutors were enthusiastic about their subject. Overall, 84.9% agreed or strongly agreed with this assertion, with only a very low proportion (4.2%) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

o. I would go to my tutor to discuss a personal problem

Whilst both groups clearly valued the professional expertise of their teachers, a notably smaller percentage (56%) of new entrants said that they would go to their tutor if they needed advice on a personal problem. It was unclear from the responses where such advice would be sought instead, although as most students live at home it could be assumed that they have access to other sources of support.

60.1% students in the 18-24 age group either agreed or strongly agreed that they would go to their tutor if they had a personal problem. A comparable proportion of 25+ students (59.3%) confirmed that they would go to their tutor.

p. Does the student support team offer a good service to older students?

Respondents were also less certain about the support offered to mature students by student support services. Continuing students were more likely to use the service –

49.4% agreed or strongly agreed that the team was helpful to older students – but only 34% of new entrants shared this view.

This may be attributable to the predominance of FT students aged 16-18 in most FE colleges.

q. *The role of the Students Union*

Students Unions do not seem to play an important part in the life of Full time students, with (79.8%) saying that the Student Union was not important to them. Progressing students indicated slightly more involvement; again perhaps attributable to the prior experience those students have of the college and its services.

Split by age, the SU does not play a crucial part in the student experience of either young or mature age groups. Unsurprisingly, a relatively higher proportion of 18-24 year students (22.5%) believed that it was important part of their experience in comparison to 16.4% of mature students.

Perceived benefit from studies

92% of responses indicated that students believed they were benefitting from their studies. Of the minority of students expressing dissatisfaction, most came from new entrants to the college. A total of 23 respondents gave reasons for their view, which included poor value for money (given higher fees), poor course organisation and inadequate pre-course information.

Are you benefiting from your studies?	Frequency	%
Yes	395	92.1
No	27	6.3
Missing	7	1.6
Total	429	100.0

Monitoring of individual progress

Continuing students expressed greater satisfaction (78%) with their involvement in monitoring their own progress than those entering the college for the first time (63%). This may reflect a greater familiarity with college systems and approaches gained in

earlier study. In some cases, the same teachers will teach on both FE and HE courses, thus adding a sense of continuity, albeit that a different style of learning is being undertaken.

Overall experience of HE in FE

72.5% of respondents stated that they found their experience Satisfactory or Very Good. This is slightly lower than is the case amongst Part-time students. New entrants to HE were less likely to say that their experience was Very Good or Satisfactory than continuing students.

Overall Experience	Frequenc y	%
Very Good	168	39.2
Satisfactory	143	33.3
Average	69	16.1
Unsatisfactory	32	7.5
Very Poor	10	2.3
Missing	7	1.6
Total	429	100.0

Would you recommend the college to friends or family?

Similarly, a smaller percentage (58.5%) said they would recommend their friends or family to study at the college, with 27% uncertain. No reasons were sought to explain.

Recommend friends/family?	Frequenc y	%
Yes	251	58.5
Maybe	115	26.8
No	56	13.1
Missing	7	1.6
Total	429	100.0

Does the college offer good value for money?

Although 72% of students overall believed that their course offered good value for money, all students entering the college for the first time were significantly less likely to respond positively (68%) when compared with continuing students (78%). Just over a quarter of all students (27%) did not consider that they received value for money.

Looked at by age, nearly similar proportions of 18-24 (71.3%) and 25+ students (72.5%) indicated that they believed that the college offered them good value for money.

4. Students' Comments

Of the 429 students who made a return, 102 offered further comments at the end of the survey. These, it must be said, came from a small number of colleges and thus may not be representative of Full time students' views as a whole. The comments inevitably reflect the views of those who feel strongly about a particular issue (either in favour of their course and/or their college or wishing to draw attention to perceived failings). The Summary and Discussion sections at the end of this report pick up many of the issues raised in the student comments, but given the concerns across the HE sector about widening participation, fee levels and the development of higher level skills, it is useful to explore some broad themes at this point.

In most cases, the comments related to what was received in return for a course fee. In some cases this had been paid by the students, in others it is a loan from SLC that will be repaid at a future date. First year students faced higher fees than second or third year students. Unusually, when compared to the comments of Part Time students, the Full Time respondents to our survey had a keen and detailed sense of where they perceived there to be failings. Several wrote at length. At times they described a series of weaknesses or oversights which, individually, may have been of little or no concern but cumulatively led the student to conclude that he or she was being asked to pay a large amount of money but not receiving very much in return.

Interestingly, there was a distinction in the comments of those in their First year (and who were faced with repaying a higher fee) and those in their Second or Third years and who had paid lower fees. First year students were more likely to be critical of college delivery arrangements.

The comments fall into five areas:

a. The impact of the FE college environment on HE delivery

In those instances where this was referred to, students were invariably critical. The following comments sum up concerns:

“If the college looked up to date and catered for the mature students as well as the younger ones then it would be more appealing.”

“I would like to see some more support for mature HE foreign students.”

“At present we have to use the same college as the 16-18 year old age group and this presents a multitude of problems. It is annoying when you do have some time during the day to use the library and you can’t find a computer because they are being used for Facebook and some social networking suites. Or you’re trying to work in the “silent study” area and people are chatting loudly on mobile phones or just messing about....”

“Needs to be a clear separation of facilities between FE and HE students.”

These comments reflect similar points made by Part-time students. The preference for separate social and academic facilities for HE students has been mentioned on a number of occasions and reflects a more general discussion within colleges about how best to organise HE in an FE setting.

b. Resource issues

Typical comments are given below:

“Could do with more HE facilities such as computer suites, libraries and printers.”

“Although the library has a copy of most books you need, there are never enough copies and obtaining books can be hard.”

“My studies are undertaken in a building away from the main campus which is not ideal for education. There are no rooms for private study or group work. The computer room is noisy and on site access to books is limited. It is possible to get books sent over from the main campus but without looking at the books it is not always possible to know how useful they will be prior to requesting them. The facilities at the building are more geared around management and conferences and it feels like education there is an afterthought.”

Not all students were critical, however. The student above added:

"I cannot fault the teaching however, and the engagement of the lecturers with students and the topic is fantastic."

Another commented:

"Excellent college with superb study facilities and supportive lecturers and all other staff."

c. Quality of teaching staff

Some students were impressed by their HE tutors and wanted to share the positive experiences that they gained from studying in the college environment:

"I have been very lucky to have had X teach quite a few of my lessons and I view her a shining light at XX College as she has always gone out of her way to help not only myself but other students when they are finding the going tough. What a shame there aren't more tutors about like her. It would make life so much more easier!"

"Two of the tutors on my course are absolutely brilliant and I have felt it was a privilege to be taught by them."

"Love my course and high quality teaching."

Others took the opposite view, citing instances where staff seemed poorly trained, unreliable and disinterested in their students:

"Work needs to be marked quicker, teachers need to be more enthusiastic, assignment due dates need to be spread out."

"We have had many tutors on the course, all with completely different ways of working and marking and only one tutor who I would consider as being captivating. One tutor was clearly unprepared for any of the sessions. I am very happy that I am not paying the full cost of the course because it has simply not been worth the money."

"I would argue that on the whole the college offers good value for money with some select members of the teaching staff going above and beyond for students as well as providing a high level of teaching and guidance. However, in my experience there have been some serious shortfalls in the college's provision of appropriate staff for some of the modules, which has had a profound effect on some individual's grades and confidence."

d. Administrative Matters

Chief amongst these concerns was the time taken to mark and return assignments.

“Work took too long to mark and be handed back to the students meaning there was no time to reflect on advice before the next piece of work was due. I personally felt I was paying a lot of money for poor teaching and could have done better just reading from books at home!! Some of my work was never returned and I was told it had been lost in a departmental move.”

Others were organisational:

“It seems to me that x college does not have any desire to create professional artists, but instead offers too many courses which cause cramped rehearsal conditions and over stretched resources. Imagine having an Alexander lesson (a lesson in meditation and spinal alignment, which we only have for an hour a week) whilst a tap class is in the room above and singing in the adjacent room.”

“One of the reasons I chose this particular course was because one of the modules involved going to Cuba which I feel would have been an exceptional experience. However this never happened. On another module we had to change teachers who used the same Powerpoints from the second year of the degree. They also decided to change how the words were counted for assignments but didn't change the assignment specifications or the amount of credits received for the modules which would have reflected the word count change. I understand why they decided to change the word count but to enforce it on 3rd year students who for the previous two years have written a completely different way and expecting to change their writing style in the year where it all matters seem pretty stupid.”

Some were about what happened after the completion of the course:

“The college should care about opportunities after the course. Eg it could organise specialised job fairs in order for students to improve their chances of getting a relevant job.”

e. Other costs

Cumulatively, a number of other issues led students to feel that they were not receiving value for money. Several mentioned the cost and quality of canteen food. Car parking costs were an irritation – one student remarked that their college had a focus on recruiting local students and thus anyone travelling any distance for a

specialist course had to incur heavy parking costs. Having to pay for printing rankled with many of our respondents, who could not square this with an increased tuition fee. Course costs were also mentioned, e.g.:

“The course is very practical and demands a lot of extra money to be spent on things such as fabric, machine spools and equipment to participate in the lesson such as set squares, tracing wheels, tape measures etc (a lot of equipment goes missing.) On top of that I’m paying for fashion shows and Graduate Fashion week and any trips that may be put on. I sometimes think that if I didn't have financial support from my parents as well as my student loan and my part time job I would struggle to complete this course successfully. My loan mostly goes on petrol as I commute quite far to get to my college and as grants and bursaries count as household income I have never been entitled to any extra support.”

Course content and organisation was also referred to:

“Large loss of staff left current staff over worked and unable to run field trips and teach efficiently. So - fee has gone up but I do not see any of it being spent on the course, or repairing broken tools, dealing with the lack of staff or a return to field trips.”

A more rounded view is probably encapsulated below:

“I love my degree and I like my tutors. Some are more enthusiastic than others. The environment is okay, although one classroom will be the height of technology and the next will be from the 80's and basic. Overall, I believe I chose right in deciding to study at X College. However, as with everything, there are things about the college that I believe need work.”

5. Summary

- A notable proportion of students return to their original FE college for their HE studies. Whilst they may not do this immediately, they are highly likely to consider their college as the location for any future studies.
- College location is the strongest factor underpinning the choice of college for FT students. This is followed by access to their preferred course.
- Friends/family are not influential in student choice.
- The factors that can deter the students from studying FT are broadly financial in nature. High course fees and other associated costs of studying are the strongest factors that affect a student’s choice to pursue HE.

- More class contact hours and more individual study support from tutors are regarded as factors that can help students to learn better. This is supplemented by students spending more time in private study at the college.
- Students are generally satisfied with their teaching. They find their teachers supportive, able, enthusiastic and approachable.
- HE students do not want to share libraries, academic and social spaces with FE students
- The experiences of younger (18-24) and mature (25+) students are similar or comparable. However, colleges should be mindful of the fact that a significant number of 25+ respondents were generally more cautious in their views of the support available to them at their colleges. Older students who were new to the college were more likely to be critical of student support services and the level of support from tutors.
- Given future demographics, this group of students is likely to form an increasing percentage of college intakes. A regular review of their pastoral and academic needs and what is available within the college to address these, may be helpful.

6. Conclusions and Discussion

We give below some questions for colleges and other stakeholders arising from both the analysis of the questionnaire and the student comments.

For Colleges

Does your Full Time HE offer have a distinctive organisation and delivery that is suited to the needs of your students?

- How are classroom delivery and the quality of the student learning experience assessed?
- Is the course organised to suit the needs of learners e.g. does it take into account family responsibilities when timing assessments, particularly around holiday periods?
- Is student feedback timely and suited to the tighter time constraints under which many more mature students work?
- Is sufficient attention paid to course administration? Are changes to course organisation which affect students explained to them?
- When does flexibility become lack of organisation?
- Are staff changes or absences adequately managed?
- Are learning resources including library stock adequate and accessible to students who may wish to use them at times convenient to them?

- Are the different learning and social expectations of students taken into account?
- Are there sufficient resources to deliver a high quality course?
- Is the fee set at a level which both attracts students and guarantees sufficient resource for quality course delivery and resourcing?

For BIS

- If fee levels are a significant disincentive for participation in higher-level study for some groups of students, what can be done to counter this?
- Is the contribution made to economic development and business success by older students returning to study recognised appropriately?
- Is there an appropriate balance between the number of Full and Part Time students?
- Are there appropriate incentives to encourage innovative approaches to higher level skills in the workplace including Higher Apprenticeships and blended learning?

For Employers

- Do your recruitment policies recognise the potential benefits of employing local people with higher level qualifications?
- Do you encourage those you employ to build on their higher level qualifications?

Madeleine King, Dr. Arti Saraswat and John Widdowson, CBE

November 2013

Addendum: The responses of first year students.

Summary

The key differences between those who progressed from an FE course within the same college and those with no prior connection to the college can be summarised as:

- higher overall expectations on the part of new entrants to HE in a college setting;
- a more purposeful approach to learning by this sub group – the course is a means to an end;
- the expectations that this group has of teaching staff are therefore much higher;
- this group puts a higher premium on value for money in terms of the quality of resources available to the HE student;
- there is significant disquiet where HE students are required to share resources and social facilities with FE students.

In this final section of our paper on Full Time students we explore whether First year students, who are subject to the new fees regime, have different views to those subject to the former system of fees. Such students may have a different perspective on many of our questions and may have higher expectations of their course and their teachers as a result of facing a higher level of tuition fee. Those beginning a course in 2012-2013 would have committed to a higher level of fee repayment and also face potentially large amounts of repayable debt on graduation. Would this factor influence their responses to our survey?

The first question that we reviewed by year of enrolment concerned the reason to study at a particular college. The global response to this question had been a clear decision based on location. The responses of First year students were subtly different:

First year - Why did you chose to study HE at your particular HE college	Rank 1	Rank2	Rank3
Location	47 (34.3)	40 (29.2)	21 (15.3)
My friends/family study(ied) here	5 (3.6)	6 (4.4)	14 (10.2)
Reputation of the College	11 (8.0)	22 (16.1)	25 (18.2)
Offered my preferred course of study	53 (38.7)	21 (15.3)	21 (15.3)
Lower fee than other colleges	12 (8.8)	33 (24.1)	21 (15.3)
I've studied for other courses here	9 (6.6)	8 (5.8)	17 (12.4)
Missing		7 (5.1)	18 (13.1)
Total			

Second year- Why did you chose to study HE at your particular HE college	Rank 1	Rank2	Rank3
Location	49 (40.2)	29 (23.8)	32 (26.2)
My friends/family study(ied) here	1 (0.8)	8 (6.6)	13 (10.7)
Reputation of the College	19 (15.6)	15 (12.3)	15 (12.3)
Offered my preferred course of study	33 (27.0)	25 (20.5)	9 (7.4)
Lower fee than other colleges	3 (2.5)	18 (14.8)	19 (15.6)
I've studied for other courses here	16 (13.1)	16 (13.1)	14 (11.5)
Missing	1 (0.8)	11 (9.0)	20 (16.4)
Total			

Final year- Why did you chose to study HE at your particular HE college	Rank 1	Rank2	Rank3
Location	66 (38.8)	48 (28.2)	32 (18.8)
My friends/family study(ied) here	6 (3.5)	11 (6.5)	11 (6.5)
Reputation of the College	17 (10.0)	13 (7.6)	28 (16.5)
Offered my preferred course of study	53 (31.2)	52 (30.6)	23 (13.5)
Lower fee than other colleges	8 (4.7)	20 (11.8)	27 (15.9)
I've studied for other courses here	20 (11.8)	13 (7.6)	22 (12.9)
Missing		13 (7.6)	27 (15.9)
Total			

Second year + Final year- Why did you chose to study HE at your particular HE college	Rank 1	Rank2	Rank3
Location	115 (39.3)	77 (26.3)	64 (21.9)
My friends/family study(ied) here	7 (2.3)	19 (6.5)	24 (8.2)
Reputation of the College	36 (12.3)	28 (9.6)	43 (14.7)
Offered my preferred course of study	86 (29.4)	77 (26.3)	32 (10.9)
Lower fee than other colleges	11 (3.7)	38 (13.0)	46 (15.7)
I've studied for other courses here	36 (12.3)	29 (9.9)	36 (12.3)
Missing	1 (0.3)	24 (8.2)	47 (16.0)
Total			

As indicated in the tables above, 'Location' was offered a Rank 1 by 34.3% of First year students, while 38.8% Second year and Final year students ranked it as 1. 'Preferred course of study' was ranked as number 1 by a higher proportion of Year 1 students (38.7%) than Year 2 and Final year students (31.2%) although a notably higher proportion of Year 2 and Final year students ranked it as Rank 2 (30.6%) than First year students (15.3%) This may imply that those beginning a course in 2011 were more focussed on the usefulness of their qualification in the job market.

Fee sensitivity was relatively more apparent for First year students in terms of their choice of the college. 8.8% of Year 1 students ranked 'lower fee' as Rank 1, while 24.1% of the same year group ranked it as Rank 2. A relatively smaller proportion of Year 2 and Final year students (4.7%) ranked it as Rank 1.

We then looked at why students had chosen a particular course:

Why did you choose your particular course	First year	Second year	Final year	Second + Final year
<i>It was of personal interest to me</i>	91 (66.4)	65 (53.3)	95 (55.9)	160 (54.7)
I have a career plan and the course will help me achieve it	90 (65.7)	82 (67.2)	109 (64.1)	191 (65.4)
It is the natural progression route from my last (FE) course	23 (16.8)	26 (21.3)	33 (19.4)	59 (20.2)
<i>I need something to fill my time and to enable me to meet people</i>	10 (7.3)	4 (3.3)	5 (2.9)	9 (3.0)

Whilst 'personal interest' and 'having a career plan' ranked high for all year groups, 'personal interest' ranks higher for First year students (66.4%) than the Second year + Final year group (54.7%). Nearly similar proportions of First year and Second + Final year students (65.7% and 65.4 % respectively) rated the 'career plan and course contribution' as their rationale for choice of their course. However, fewer First year students saw their course as a natural progression pathway from a previous programme and more were disproportionately interested in the more social benefits of further academic study.

Asked which factors would have dissuaded them from HE, contrary to all expectations a high level of course fee was given a rank of 1 in preventing the students from applying to a HE course by a notably *smaller* proportion of Year 1 students (31.4%) than Year 2 + Final year students (46.2%).

Increased levels of personal debt was rated to be Rank 1 by both First year 1 students (9.5%) and Year 2 + Final year students (9.2%). 'Affording other costs' concerned First year students noticeably more (22.6% ranked it as rank 1) than Year 2+ Final year (15.4% ranked it as rank 1). This suggests that the current First years are very aware of the total financial burden facing them when they embark on a course of HE and of their need to plan accordingly.

Continuing this theme, we then analysed the relative percentages of students in each year who were working part time whilst studying a Full Time course.

First year-undertake part time work whilst studying?	Frequency	%
Yes	68	49.6
No	69	50.4
Total	137	100.0

Second year-undertake part time work whilst studying	Frequency	%
Yes	63	51.6
No	59	48.4
Total	122	100.0

Final year-undertake part time work whilst studying	Frequency	%
Yes	113	66.5
No	57	33.5
Total	170	100.0

Contrary to expectations, a significantly higher percentage of Second and Final year students (60.2) confirmed that they undertake part-time work whilst studying than First year students (49.6). Of those who confirmed that they work on a part-time basis, it appears that a higher proportion of those in Year 2 and Final year (32.53%) work for over 16 hours per week in comparison with 24.8% of First year students.

This may suggest that First year students, having committed to a high level of potential debt, are intent on achieving academic success. The point of enrolling and taking on the debt burden is to obtain a higher qualification and with it the opportunity that this brings for personal and economic benefit. Working part time may be perceived as a threat to this success.

Asked if their course fee was too high, the year groups replied as follows:

First year- my course fee is	Frequency	Percent
Too High	80	58.4
About Right	57	41.6
Total	137	100.0

Second year-my course fee is	Frequency	Percent
Too High	44	36.1
About Right	78	63.9
Total	122	100.0

Final year-my course fee is	Frequency	Percent
Too High	67	39.4
Too Low	2	1.2
About Right	101	59.4
Total	170	100.0

Unsurprisingly, a higher proportion of Year 1 students believed that their fee is too high (58.4%) in contrast with 38% Year 2+ Final year students.

We analysed the responses of both groups to the question concerning their overall experience at their college.

First year- overall experience of studying HE	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	54	39.4
Satisfactory	50	36.5
Average	21	15.3
Unsatisfactory	6	4.4
Very Poor	3	2.2
Missing	3	2.2
Total	137	100.0

Second year- overall experience of studying HE	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	59	48.4
Satisfactory	34	27.9
Average	16	13.1
Unsatisfactory	8	6.6
Very Poor	2	1.6
Missing	3	2.5
Total	122	100.0

Final year- overall experience of studying HE	Frequency	Percent
Very Good	55	32.4
Satisfactory	59	34.7
Average	32	18.8
Unsatisfactory	18	10.6
Very Poor	5	2.9
Missing	1	.6
Total	170	100.0

Similar proportions of First year (39.4%) and Year 2 + Final year students (39.0%) rated their overall experience to be very good. A relatively higher proportion of Year 2 + Final year students (11.3%) rated their experience to be dissatisfactory or very poor in comparison with 6.6% Year 1 students.

A similar pattern was found in response to the question asking if the student would recommend the college to their friends and family:

First year- recommend friends/family members	Frequency	Percent
Yes	84	61.3
Maybe	37	27.0
No	13	9.5
Missing	3	2.2
Total	137	100.0

Second year- recommend friends/family members	Frequency	Percent
Yes	77	63.1
Maybe	30	24.6
No	12	9.8
Missing	3	2.5
Total	122	100.0

Final year- recommend friends/family members	Frequency	Percent
Yes	90	52.9
Maybe	48	28.2
No	31	18.2
Missing	1	.6
Total	170	100.0

We then looked at whether or not their course was considered good value for money:

First Year- College offers good value for money	Frequency	Percent
True	101	73.7
False	33	24.1
Missing	3	2.2
Total	137	100.0

Second year- College offers good value for money	Frequency	Percent
True	88	72.1
False	31	25.4
Missing	3	2.5
Total	122	100.0

Final year- College offers good value for money	Frequency	Percent
True	119	70.0
False	50	29.4
Missing	1	.6
Total	170	100.0

Contrary to all expectations, a slightly higher proportion of First year students (73.7%) said that their college offered them good value for their money than Year 2 + Final year students (70.9%)

Asked how they funded their studies, the three groups responded as follows

How did you fund your course	First Year (Frequency and percentage of first year students)	Second Year (Frequency and percentage of second year students)	Final Year (Frequency and percentage of final year students)
Entirely Self funded	10 (7.3)	12 (9.8)	15 (8.8)
Family	18 (13.1)	15 (12.3)	16 (9.4)
Bank Loan	2 (1.5)	1 (0.8)	3 (1.8)
National Scholarship	2 (1.5)	0	1 (0.6)- ?
Sponsorship	3 (2.2)	7 (5.7)	16 (9.4)
Personal Loan/Borrowings	1 (0.7)	2 (1.6)	0
Maintenance Grant	65 (47.4)	46 (37.7)	64 (37.6)
Loan from SLC	114 (83.2)	94 (77.0)	123 (72.4)

NB: 25 final year, 10 second year and 8 first year students chose Other funding (which in most cases meant part-self funded through their full time or part time employment and in some cases being funded by the employer or some form of bursary).

Loans from the SLC was the most substantial source of funding for all groups. 83.2% of First year students funded their studies through a loan from the SLC, whereas 217 (74.3%) of Second + Final year students funded their studies through SLC loans. Families were cited as a source of funding support by significantly more First year students than those in other years.

In terms of how their experience of HE matched their expectations, comparable proportions of Year 1 (32.8%) and Second + Final year students (32.5%) believed that their studies take up more time than they expected. A relatively higher proportion of Second + Final year students (17.5%) in comparison with Year 1 (14.6%) believed that their studies were harder than they had expected.

This suggests that those joining HE in 2012 are well aware of the level of work expected of them and have made a considered judgement to invest in higher level study.

There was no significant difference in the perceived benefit of their studies between the three year groups:

First year- benefiting from your studies?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	127	92.7
No	7	5.1
Missing	3	2.2
Total	137	100.0

Second year benefiting from your studies?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	114	93.4
No	5	4.1
Missing	3	2.5
Total	122	100.0

Final year- benefiting from your studies?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	154	90.6
No	15	8.8
Missing	1	.6
Total	170	100.0

Nearly similar proportions of Year 1 and Year 2 + Final year students (92% app) said that they were benefiting from their studies.

Conclusions

The First year group was the first cohort of HE students to experience the new funding arrangements. As such their views may be coloured by the national debate that is going on around them concerning both the level of HE fees and the payment mechanism chosen by Government. Their responses must thus be considered as early indicators, to be tested as the new system develops. However, from these early responses it may be concluded that:

- Students may become increasingly concerned at the value their qualification carries in the job market
- They will seek “value for money” defined in terms of good teaching, effective support and success rate
- They expect their course to be well-organised and adapted to meet students’ needs

In return, students come prepared for study and expect to work hard.