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Preface

We start this issue with a substantial piece of research based on the findings from the undergraduate Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaires for 2019 and 2021, by Michelle Morgan of the University of East London. The paper looks at the difference between A-level and BTEC students on entry to university, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a lengthy paper with a rich amount of data

Our second contribution is rather different. Professor Margaret Clark OBE looks back over a long career of over half a century working and studying language in the early years. A critic of the Government's obsession with synthetic phonics as the only way to teach reading, she fears that the lessons learned decades ago are now being forgotten.

Elizabeth Ellis of Arden University is concerned that education is still failing students because of the use of debunked learning styles.

Elizabeth Pearce, Head of Education at BenQ, explores the revolutionising of modern teaching with AI technology. While there are dangers, she sees the adaptation of AI in education as bringing a multitude of benefits to both students and teachers. By effectively using AI, educational leaders can drastically improve educational outputs by harnessing innovation, teaching and learning practices, as well as accelerate students' academic progress as revealed by a recent report from UNESCO.

Because of limitations of space, there is room for only two select committee reports in this issue. They cover the appointment of the new HMCI and a special report giving the Government's response to the Education Committee's report on childcare and the early years.

Demitri Coryton
Editor

Michelle Morgan,

Prior learning experience, study expectations of A-Level and BTEC students on entry to university and the impact of COVID-19. Findings from the undergraduate Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire 2019 and 2021

By Michelle Morgan
Office for Institutional Equity, University of East London

Dr Michelle Morgan *is a Student Experience Transitions Specialist across all levels of study and is extensively published in the area. She is currently Dean of Students at the University of East London. Michelle is a Principal Fellow of the HEA, Fellow of the AUA , an elected council member of UKCGE and Student Minds Mental Health Charter Assessor. During her varied career, Michelle has been a faculty manager, lecturer, researcher and academic manager.*

Key words: COVID-19, BTEC, A-Levels, qualifications, gender, minority ethnic, sexuality, disabled.

Abstract: *COVID-19 disrupted all aspects of society, and student transitions to higher education were not protected from this impact. The pandemic extended health, economic, social, and educational inequalities across the UK, and we experienced considerable impact across the learning eco-system. As we aim to support all learners into, through and beyond the university experience, it is essential to look at applicants' intentions to study through this contextual lens, and to consider the impact of the pandemic and the cost of living crisis alongside other key learning and life experiences.*

The leap in learning and personal development between school, college and higher education can be enormously rewarding, but is also a transition beset with a variety of challenges. We know that early experiences of higher education can be somewhat uneven, and that this can

be impacted by level and mode of prior study and a range of personal and contextual factors. More than ever, if we are to keep students (prospective and current) engaged in their learning, improve and support their experience, it is essential that we understand prior learning experiences, student study expectations and financial, emotional or personal concerns.

At this particular moment in time, it is important to identify the disruption and ongoing impact to learning, teaching and assessment caused by the pandemic in school and college, and classify any specific gaps resultant from students following different learning pathways as they enter university study. In addition, in light of Level 3 qualification reforms in the UK (that will result in the defunding of some BTECs from 2025), it is important to develop a thorough understanding of the needs of learners with different entry qualifications; this level of contextual understanding will help us to meet the needs of today's learners whilst identifying any longer term impact of the impending reforms.

This report investigates and compares the prior learning experiences, impact of COVID-19 and expectations of A-Level and BTEC students on entry to university across two surveys undertaken between 2019 and 2021. The participating UK-based institutions were the Universities of Bournemouth (2019), Leeds Beckett and East London (2021). Data was collected via the pre-arrival academic questionnaire.

The report highlights the consistency of experience by qualification across both surveys. The report also identifies learning differences experienced by students during the pandemic and compares the learning experience of those who had completed their studies prior to it.

It suggests actions for consideration by institutions seeking to address the challenges and the pressures that students and staff are likely to face during the learning journey. The report is arranged in themed sections to enable easy identification of areas of individual interest. I am sure that colleagues will find this report an exceptionally useful reference point, with the potential to inform institutional and national policy.

Part 1 Overview of A-Level and BTEC Qualifications

What is an A-Level?

An 'advanced level' or A-Level is a qualification offered across a range of subjects to (usually aged 16-18 years old), graded A*-E. A-Levels are studied across two years. They are sometimes described as 'linear' because final A-Level grades are determined by final exam results at the end of Year 13. To take A-Levels, at least five GCSEs at grades 9 to 4/A* to C and at least grade 6 in the specific subject(s) studied are needed. AS-Levels have been decoupled from A-Levels so very few students today undertake this qualification.

What is a BTEC?

A BTEC is a vocational qualification studied at school or college. They tend to be work-related and are ideal for any student who prefers more practical-based learning. BTEC qualifications enable continuation into further study at university or the workforce. There are three types of BTEC levels.

Level 1 BTEC Introductory – equivalent to GCSEs.
Level 2 BTEC First – equivalent to GCSEs.
Level 3 BTEC National – equivalent to A-Levels.
Level 4 BTEC Higher National Certificate (HNC) hold the same status of achievement as completing the first year of an undergraduate degree.
Level 5 BTEC Higher National Diploma (HND) hold the same status of achievement as completing the second year of an undergraduate degree.

How are A-Level's and BTECs assessed?

There are differences in the way BTECs and A-Levels are assessed. A-Levels mainly involve two years of study with assessments at the end of the course. The pre-2016 BTECs were assessed through coursework and practical projects. The post-2016 BTECs usually contain 30-40% of external

assessment.

How are A-Levels and BTECs graded?

A-Levels are graded from A* to E. BTECs are graded on a scale from Starred Distinction (D*) to Pass (P). The grading scales for both are listed below along with the UCAS point equivalent. For note: The BTEC table relates to the Extended Certificate size (one A-Level equivalent size). There are actually five sizes of BTEC at Level 3, ranging from an AS to 3 A-Level equivalent in size, with the two and three A-Level equivalents grading featuring double and triple grading scales respectively, e.g. D*D*, D*D*D*.

A-Level BTEC

A*=56 Starred Distinction/Distinction Star (D*) = 56

A =48 Distinction (D) = 48

B =40

C =32 Merit (M) = 32

D =24

E =16 Pass (P) =16

In terms of UCAS points, a Distinction* (D*) in BTEC is worth the same UCAS points as an A*, and a BTEC Merit is the same UCAS points as a C. Some universities make offers in terms of grades rather than UCAS points. In some cases, universities might require higher BTEC grades than their typical A-Level offer and the equivalent UCAS points. [1]

Domiciled and gender characteristics of those undertaking A-Level and BTEC qualifications

Since 2012, 18 year old UK domicile applications to the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) for study in higher education (HE) have increased across all qualification groups (see Table 1). Between 2012 and 2021, applications of those with A-Level only have increased by 6.7%, those who hold BTECs only by 34.8% and those holding A-Levels and BTEC by 124.0%. Those holding Other qualifications has increased by 60.0%. It is important to note that BTEC students are more likely to be 19 years old at the point of application

so a significant proportion will not be represented in the UCAS statistics.

All UCAS applications

Of all applications in 2012, the proportion of those holding A-Levels only accounted for 65.1%, BTEC only was 9.0%, A-Level and BTEC 4.5% and Other was 13.2%. In 2021, the proportion of all applications holding A-Levels only reduced in number and accounted for 57.3%, BTEC only increased slightly to 10.0%, A-Level and BTEC increased to 8.3% and Other increased to 17.4%.

Table 1 All UK 18 year old UCAS applications by qualification held

Qualification Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
A-level only	169,655	168,125	165,640	170,055	169,710	170,165	165,085	163,095	168,085	181,080
BTEC only	23,610	25,935	29,705	31,630	30,245	30,335	26,980	25,715	28,200	31,830
A-Level and BTEC	11,805	13,915	16,590	18,890	20,525	21,550	19,365	20,350	22,905	26,445
SQA only	18,385	187,400	18,705	18,855	18,670	18,180	17,580	17,075	16,660	18,880
IB only	2,390	2,170	2,330	2,330	2,370	2,470	2,340	2,495	2,505	2,715
Other	34,510	34,305	35,785	37,605	39,520	39,680	46,185	52,355	51,150	55,250
Total	**260,360**	**262,850**	**268,760**	**279,365**	**281,035**	**282,380**	**277,530**	**281,080**	**289,510**	**316,200**

(SQA= Scottish Qualifications Authority; IB= International Baccalaureate; Other= any mix of qualifications listed)
Source: UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS

In 2021, the domicile status of applicants undertaking BTEC only accounted for 10.9% in England, 9.5% in Wales, 7.0% in Northern Ireland and 0.02% in Scotland.

When examined by gender, there has been a similar increase across all qualifications between 2012 and 2021. The applications from those who identified as male and female holding A-Levels only were similar with 7.4% and 6.2% respectively. However, the notable differences were the proportion of males who held BTEC only qualifications which increased by 39.4%, and those who held both A-Levels and BTEC that increased by 110.0% for males and 135.1% for females.

Accepted applications

In 2012, A-Levels only accounted for 69.9% of all accepted applications, BTEC only was 8.7%, A-Level and BTEC 3.9% and Other by 10.1% (see Table 2). By 2021, A-Levels only acceptances reduced to 58.6% as other qualifications increased. BTEC only increased slightly to 9.7%, A-Level and BTEC increased to 8.4% and Other qualifications increased to 17.4%. The acceptances by qualification and gender were similar.

Table 2 All UK 18 year old UCAS acceptances by qualification held

Qualification Group	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
A-level only	145,520	147,075	144,840	149,760	150,305	151,240	146,810	145,155	152,495	161,355
BTEC only	18,220	20,685	24,060	25,965	25,100	25,170	22,825	21,895	24,665	26,830
A-Level and BTEC	9,830	11,795	14,285	16,295	17,830	18,755	16,870	17,855	20,520	23,245
SQA only	13,615	13,705	13,780	13,850	14,045	13,985	14,075	13,545	14,230	15,890
IB only	2,045	1,835	2,030	2,020	2,060	2,160	2,050	2,200	2,250	2,385
Other	22,880	24,225	25,560	27,470	29,595	30,275	35,745	40,865	43,730	45,535
Total	**212,105**	**219,320**	**224,555**	**235,355**	**238,940**	**241,585**	**238,380**	**241,515**	**257,895**	**275,235**

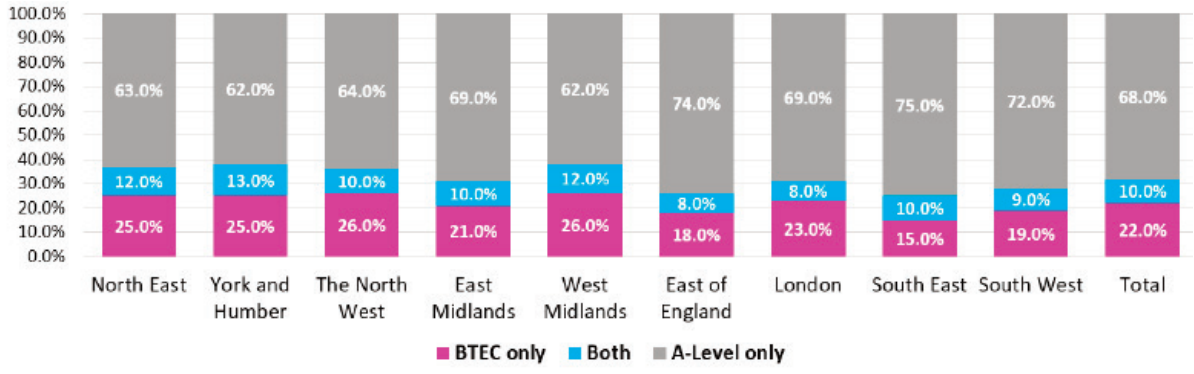
(SQA= Scottish Qualifications Authority; IB= International Baccalaureate; Other= any mix of qualifications listed)
Source: UCAS Undergraduate sector-level end of cycle data resources 2021 | Undergraduate | UCAS

Acceptances by region

The national average of students accepted into university having only studied BTECs in 2016 was 22.0% (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018). When acceptances were examined by region, students with a BTEC only qualification are less likely to be accepted by universities in the East and South East of England (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018). In the northern regions (the North East, Yorkshire and the Humber, the North West) and the West Midlands, the largest proportion of students were accepted to university with a BTEC with a quarter holding BTEC only qualifications.

Ethnic, parental occupational background and polar quintile characteristics of those undertaking A-Level and BTEC qualifications.

Figure 1 Acceptances by region



Source: SMF analysis of UCAS End of Cycle 2016 data cited in Gicheva and Petrie (2018) (p14)

Ethnic characteristics

In 2020, over 45,000 18-year-old students entered higher education with BTECs only or A-Levels and BTECs (Atherton, 2021). Of the 18-year-old black students, 33.0% entered higher education with either BTECs or A-Levels and BTECs (see Table 3). For 18 year old Asian students, it was 24.0% compared to 21.0% of white students. The proportion of black students entering higher education with BTECs only was nearly twice that of white students (Atherton, 2021). This finding has also been found in other studies (e.g. Hayward and Hoelscher, 2011).

Parental occupational background characteristics

Ongoing research highlights that 'socio-economic disadvantage continues to be the most significant driver of inequality in terms of access to and outcomes from higher education' (Social Mobility Advisory Group, 2016 cited in Gicheva and Petrie, 2018). Gicheva and Petrie state that defining what 'working class' comprises is difficult due to the data available, and that the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC occupational) categories do not cover all groupings (Gicheva and Petrie, 2018). For the purpose of Figure 2, the categories 5-7 (Lower Supervisory and Technical Occupations, Semi-routine Occupations, Routine Occupations)

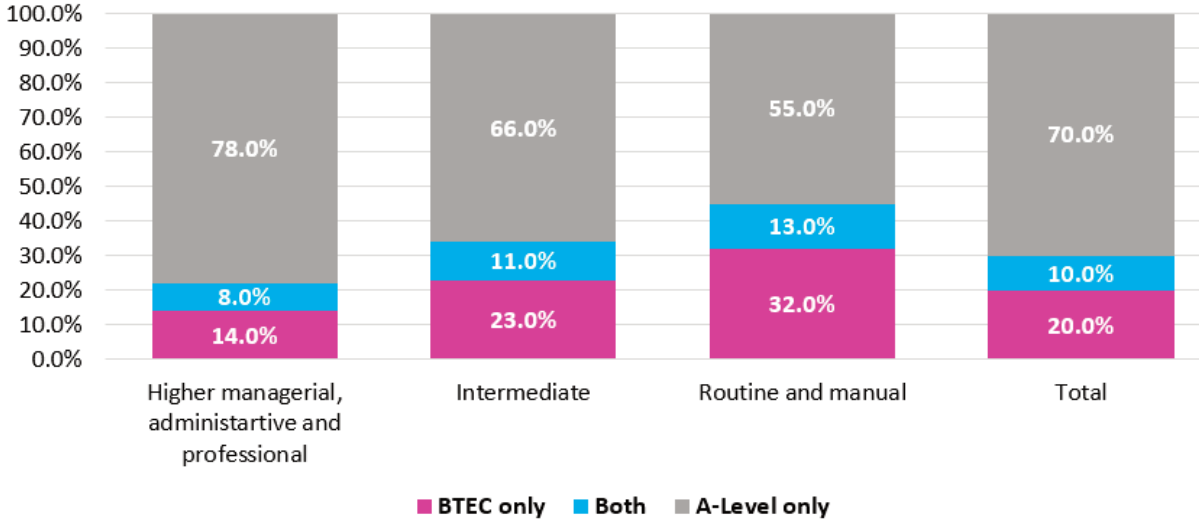
have been merged to create the 'Routine and Manual' group.

Table 3 %of students entering higher education in 2020 by ethnic group and qualification

Qualification	Black	Asian	White
A-Level	67.0%	76.0%	79.0%
BTEC	***21.0%***	***14.0%***	***11.0%***
A-Level and BTEC	*12.0%*	*10.0%*	*10.0%*
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Atherton, 2021 (p8)

Figure 2 Highlights that the more manual the parental occupation, the more likely applicants are to go to university holding BTEC only qualifications. Applicants from a routine and manual back ground are most likely to hold both an A-level and BTEC.



Source: SMF analysis of UCAS End of Cycle 2016 data cited in Gicheva and Petrie (2018) (p15)

Research by Myhill looking at HESA data identifies that students holding BTEC qualifications are less likely to study at Russell Group universities and more likely to attend

institutions of low tariff providers (Myhill, 2020).

Polar quintile characteristics

The impact of socio-economic background on polar quintile measure is also pronounced. In 2020, of the 29,020 18-year-old students who entered higher education from the lowest participation neighbourhood quintile (PQ 1), 30.0% entered with either BTECs only or A-Levels and BTECs. The percentage of these students entering higher education with these qualifications has fluctuated between 25.0% and 30.0% since 2011 (Atherton, 2021). The research is based on the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) legacy BTECs and not the reformed 2016 ones.

Table 4 highlights that around a quarter of students entering HE in 2019 from the lower participation neighbourhoods entered with either BTECs only or A-Levels and BTECs. This proportion drops to less than 10.0% for those from the neighbourhoods where participation is the highest (Atherton, 2021). This finding has been reflected in previous research (e.g. Shields and Masardo, 2015).

Table 4 % of students entering HE with BTECs or A-Levels/BTECs by POLAR quintile 2020

Polar Quintile	% of BTEC only or A-Level and BTEC
1	30.0%
2	23.0%
3	21.0%
4	17.0%
5	10.0%

(Polar Quintile 1 = poorest quintile, Polar Quintile 5 – least poor quintile)

Source: Atherton, 2021 (p7)

Table 5 shows both the numbers of students entering HE from low participation neighbourhoods since 2011 and the percentage of these students who enter with BTECs, and A-Levels and BTECs (Atherton, 2021). It highlights that there has

been steady but gradual progress in the numbers entering HE from the lowest participation neighbourhoods.

Table 5 Students from POLAR 1 quintile entering HE via BTEC or A-Level and BTEC

Year	Polar 1 Quintile	BTEC and or A-Level and BTEC	% of BTEC and or A-Level and BTEC
2012	20,230	4,915	24.0%
2013	20,845	5,495	26.0%
2014	23,225	6,830	29.0%
2015	24,730	7,430	30.0%
2016	24,980	7,445	29.0%
2017	25,800	7,545	29.0%
2018	25,310	6,800	27.0%
2019	26,445	6,660	26.0%
2020	28,885	7,400	26.0%

Source: Atherton, 2021 (p8)

Across all measures of disadvantage, BTEC qualifications are an important route enabling individuals to access higher education from low participation areas and low socio-economic backgrounds.

Continuation and completion rates of A-level and BTEC entrants in HE

The statistical data used in the research by Dilnot et al. (2021) reported in Table 6 is from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) along with seven universities who provided datasets of the entry qualifications and outcomes of their students (including results of modules). Although the data shows that those who entered university with BTECs only or combinations were more likely to drop out and graduate below a 2.1, the authors state that the overwhelming majority do not dropout or repeat, and do graduate with at least a 2.1. The research is based on the QCF BTEC legacy and not the

post 2016 reformed qualification.

When examined by continuation and completion rates, Table 6 shows that around 8.0% of the sample of first years in 2021 dropped out before the start of their second year. This equates to just under 5.0% of those with A-Levels only, but nearly four times for those BTECs only with 17.8%. The rates of repetition of the first year by BTEC students are three times higher than for A-Levels. Among those graduating, just under 20.0% overall graduate below a 2:1. However, students who entered with BTECs only were two and a half times more likely to with 40.0% compared to A-Level entrants with 15.0%. Those with less suitable A-Levels were more likely to drop out or graduate below a 2.1, but this was not significant (Dilnot et al., 2021). This pattern has been reflected in previous research (e.g. HEFCE, 2013, Rouncefield-Swales, 2014).

Office for Students Dashboard launched November 2022

In November 2022, the Office for Students launched three new Dashboards of data. One was the Entry qualification and subject data dashboard. This dashboard shows sector-level outcomes information for UK-domiciled undergraduate students for qualifications on entry to higher education, and their subject of study. Diagrams 1 and 2 represent the continuation data of full time students between 2015/16 and 2019/20. They show the consistent pattern of continuation across the entry qualifications. BTEC only students are the least likely to progress in their studies year on year.

Choice of related A-Level and BTEC subjects for ten popular degree courses generally not requiring the related entry subject

The ten popular degree subjects examined by Dilnot et al. (2021) in the research were accounting, business, computer science, law, media studies, psychology, sociology, sports science, nursing, drama. Dropout proportions varied considerably across subjects. For example, 6.6% in psychology to 13.4% in computing and 14.8% in sports science.

Table 6 Outcomes, achievement, and social background by qualification

	All level 3 qualifications	A-level only	Mixed A-level and BTECs	BTECs only	Other academic	Access	Other L3 including other mixtures
First years							
N	743,900	518,710	54,530	115,850	8,355	1,685	43,260
Dropout %	7.6[11]	4.6	9.9	17.8	3.9	19.4	13.6
Repeats %	4.3	2.8	5.5	9.6	2.7	13.5	6.9
GCSE points	427	470	360	304	445	261	329
Total L2 points	534	554	521	471	516	403	493
Mean SES quintile	3.2	3.5	2.7	2.5	4.2	2.4	2.6
Non White %	26.5	23.9	29.7	34.8	21.7	37.0	31.1
Female %	55.6	57.3	56.2	49.1	52.5	65.9	53.5
Graduates							
N	614,580	460,245	35,935	71,420	6,860	2,360	36,345
Graduating below 2:1 %	19.8	14.9	29.0	39.5	11.4	36.5	33.8
GCSE points	439	475	358	309	485	278	331
Total L2 points	542	558	535	476	541	374	494
Mean SES quintile	3.3	3.5	2.7	2.6	4.2	2.5	2.7
Non White %	23.5	21.9	27.6	29.6	19	27.4	27.6
Female %	56.6	57.5	56.8	52.2	52.6	67.7	54.4

Source: Dilnot et al., 2021 (p24)

For A-Levels, the authors found:

- For all of these degree subjects, having the related A-Level rather than any other A-Level was beneficial in terms of lower associations with chances of dropping out, repeating or graduating below a 2:1. For example, three quarters of those first years studying psychology had psychology A-Level, but only 11% of those studying for an accounting degree had an A-Level in accounting.

- For dropout, having the related A-Level for computing,

Diagram 1 Fulltime continuation in 2015/16 and 2017/18

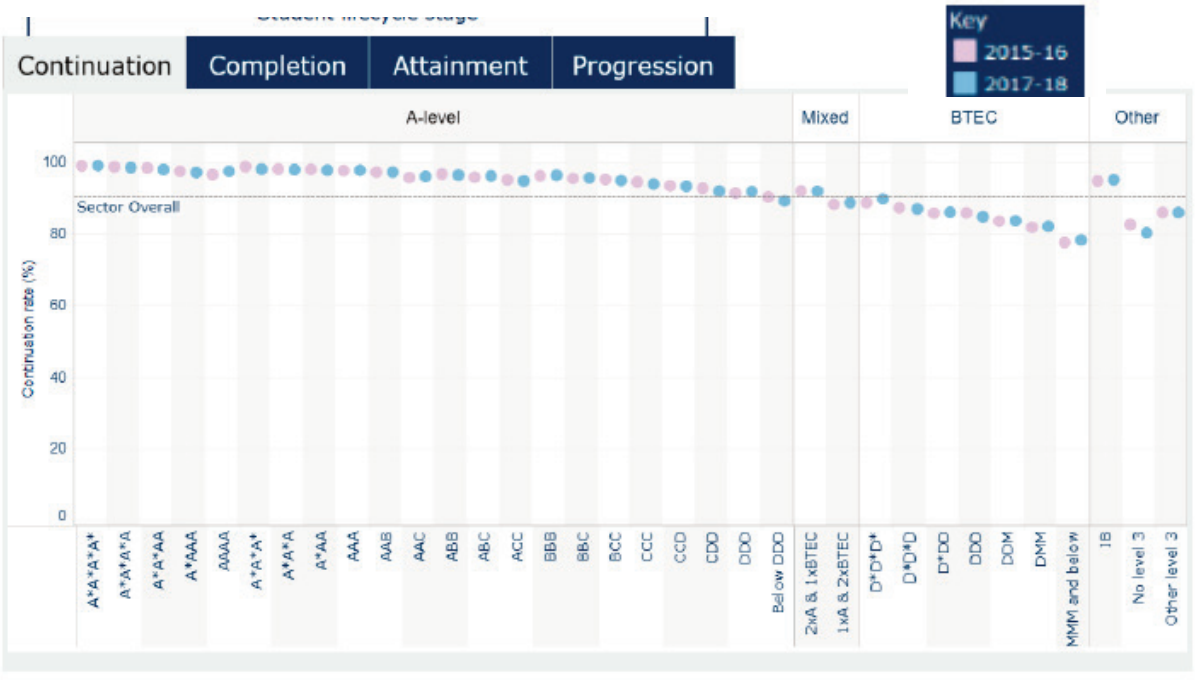
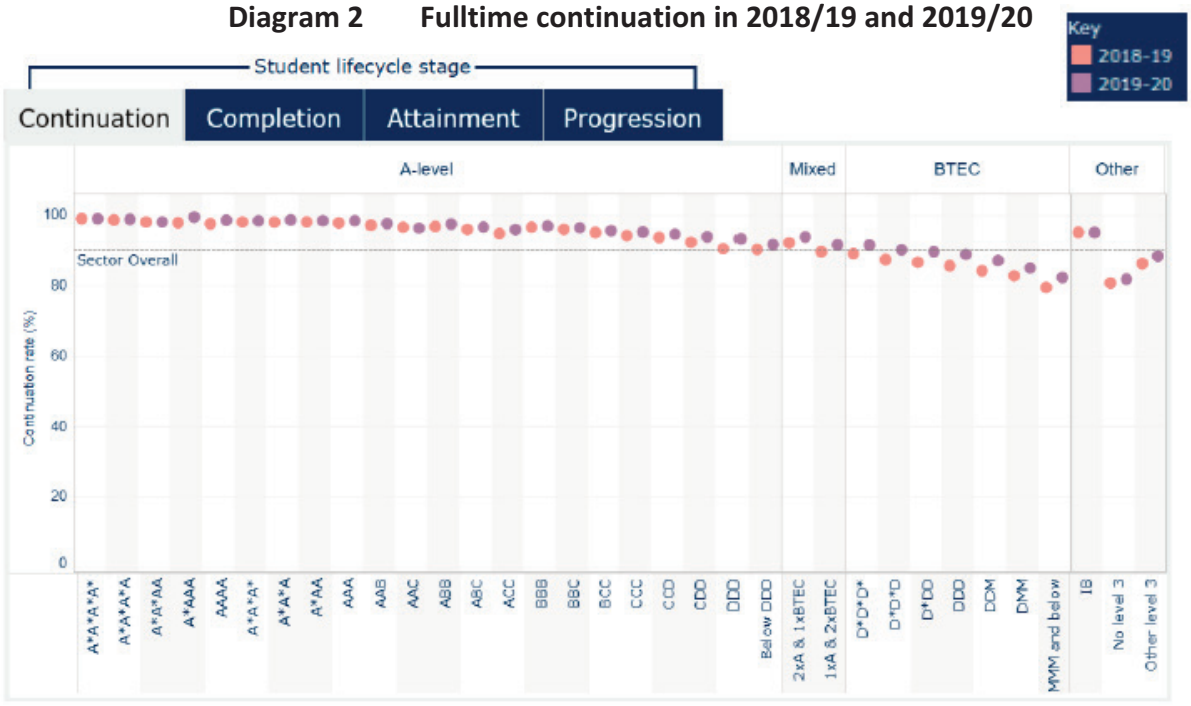


Diagram 2 Fulltime continuation in 2018/19 and 2019/20



Source: for Diagram 2: OfS, 2022a Student characteristics data: Entry qualification and subject data dashboard - Office for Students psychology, sociology and sports science degrees reduced the chances of an adverse university outcome by a multiple of between 0.6 and 0.8.

- For avoiding repetition, related A-Levels in computing, psychology and sports science, plus accounting and law, were beneficial. For graduating with a 2:1 or above, computing, psychology, sports science, and law A-Levels were found to be beneficial.

There were a few significant relationships between university outcomes and subject of BTEC entry qualification for the five degree subjects considered that had a related BTEC.
For BTECs, the authors found:

- Having a performing arts BTEC qualification for drama students was the only example among the degrees examined where having a related BTEC rather than any other BTEC subject was associated with a better outcome. It had a higher probability of graduating with a 2:1 or above.

- Holding a health and social care or health studies BTEC appeared to be a disadvantage for those studying nursing degrees, in terms of both dropout and graduating with below a 2:1, compared with someone with BTEC, or mixed BTEC and A-Level qualifications in a different subject.

The Office for Students new data dashboard highlights that of the discipline categories, business and management had the lowest continuation rates in 2019/20 with 86.8% (see Table 7) which reflects data from previous years. The other disciplines range from 90.1% for design, creative and performing arts to 93.7% for humanities and languages to the highest with 98.3% for medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences. When attainment is examined, nursing, allied health and psychology

had the lowest levels of attainment with medicine, dentistry and veterinary sciences having the highest.

Table 7 Continuation and Attainment Statistics from Office for students 2019/20

Subject	Continuation rate	Attainment of 2:1 or above
Business and Management	86.8%	80.4%
Design, Creative and Performing Arts	90.1%	82.6%
Education and Teaching	90.4%	78.6%
Engineering, Technology and Computing	90.4%	83.3%
Humanities and Languages	93.7%	89.8%
Law and Social Sciences	91.4%	81.4%
Medicine, Dentistry and Veterinary Sciences	98.3%	92.9%
Natural and Built Environment	92.6%	85.5%
Natural and Mathematical Sciences	92.5%	85.5%
Nursing, Allied Health and Psychology	93.1%	79.6%

Source: Extracted from Student characteristics data: Entry qualification and subject data dashboard - Office for Students

Student characteristics and continuation

When continuation figures for a range of student characteristics are examined, male underachievement is not only seen in the figures for entry as highlighted previously but also in non-continuation (drop-out) rates and degree performance statistics (Hillman and Robinson, 2016; Hillman 2021). As Curnock- Cook, former Chief Executive of UCAS highlights, males are not just performing worse than females in higher education, but across primary, secondary education and apprenticeships.

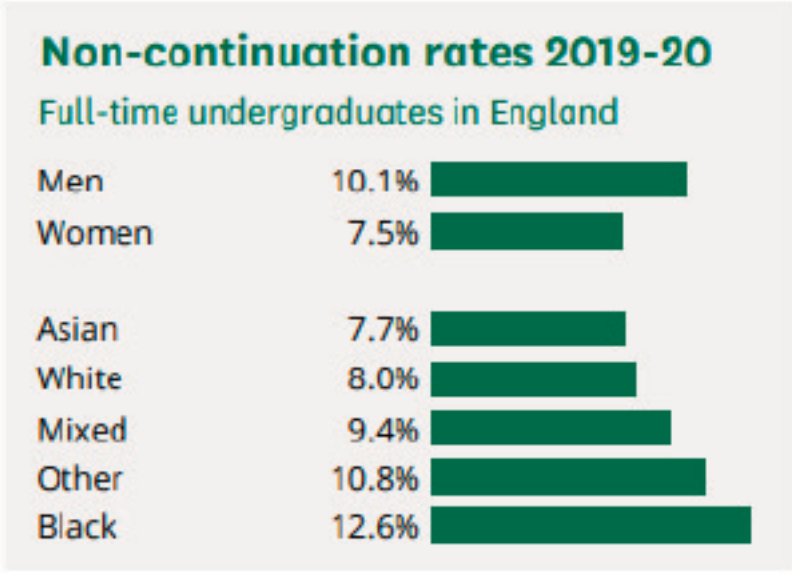
The Equality of Access and Outcomes in Higher Education in England Research Briefing Report by Bolton and Lewis (2023) highlight those students with the highest non-continuation rates (see Diagram 3). Non-continuation is defined as full-time first year students who are not continuing their studies 12 months later (24 months for part-time students). The average non-continuation rate across all groups was 9.9%.

The groups of students with the highest non-

continuation rates were:

- Men (10.1%)
- Mature (13.9%)
- Black (12.6%)
- From the lowest IMD groups (10.4-11.9%)
- Other ethnic group (10.8%)

Diagram 3



Source: Bolton and Lewis, 2023 (p15)

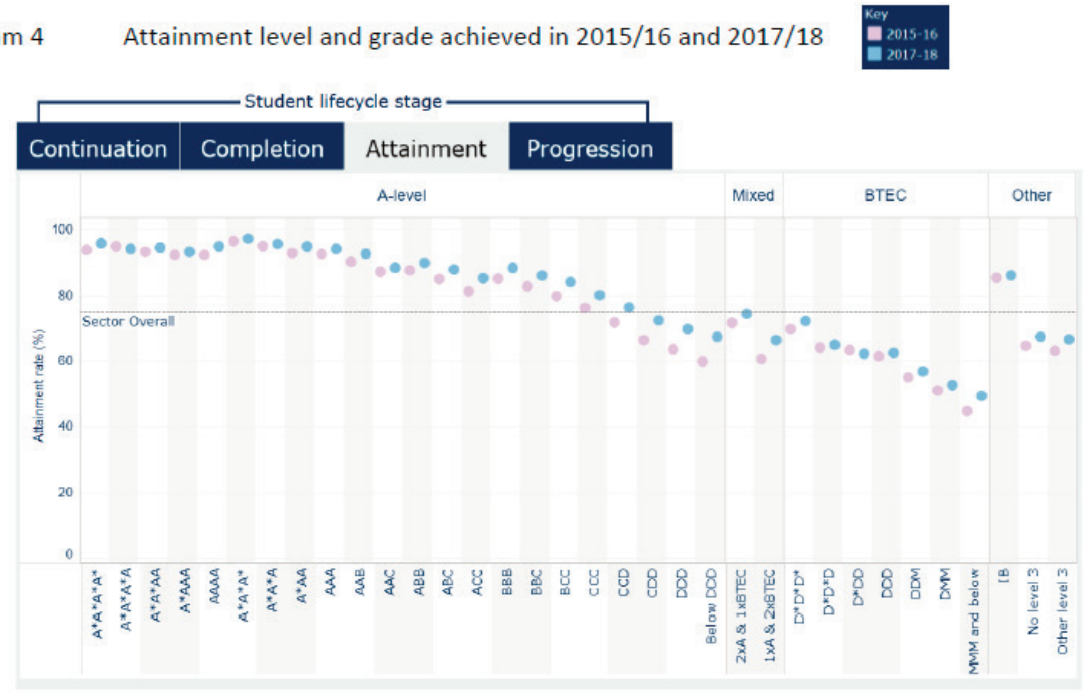
It is important to note that the main categories of Black, White and Asian are quite broad, and within each category there are differences in trends between sub-categories such as Chinese and Indian.

When attainment is examined by entry qualification since 2015/16 through to 2021/22, there is a consistent pattern by entry qualification and grade in terms of achieving an Upper Second or First Class degree (see Diagrams 4-6). Regardless of year, students who entered with BTEC only qualifications are the least likely to attain this level of qualification.

The of entry qualification on employments outcomes post degree award

Research by Patrignani et al. found that the average salary measured at age 28 of first degree graduates who enter university via the A-Level route earn substantially more

Diagram 4 Attainment level and grade achieved in 2015/16 and 2017/18



Source: OfS, 2022a Student characteristics data: Entry qualification and subject data dashboard - Office for Students

compared to those on the BTEC route. The gap in average annual salary was £11,000 for men (£35,000 versus £23,800 per annum) and £9,000 for women (£28,200 versus £19,100 per annum) (Patrignani et al., 2019).

The of entry qualification on employments outcomes post degree award

Research by Patrignani et al. found that the average salary measured at age 28 of first degree graduates who enter university via the A-Level route earn substantially more compared to those on the BTEC route. The gap in average annual salary was £11,000 for men (£35,000 versus £23,800

Diagram 5 Attainment level and grade achieved in 2018/19 and 2019/20

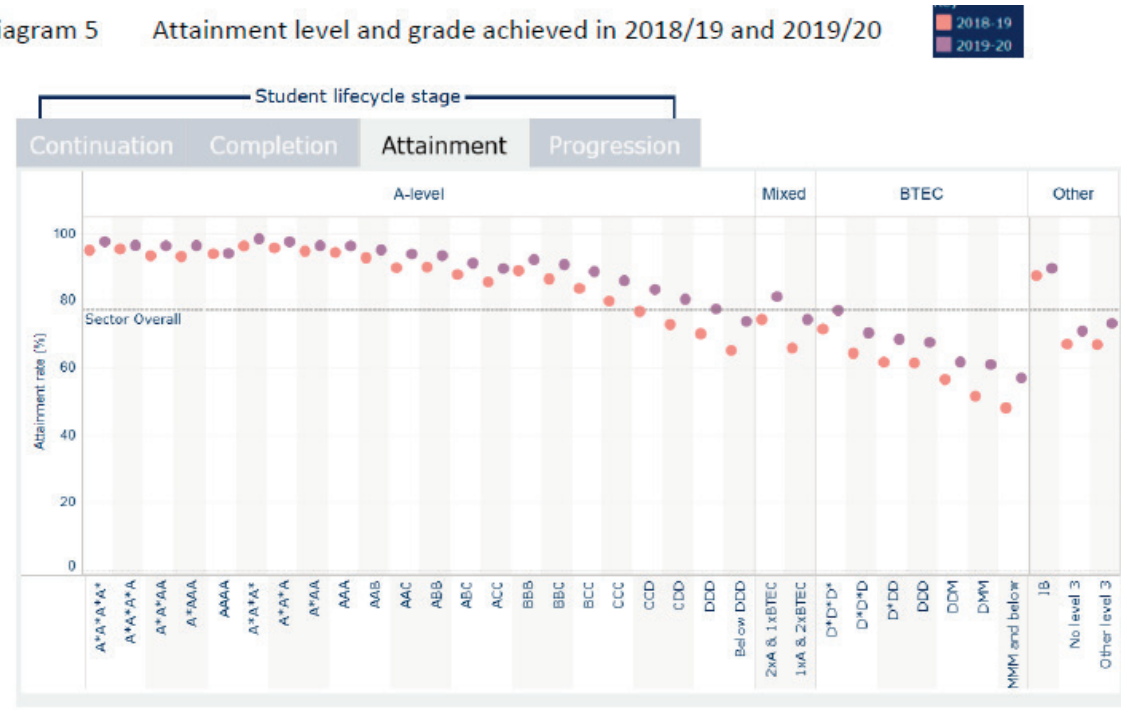
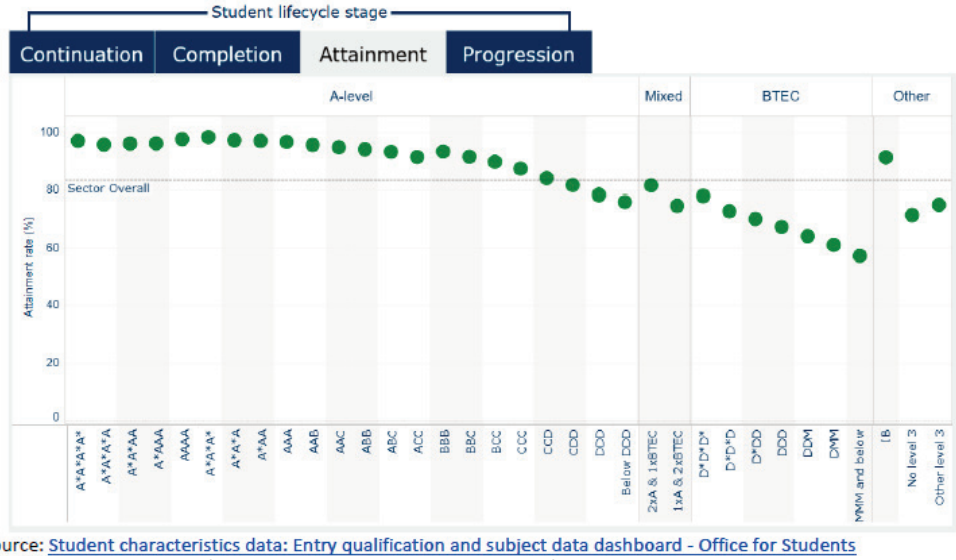


Diagram 6 Attainment level by entry qualification and grade achieved in 2020/21



Source: Student characteristics data: Entry qualification and subject data dashboard - Office for Students

per annum) and £9,000 for women (£28,200 versus £19,100 per annum) (Patrignani et al., 2019).

Amongst median salaries, the gap was lower but still notable with £8,300 per annum for men and £7,800 per annum for women. The figures for those who held both BTECs and A-Levels on entry were only marginally higher than the figures reported for the BTEC category. They also found subject-variation in the salary-gaps. The largest gaps were for social studies, law, languages, history and philosophy and business and administration' (for both genders). However, the smallest wage gaps were for architecture, arts and design' and subjects allied to medicine (females only). They also identified a substantial gender-gap for all subjects except arts and design' (Patrignani et al., 2019). Additionally, Hewitt argues that the labour market females enter still has a long way to go in terms of equality, even when looking at universities own labour force (Hewitt, 2020).

The gaps in knowledge and recommendations

The current policy and the changes being considered by the Department of Education regarding BTEC qualifications are based on limited existing research and only outcome metrics as highlighted above. These impact on university strategic and policy approaches. For any future policy changes to be effective, it is essential that knowledge gaps are first filled to inform policy and practice effectively (see Diagram 7).

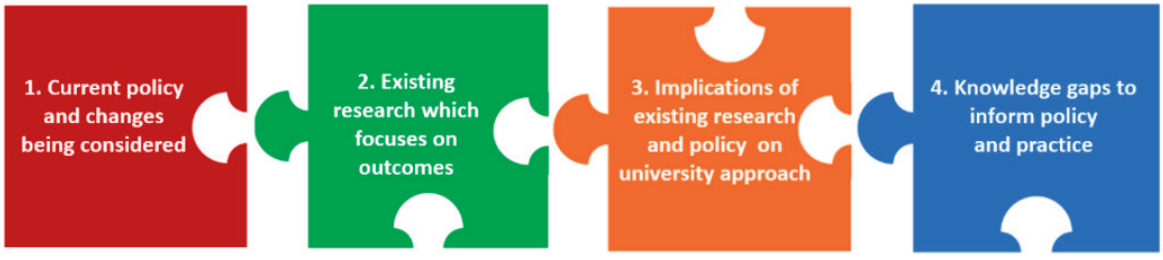
The findings reported by Atherton (2021) and Dilnot et al. (2021) and other publications (e.g. Morgan, 2020a; 2020b; Swinton, 2020) have made a number of recommendations to understand why there are poor progression and outcome differences for those holding BTEC only or a combination of A-Level and BTEC qualifications.

Recommendations for policy makers include:

- More targeted research to understand why there are patterns of lower success among BTEC students.

- Work with all stakeholders to develop an understanding across all levels of study.

Diagram 7 Steps to effectively inform policy and practice



Source: Morgan (2023)

Recommendations for universities:

- Work more closely with schools and colleges of further education.

- Monitor the outcomes of students with different entry qualifications, in particular taking account of differences in performance by assessment type.

- Consider the alignment of assessment methods with students' previous experience throughout the course of students to understand where issues occur.

- Obtain a greater understanding by universities of the prior learning experience of students so effective support can be provided to enable students to succeed.

The purpose of this report

It is the last two recommendations that this report addresses. Government policy in recent years has led to a strategic and policy focus on outcomes. However, if institutions and Government want to improve the outcome metrics, then we need to go back to the start of the study journey and understand the prior experiences of new students entering higher education to help inform the key learning and support areas.

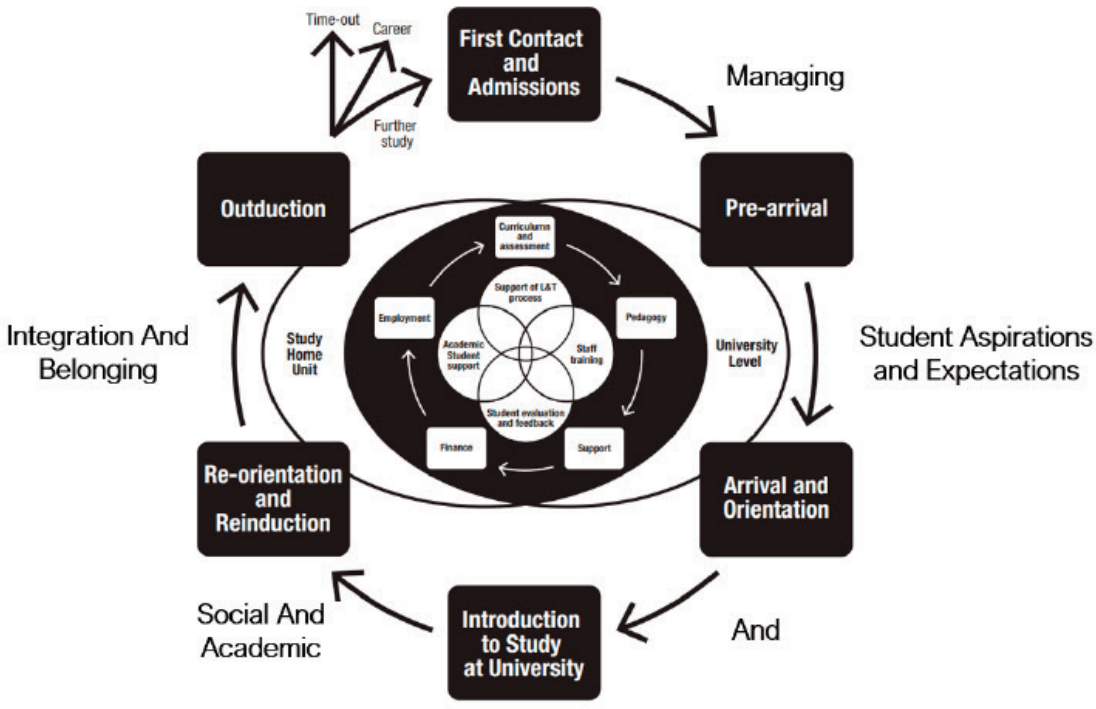
If a university does not understand their students previous experience and expectations, they will not effectively be able to support their students through the study lifecycle (Engle and Tinto, 2008; Morgan, 2011: 2013; Mountford-Zimdars et al., 2015; 2017) nor provide them with a voice that makes them feel recognised and gives them a sense of belonging (Thomas, 2012a,b; Thomas et al., 2017; Thomas and Jones, 2017; Morgan, 2018; Blake et al., 2022). Diagrams 8 and 9 provide an overview of how this can be achieved.

The Student Experience Transitions Model in Diagram 8 provides a framework for institutions to organise and map out the different types of support needed for students at particular times throughout their journey at university or college. It also provides a framework of what to consider and who to involve when developing initiatives to support students in their study journey. All students must undergo every stage regardless of the level at which they enter. More information can be found by going to: https://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/student-practitioner-model/

Diagram 9 highlights the six key themes that UPP Student Futures Manifesto suggests that Universities should clearly address in supporting new and returning students.

Having this understanding has never been more important especially post pandemic and with the cost of living crisis because as the UPP Student Futures Manifesto highlights, there have been numerous shifts taking place over the last few years in higher education (see Diagram 10).

Diagram 8 The Student Experience Transitions Model



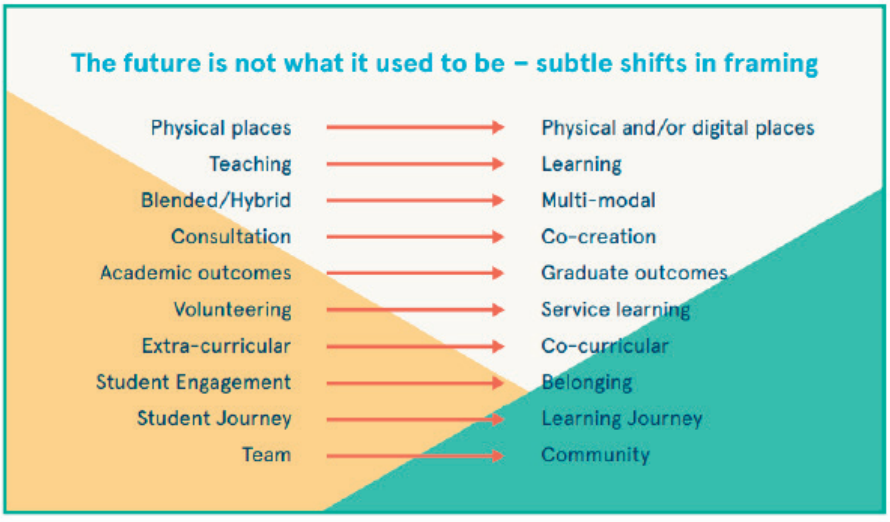
Source: Morgan, 2013 and Improving the Student Experience by Michelle Morgan - Official Website

Diagram 9 Six key themes for student futures

- *Support for students before they reach university*
- *An induction into university life for each year of study*
- *Support for mental health and wellbeing*
- *A clear outline of the teaching students will receive and the necessary tools to access it*
- *Activities inside and outside the curriculum that build skills, networks and communities*
- *A clear pathway towards graduate outcomes*

Source: A Student Futures-Manifesto-Final-Report-of-the-Student-Futures-Commission.pdf upp-foundation.org) (p8)

Diagram 10 Shifts in higher education



Source: A-Student-Futures-Manifesto-Final-Report-of-the-Student-Futures-Commission.pdf upp-foundation.org) (p9)

The content of this report

This report provides findings from the undergraduate pre-arrival academic questionnaire undertaken in 2019 across one Post 1992 university prior to the pandemic, and across two Post 1992 institutions in 2021 at the height of COVID-19. It focuses on the prior learning experience of students prior to, during and post COVID-19 as well as concerns on entry and expectations of university study of students entering with A-Level only and BTEC only qualifications. The rationale for the survey is explained in Part 2.

Part 2 Introduction to the Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire

Rationale for the Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ)

There are three broad aims behind the Pre-Arrival Academic Questionnaire (referred to as PAQ hereafter). 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 is delivered at course level, and 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 real time in order to bridge the perceived and actual skill and knowledge gaps of students (Morgan, 2020a; 2020b). The PAQ was formalised via the 11 University HEFCE funded £2.7m Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP) which was part of the Postgraduate Support Scheme Phase one designed to reenergise the UK postgraduate market (Morgan and Direito, 2016). In the development of the PAQ at undergraduate (UG) and postgraduate taught (PGT) level over the years, student representatives have been involved in refining and enhancing the content, structure and order of questions.

Structure of the questionnaire

The questionnaire comprises open and closed questions. It collects pertinent biographical data to check the representation of the sample and to provide detailed analysis of the questions by different student characteristics such as gender, domiciled status, generational status and entry route to study. It contains seven sections that are designed to obtain as much information from respondents about their learning prior experiences and their expectations and aspirations for their upcoming study. Some of the questions are different depending on the level of study and they have been adapted to encompass current issues such as COVID-19 and the Cost of Living Crisis. The sections are as follows:

- Previous study qualifications.

- Previous study experience.
- Motivations and expected challenges of study being undertaken.
- Student expectations.
- Current learning expectations.
- Attitudes towards the level of study being undertaken
- Biographical details.

The sections of the questionnaire are designed to make completion easy and to take respondents systematically through a logical set of questions that will be of benefit to them as well as their academic home unit (e.g. department/course). The questionnaire consists of a maximum 51 questions depending on the responses provided (inclusive of 11 biographical questions) thus providing an extensive amount of information. The survey is executed using Survey Monkey.

Collection of Data

Ethical approval was granted for the survey at each institution. Pre-arrival completion at both UG and PGT level as a course academic activity is the preference as it does generate a substantially higher rate of completion. In this survey, questions relating to disability and social economic class were not included in the survey. However, age, generational status, ethnicity, gender and domiciled status were collected. The questionnaire is anonymous at the point of completion so identification of an individual is not 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 is deleted off Survey Monkey.

Completions of the questionnaire by each university for the undergraduate PAQ in 2019 and 2021

Only fully completed pre-arrival academic questionnaires have been used in the analysis. The full completions for all entry qualifications for Bournemouth University (BU hereafter) in September 2019 was 1104. For Leeds Beckett University (LBU hereafter) in September 2021, which was in its second year of implementation, it was 888. For the University of East London (UEL hereafter) in September 2021 which was its first year, it was 484.

For the purpose of this report, only data of respondents holding A-Levels only or BTEC only as their entry qualification has been used in the analysis. Findings for BU are reported separately. The overall sample is referred to as '2019' and the qualifications as 'A-Level 2019' and 'BTEC 2019'. LBU and UEL data has been combined to provide a larger data set for 2021 and is referred to as '2021'. The qualifications are referred to as 'A-Level 2021' and 'BTEC 2021'. The two datasets provide a useful comparison of responses by entry qualification 'pre' and 'during' the pandemic.

Quantitative, qualitative and comparative analyses of 2019 and 2021 surveys

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 route into study, generational status, age and gender. Due to small sample sizes, no analysis was undertaken by ethnicity or domiciled status. Gender analysis was only undertaken with those who identified as female or male which comprised around 98.0% of the institutional samples.

Where possible, comparison has been undertaken between the two datasets. The pre-arrival academic questionnaire undertaken during COVID 19 contained new questions and developed others by providing additional options to explore the impact of the pandemic. Where questions cannot be compared or additional options were included, this is highlighted in the findings.

The basic respondent characteristics for A-Level and BTEC respondents in 2019 and 2021

The basic respondent characteristics by entry qualification are reported below in Table 8 ('n' denotes the sample size).Part 3

Table 8 Basic respondent characteristics by entry qualification

Characteristic		2019 A-Level n=640	2019 BTEC n=200	2021 A-Level n=459	2021 BTEC n=287
Domiciled status					
	UK	98.6%	100.0%	97.6%	99.0%
	EU	0.9%	0.0%	0.7%	0.3%
	OS	0.5%	0.0%	1.7%	0.7%
Gender identity					
	Female	59.7%	49.5%	58.4%	55.4%
	Male	39.1%	50.0%	39.9%	42.9%
	Non-binary	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%
	Transgender	0.6%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%
	Prefer not to say	0.2%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%
Ethnicity					
	Asian	5.6%	3.5%	12.9%	14.3%
	Black	4.3%	6.5%	6.5%	11.8%
	Mixed	4.7%	6.5%	5.9%	7.6%
	White	86.9%	82.5%	72.8%	64.4%
	Other	0.8%	1.0%	1.9%	2.8%
Generational status					
	First (1st)	54.8%	66.0%	53.8%	62.0%
	Second (2nd)	42.4%	31.0%	42.1%	31.0%
	Unsure	2.8%	3.0%	4.1%	7.0%
Age group					
	Under 18	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%	1.4%
	18	63.1%	39.5%	63.8%	45.3%
	19	24.7%	34.5%	17.4%	20.6%
	20	6.4%	8.0%	8.3%	9.8%
	21	2.5%	5.5%	2.6%	4.5%
	22-25	1.9%	6.0%	3.1%	8.7%
	26-30	0.6%	3.5%	1.7%	4.9%
	31-40	0.3%	1.0%	1.3%	2.1%
	41-50	0.0%	0.5%	0.9%	1.7%
	51-60	0.2%	1.5%	0.4%	1.0%

Characteristic	2019 A-Level n=640	2019 BTEC n=200	2021 A-Level n=459	2021 BTEC n=287
Accommodation				
Staying at home and attending University	13.0%	19.0%	34.4%	47.4%
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	9.5%	8.0%	6.8%	3.1%
Staying local and moving into private rented accommodation	1.9%	1.0%	2.4%	5.9%
Moving into the area and into university accommodation	70.3%	63.5%	42.3%	33.4%
Moving to the area and into private rented accommodation	5.2%	7.5%	12.9%	9.1%
Other	0.2%	1.0%	1.3%	1.0%
Living status				
Living by myself	2.8%	6.0%	4.1%	9.4%
Living with other students	81.6%	74.5%	59.0%	40.8%
Living with friends	1.9%	1.5%	1.7%	4.5%
Living with my parents/guardians	12.0%	13.0%	29.4%	36.2%
Living with my partner/spouse	1.6%	2.5%	3.1%	4.9%
Living with a partner/spouse and children	0.2%	2.5%	2.6%	4.2%
Distance travelled from living to university				
Under 5 miles	57.5%	61.50%	63.6%	49.8%
5-10 miles	15.5%	17.5%	17.9%	22.3%
11-15 miles	4.1%	2.5%	6.8%	10.1%
16-20 miles	1.1%	2.0%	2.2%	4.2%
21-25 miles	1.1%	0.5%	2.4%	5.9%
26-50 miles	5.2%	4.5%	3.7%	4.9%
Over 50 miles	15.6%	11.5%	3.5%	2.8%
Entry through clearing				
Yes, I did not get my first choice	18.3%	12.5%	13.1%	2.1%
Yes, as I hadn't applied before	Not asked	Not asked	5.7%	12.9%
No	81.7%	87.5%	81.3%	85.0%
English as a first language				
Yes	94.4%	94.2%	93.0%	98.6%
No	5.6%	5.8%	7.0%	1.4%
Languages cited as a first language	*23*	*6*	*19*	*18*
English fluency				
Yes	99.5%	100.0%	99.6%	98.6%
No	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%	1.4%
Year of highest entry qualification				
2020/21	-	-	70.8%	63.8%
2019/20	-	-	17.6%	13.9%
2018/19	72.8%	70.0%	4.4%	6.6%
2017/18	19.8%	18.0%	2.0%	3.5%
2016/17	4.1%	6.5%	0.4%	1.0%
2015/16	1.4%	1.5%	1.1%	3.8%
2014/15	0.5%	0.0%	0.4%	0.7%
2013/14	0.6%	1.5%	0.4%	0.7%
2012/13	0.3%	0.0%	0.4%	1.4%
2011/12	0.3%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%
2000/10	0.4%	0.0%	0.9%	3.0%
1990/99	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%	0.6%

Headline findings

The headline findings are provided below for respondents holding A-Level 'only' and BTEC 'only' qualifications on entry. Hereafter they are referred to A-Level and BTEC.

Section 1 Entry qualifications, funding and choice of university

Generational status

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents, 1st generation status (no parent had gone to university) was the dominant status across all participating institutions, but it was higher for those who held BTEC qualifications.

Year of attainment of highest entry qualification

Across both surveys, the majority of respondents stated they had obtained their highest qualification in the previous two years. There was little difference in year of attainment between the qualifications and institutions.

Pre-entry status in year immediately prior to study

For the majority of both A-Level and BTEC respondents, study or training prior to starting their undergraduate study had been their main activity.

Reasons for undertaking university study

The top three reasons cited across both surveys and qualifications were I was interested in the subject followed by I wanted to continue studying then to improve my employment prospects. There were differences in responses by gender.

Fees and funding

The Student Loan Scheme was the primary method of funding for both A-Level and BTEC respondents followed by financial support of parents/guardians then savings. However, across both surveys, A-Level respondents were substantially more

likely to obtain funding from parents/guardians compared to their BTEC counterparts. There were notable differences in responses by gender and qualification.

Route into university

Across both surveys, as expected 'Home status' was dominant for these qualifications. A higher percentage of A-Level respondents reported that they had obtained their place through clearing compared to BTEC. In 2021, after expanding the question to understand why this was the case, over twice as many BTEC respondents compared to A-level had applied through clearing as they had not applied for any course previously. They had not lost their place through confirmation.

Intention to undertake paid work during study

There were similar intentions across both surveys and qualifications to undertake paid work during their studies but there were also high levels of uncertainty.

Impact of the pandemic on the decision making process in 2021

A similar number of A-Level and BTEC respondents stated that the pandemic had made no difference to their university decision making process. When examined by gender, BTEC male respondents were notably more likely to state it had made no difference to their plans. There were no major generational differences by qualification.

Type of accommodation whilst studying in the first year

A much higher number of BTEC respondents intended staying at home and undertaking university study compared to their A-Level counterparts. There was little difference between female and male A-Level respondents, but there was between BTEC females and males, with females notably more likely to stay at home.

Distance travelled to university

The majority of respondents across both surveys and qualification groups expected to travel 0-15 miles (24km) to their university to study in-person. A substantial number of respondents expected to travel in excess of 16 miles plus (25km). There was a correlation between age and distance, and as the distance travelled increased so did the age of the respondents.

Section 2 Prior learning experiences- accessing material and submission of work

Accessing learning materials at school/college up to 2018/19 & 2019/20 prior to March 2020 lockdown

For the majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents, handwritten notes and a course text book were the most common methods of accessing learning materials up to 2018/19 and for those in study in 2019/20 prior to the March 2020 lockdown. For BTEC respondents, reliance on these two sources was notably lower than those undertaking A-Levels. BTEC respondents reported using a much wider source of materials.

Accessing learning materials at school/college in 2020/21 Pre- lockdown- 2021 PAQ only

Up to December 2020 (before the January lockdown), for A-Level respondents the top three sources were handwritten notes from classes, a course text book then handouts of book chapters and information. For BTEC respondents, handwritten notes was first but much lower in usage than their A-Level counterparts followed by accessing information on the school/college VLE then accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE. For both groups accessing books via a school /college library was low.

Accessing learning materials at school/college in 2020/21 During and post lockdown- 2021 PAQ only

During the lockdown period of January to March, accessing

information on the school/college VLE was the most cited by both A-Level and BTEC respondents. On return to school/college in April, A-Level and BTEC respondents pattern of accessing information generally reverted to that up December 2020. The notable difference for both qualification groups was the increase in use of accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE after the return to study in April 2021.

Submission of coursework at school/college up to and including 2019/20

For A-Level respondents in study up to and including 2019, submission of course work hard copy (with and without a cover sheet) was the primary method. For BTEC respondents, the most cited method was via a school/college VLE. Via Email was the cited in second place by A-Level respondents and third by BTEC.

Submission of coursework at school/college in 2020/21 - PAQ 2021 only

Up to December 2020, A-Level respondents most common submission methods were hard copy (with or with a cover sheet) followed by via email. For BTEC it was via school/college VLE then via email. For both during the lockdown, via email and the school/college VLE were the top two.

After the return to study in April 2021, the methods reverted back to a similar submission pattern prior to the January to March lockdown with the exception of an increase in the use of submission via the school/college VLE.

Section 3 Feedback

Understanding what is meant by feedback

When respondents across both surveys 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 by both A-Level and

BTEC respondents.

Feedback method at school/college up to 2018/19- PAQ 2019 only

For A-Level respondents written feedback (hardcopy) followed by face to face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually) were the top two cited whereas for BTEC, it was the reverse. For BTEC respondents, feedback was delivered in a more diverse way with greater use of email and the school/college virtual learning environment.

Feedback method at school/college up to 2019/20- PAQ 2021 only

The top three responses for both A-Level and BTEC respondents for how feedback was commonly given were written feedback (hard copy), face to face in-person (individually) and written feedback via email reflecting the findings from the PAQ in 2019.'

Feedback method at school/college in 2020/21- 2021 PAQ only

Up to December 2020, A-Level respondents mainly received feedback via written hard copy then face to face in-person (individually) followed by written feedback via email. For BTEC, it was face to face in-person (individually) then via the school/college VLE followed by written feedback (hard copy). During the January to March lockdown, for both groups it was via email and the school/college VLE. When teaching resumed in-person in April, a similar delivery of feedback pattern to that up to December 2020 for those groups resumed.

Feedback method preference at school/college up to 2018/19

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents, face to face in-person feedback was their main preference although notably higher for BTEC. Written feedback (hard copy) was second for both groups but lower for BTEC respondents.

Feedback method preference at school/college up to 2020/21 prior to March 2019 lockdown

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents in study up to 2019/20 and in study in 2020/21, the preferred method for receiving feedback was face to face (individually) with the tutor reflecting previous findings.

Using feedback to help in future assignments at school/college

Almost all of the respondents stated they had used the feedback to help with future assignments. Of the respondents who stated that they had not read the feedback, explanations included too generic, not personal and it was too late to help another assignment.

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

For both groups, the objective for approaching a teacher/tutor was to get more feedback on how to improve the mark. There were no notable differences by gender and generational status between the two highest entry qualification groups.

Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor

For A-Level respondents across both surveys, the main reason for not approaching a teacher/tutor was I understood the written feedback followed by I got the grade I expected/I was happy with my grade. For BTEC respondents, it was the reverse. A higher number of A-Level respondents stated that they did not feel comfortable about asking for feedback and they had never thought about asking for feedback compared to their BTEC counterparts. Discussing academic issues with fellow students was not a preferred option for either qualification group.

Revision undertaken in prior study

Across both surveys and qualifications, the most cited revision method was a mix of revision methods. However, for a third

of A-Level and BTEC respondents, mainly independent study at home was the primary activity.

Section 4 Study issues due to COVID1-9 PAQ 2021 only

Study issues experienced in 2019/20 due to COVID 19

For A-Level and BTEC respondents in study in 2019/20, the top three concerns were the same but in a slightly different order. They were loss of a structured learning environment, worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps, and loss of social engagement with friends at school/college.

Study issues experienced in 2020/21 due to COVID 19

In 2020/21, the top four concerns for both groups were the same but again in a slightly different order. They were all related to the impact of COVID-19- worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps, loss of a structured learning environment, and loss of social engagement with friends at school/college and online fatigue.

IT issues experienced in 2020/21 due to COVID 19

The top two issues for both groups were poor internet connection followed by no appropriate quiet study space.

Section 5 Concerns and confidence levels in starting university

Concerns about starting the course at university

In 2019, the order of concerns for A-Level and BTEC respondents was almost identical with a similar level of response. In the 2021 survey, the top four study concerns were similar although in a slightly different order. They were coping with level of study, mental health and wellbeing (added in 2021), lack of information about how to study at university and fitting in with class mates. There were gender differences across both surveys with A-Level and BTEC

females citing higher levels of concern than males in every listed 'study related' concern. A-Level females cited greater concern than their BTEC counterparts.

Anxiety levels relating to their concerns- PAQ 2021 only

There were similar levels of being very anxious by highest entry qualification regarding mental health and wellbeing, lack of confidence about ability and concerns about knowledge gaps. The majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents stated they were anxious in relation to their concerns. When examined by gender and highest entry qualification, females were more likely to say they were very anxious compared to their male counterparts, especially BTEC females, who were the most very anxious across five of the areas.

Confidence levels on starting university- PAQ 2021 only

The majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents expressed similar levels of confidence across all areas. Of those who expressed feeling very confident, BTEC respondents accounted for the majority in seven of the eight areas, but this was mainly due to males responses. A-Level and BTEC females were noticeably more likely to state they were not confident across most of the areas than their male counterparts.

Section 6 University study expectations

Expected contact and independent study hours

Across both qualifications and surveys, there was a notable level of uncertainty about the expected 'contact hours' per week for their course. For both qualification groups across both surveys, approximately one third expected the contact hours to range between 5-10 hours. This was closely followed by 11-20 hours for both. For independent study hours, 11-20 hours a week was the most cited for A-Level and BTEC respondents across both surveys.

Study style preference at university

The majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents across both surveys stated they would like to study both individually and in a group. However, around a fifth from both groups stated that they would prefer to study independently.

Study assessment preference

The study preference of both A-Level respondents across both surveys was a mix of exams and individual/group assessments and individual assessments whereas for BTEC it was undertaking individual assessments.

Most useful feedback -PAQ 2021 only

A-Level and BTEC respondents cited the most important type of feedback was academic feedback telling me what I did not do well and how to improve followed by receiving academic feedback that is encouraging and raises my confidence then academic feedback telling me what I did correctly.

Perceived study strengths and weaknesses- PAQ 2021 only

For A-Level and BTEC respondents, the majority of responses fall into the 'strong' or 'adequate' categories. A-Level respondents who stated they had 'strong' skills were higher than their BTEC counterparts in four of the six study areas. BTEC respondents were notably more likely to perceive their study skills as being 'adequate' across five for the six areas and more 'weak' in literacy and numerical skills than A-Level. There were notable gender differences between females and males across both qualifications and within each gender.

Expected use of university services

A-Level respondents across both surveys were notably more likely to state that they expected to use health and wellbeing, academic support and careers and employment services than BTEC. In the 2021 survey, BTEC were more likely to use IT/Tech support than their A-Level counterparts. A notably higher number of female respondents across both qualifications expected to use health and wellbeing, academic

support and financial compared to their male counterparts. A-Level and BTEC females were nearly twice as likely to use health and wellbeing compared to A-Level and BTEC males whereas males were more than twice as likely to use sport facilities than females. There were generational differences by qualification group.

Course Appeal

For both groups across both surveys, the top five most cited course appeal responses are similar but in a different order. In 2021, BTEC respondents cited employment prospects whereas for A-Level it was the course modules. BTEC respondents were more likely to cite course links with industry than their A-Level counterparts. For both groups, the university's league table position, unconditional offer based on predicted grades and contact hours were three of the least cited reasons.

Expected use of technology -PAQ 2021 only

There was similarity between the two highest entry qualification groups with their current laptop /desktop computer being their main source of technology.

Perception of how employers view an undergraduate qualification

The majority of respondents felt that employers' valued an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications, but there was a notable amount of uncertainty especially amongst BTEC respondents across both surveys.

Part 4 Detailed findings

Notable findings in the tables in all the sections are in bold in black and red.

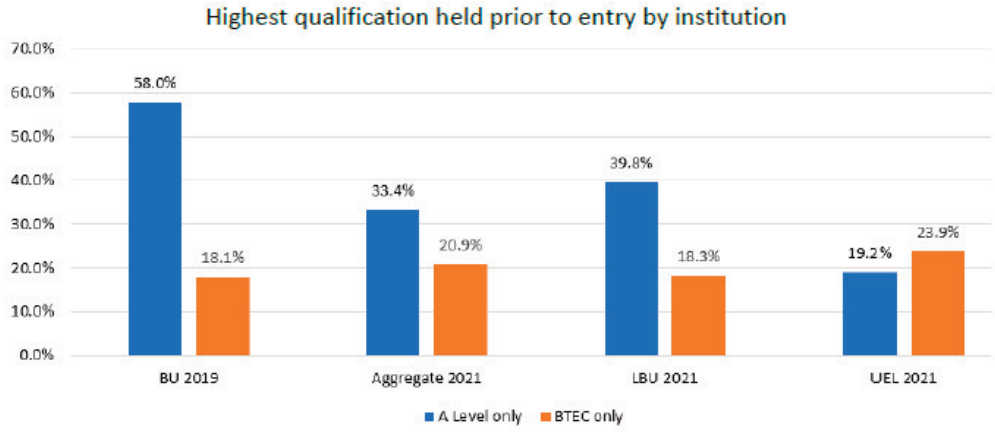
Section 1 Entry qualifications, funding and choice of university

Highest entry qualification

Across both surveys, A-Levels were the most frequently cited as the highest qualification on entry followed by BTEC (see

Figure 3). However, when examined by institution, A-Levels only at BU and LBU were cited as the main qualification with 58.0% and 39.8% respectively whereas at UEL it was BTEC only with 23.9%. For note: at LBU, respondents who stated that their highest qualification was an Access, Foundation Year or Level 3 Diploma accounted for 8.6% whereas at UEL they accounted for 19.6%. Respondents who held both A-Levels and BTEC accounted for 9.8% at LBU and 5.8% at UEL. This highlights the differences in diversity of highest entry qualification at different universities.

Figure 3

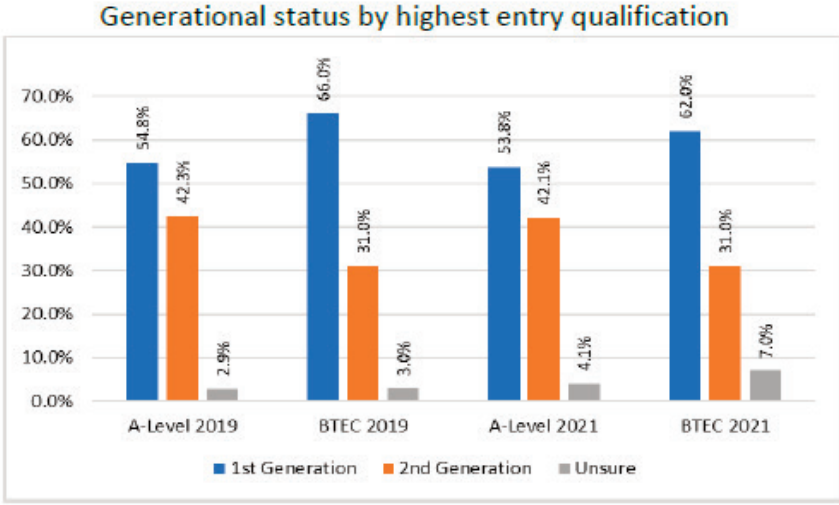


Generational status

When analysed by generational status, 1st generation status (no parent had gone to university) was the dominant status for respondents for both entry qualifications across all institutions, but it was higher for BTEC (see Figure 4). Across all institutions, A-Level respondents were notably more likely to have had both parents go to university (2nd generation) compared to BTEC. Unsure responses could have been due to care leavers or estranged respondents not knowing. This information was not collected.Year of attainment of highest entry qualification

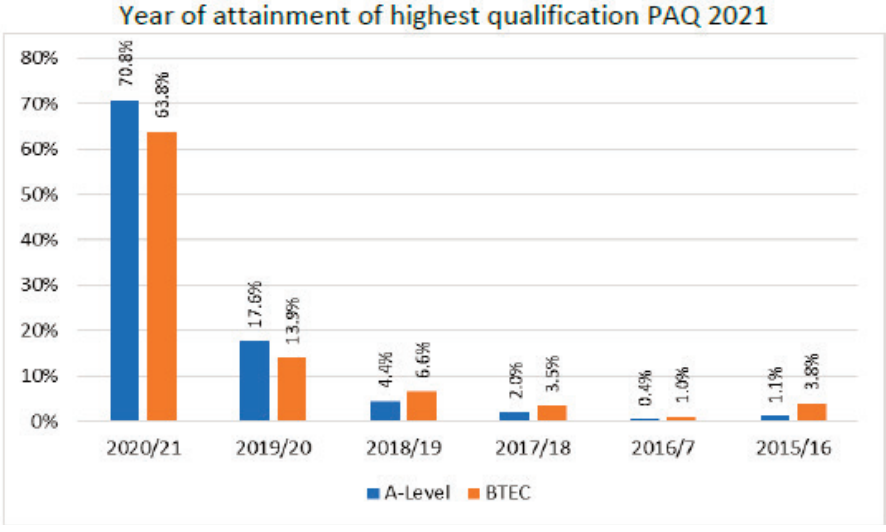
Across all institutions, the majority of respondents stated they had obtained their highest qualification in the previous two years. Figure 5 highlights the highest year of attainment for respondents in the 2021 PAQ. There was little

Figure 4



difference in year of attainment between the qualifications and institutions.

Figure 5

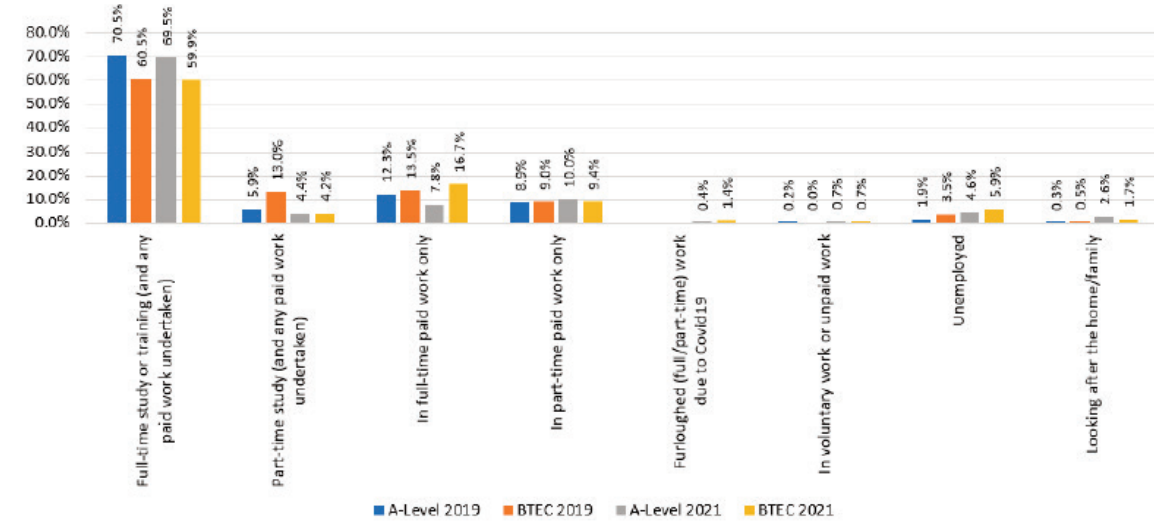


Pre-entry status in year immediately prior to study

Respondents were asked to describe what the main activity was that they had been undertaking in the 12 months immediately before starting their undergraduate course. For the majority of both A-Level and BTEC respondents, it was in study or training prior to starting their undergraduate study (see Figure 6). In the September 2021 questionnaire, the

option of being in furloughed work was added as a result of COVID-19 but it was not a commonly selected pre-entry status.

Figure 6 Pre-entry status immediately prior to study



Reasons for undertaking university study

When the respondents were asked to select all their reasons for undertaking undergraduate study, the top five responses provided are similar (see Table 9). The primary reason cited was *interested in the subject.* The second most cited reason was I wanted to continue studying. In the 2021 PAQ, both A-Level and BTEC respondents cited *to improve my employment prospects* lower than those in 2019. It is unknown if this response was impacted on due to the employment circumstances surrounding COVID-19.

A notable difference between A-Level and BTEC respondents in 2021 was 21.6% of BTEC respondents stated that the *pandemic had made me think about my future* compared to 15.7% of A-Level. This may explain the finding in relation to Figure 7 below where a higher percentage of BTEC respondents applied through clearing as they had not applied before.

When examined by gender and entry qualification, both A-Level and BTEC female respondents in 2021 cited

Table 9 Reasons for undertaking university study

Reason	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
I was interested in the subject	93.0%	90.0%	89.3%	84.3%
I wanted to continue studying	58.3%	62.5%	54.5%	45.6%
To improve my employment prospects	53.3%	60.0%	35.7%	39.7%
The pandemic made me think about my future	NA	NA	15.7%	21.6%
To prove I was capable of university study	17.0%	16.5%	15.7%	15.6%
To was encouraged by a former teacher/tutor	19.2%	25.0%	16.1	13.6%

NA= Not asked

higher than males *being interested in the subject* (see Table 10). Across both surveys, a higher number of A-Level and BTEC males cited undertaking university study *to improve their employment prospects* than females. In 2021, male and female BTEC respondents were more likely to cite that the *pandemic made me think about my future* compared to their A-Level counterparts.

Table 10 Reasons for undertaking university study by gender

Reason	A-Level Female 2019	A-Level Male 2019	BTEC Female 2019	BTEC Male 2019	A-Level Female 2021	A-Level Male 2021	BTEC Female 2021	BTEC Male 2021
I was interested in the subject	91.6%	91.2%	91.4%	91.9%	91.0%	86.8%	86.8%	80.4%
I wanted to continue studying	63.8%	48.0%	62.1%	60.6%	55.2%	54.1%	49.0%	40.6%
To improve my employment prospects	52.8%	53.2%	56.4%	64.5%	27.3%	48.1%	34.5%	47.1%
The pandemic made me think about my future	NA	NA	NA	NA	16.4%	14.8%	23.2%	18.7%
To prove I was capable of university study	13.0%	22.8%	13.6%	11.1%	15.2%	15.3%	14.4%	17.0%

NA= Not asked

Fees, funding and route into university

In 2021, the EU status fee option was removed due to the UK no longer being in the European Union. Across both surveys 'Home status' was predominant as expected for these qualifications (see Table 11).

Respondents were asked whether they had obtained their place through the clearing process. A-Level respondents reported a higher percentage of obtaining their place through clearing compared to BTEC (see Table 12).

In 2021, this question was developed to explore why

Table 11 Fee status

Fee status	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Home	99.4%	100.0%	96.7%	98.6%
International	0.6%	0.0%	3.3%	1.4%

this was the case. Of the respondents, 81.3% of A-Level and 85.0% of BTEC had been accepted at the university of their

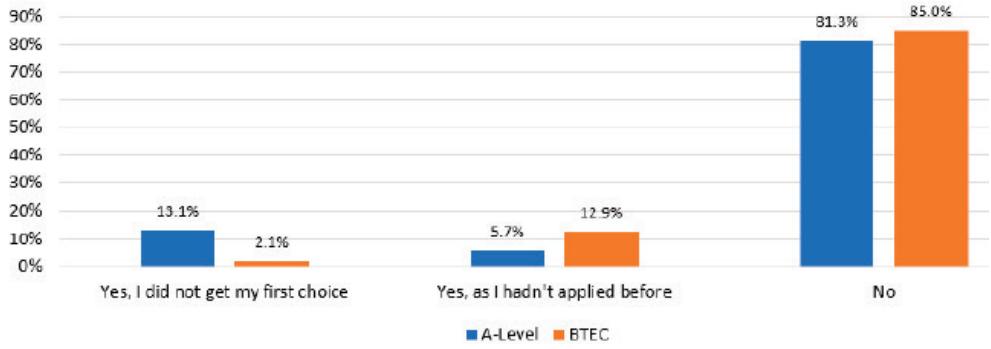
Table 12 Entry route to study

Entry route	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Yes	18.3%	12.5%	18.7%	15.0%
No	81.7%	87.5%	81.3%	85.0%

choice and had not obtained a place through clearing (see Figure 7). Over twice as many BTEC respondents compared to A-Level had *applied through clearing as they had not applied for any course previously.* For 13.1% of A-Level respondents, application was made through clearing as they *did not get their first choice of university* whereas this figure was only 2.1% for BTEC respondents.

In terms of funding the course, the *Student Loan Scheme* was the primary method of funding for both A-Level and BTEC respondents followed by *financial support of*

Figure 7 Obtaining university place through clearing PAQ 2021

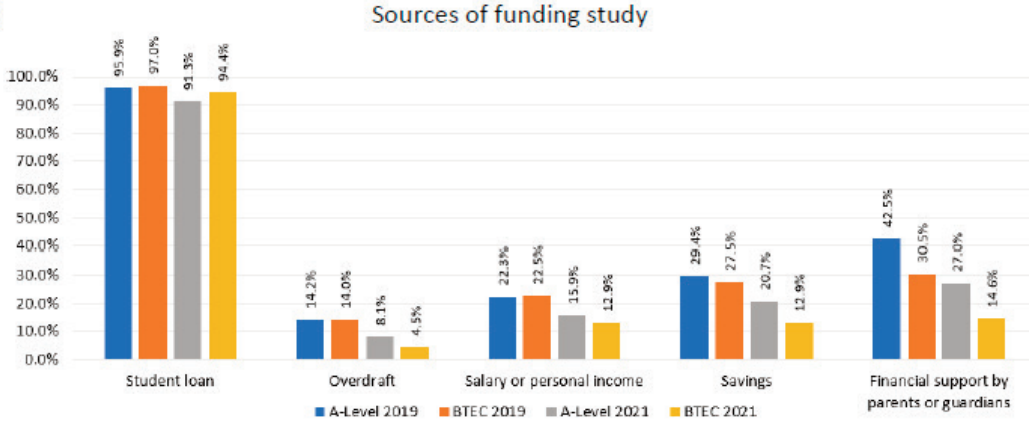


parents/guardians then savings (see Figure 8). However, across both surveys, A-Level respondents were substantially more likely to get funding from *parents/guardians* compared

to their BTEC counterparts.

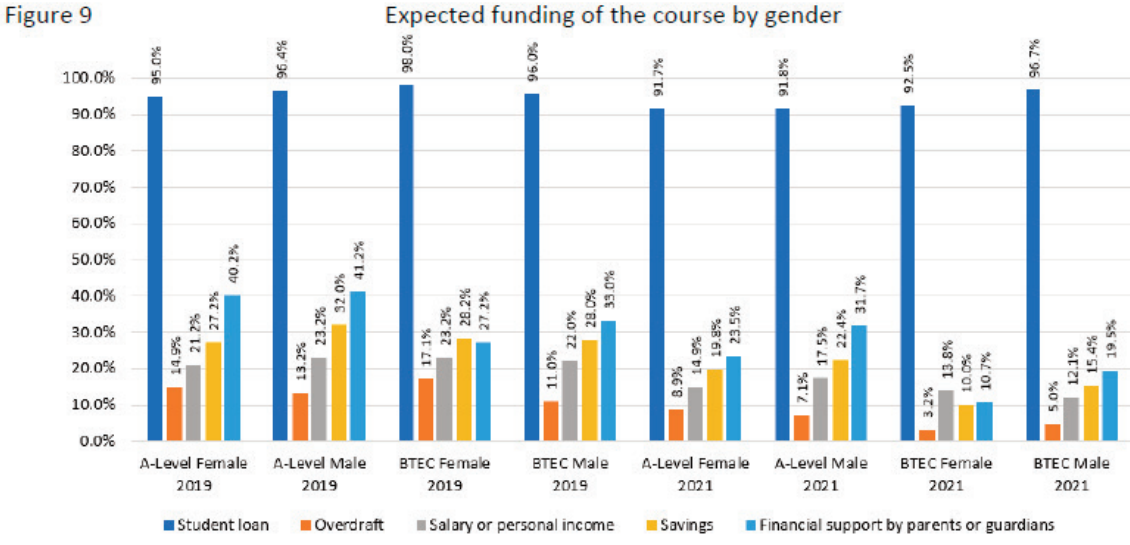
When examined by gender across both surveys, A-Level and BTEC female respondents were less likely to receive support from parents compared to their male counterparts (see Figure 9).

Figure 8



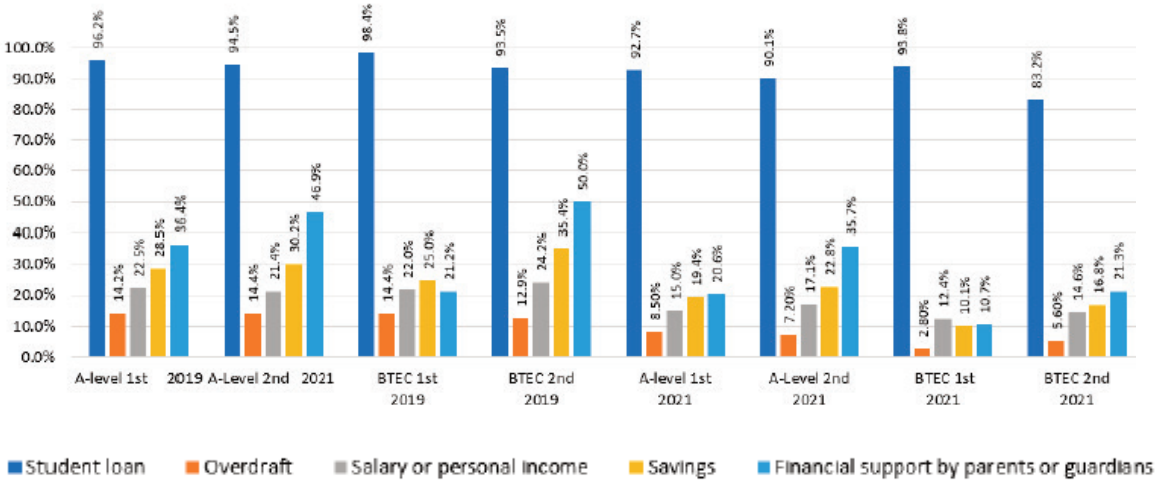
When highest entry qualification was examined by generational status, 2nd generation respondents for both A-Level and BTEC were noticeably more likely to receive parental/guardian funding (see Figure 10). In the 2021 survey,

Figure 9



A-Level 2nd generation respondents were more likely to cite this as a source of funding compared to their BTEC 2nd generation counterparts. The type of course does not appear to be a factor in this finding (e.g. nursing related courses that obtain funding). So, being female and 1st generation appears to be a disadvantage in receiving parental/guardian financial support.

Figure 10 Expected funding of the course by generational status

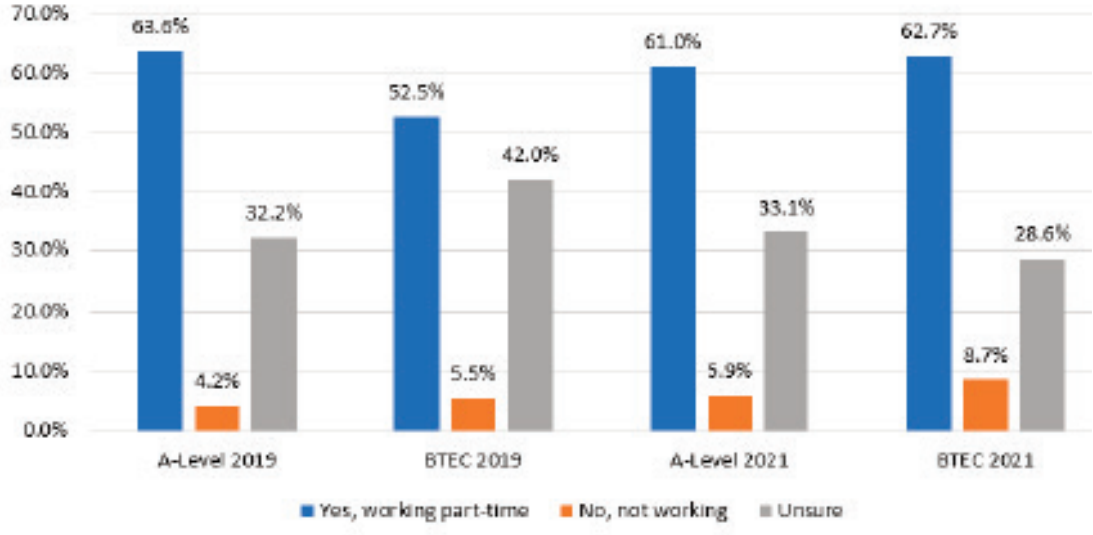


Intention to undertake paid work during study by entry qualification

There was not much difference between respondents when asked if they intended undertaking paid work during their studies (see Figure 11) but there was a high level of uncertainty. This may be due to concerns about managing the workload and the expectation of undertaking a placement (see Figure 12).

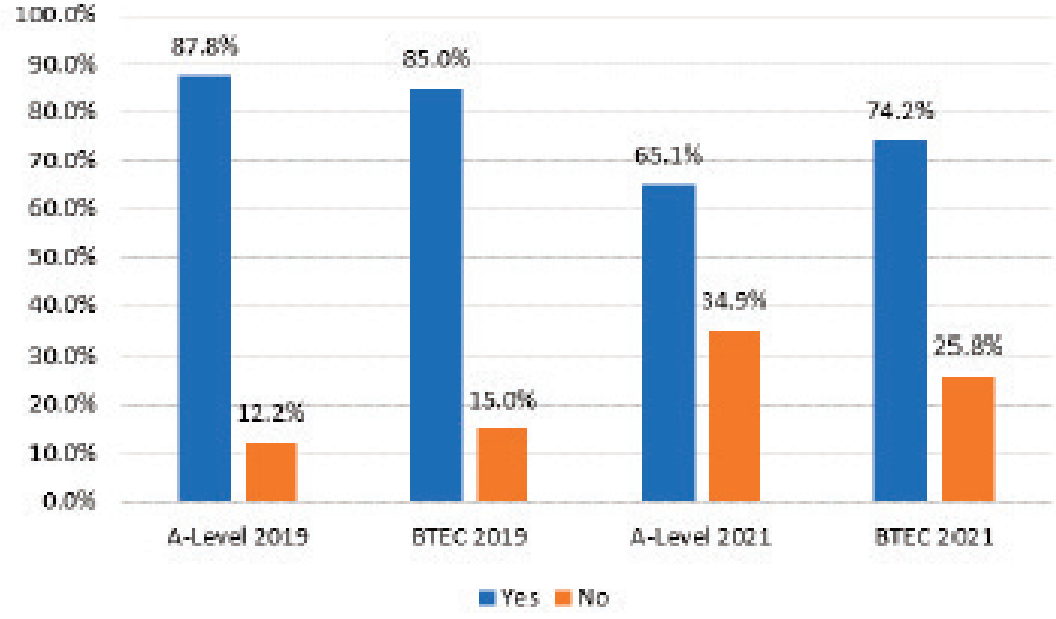
Across the surveys, there were similar levels of response between A-Level and BTEC 1st and 2nd generations respondents who intended working (see Figure 13). There was a high degree of uncertainty across both qualification and generational status.

Figure 11 Intention to work



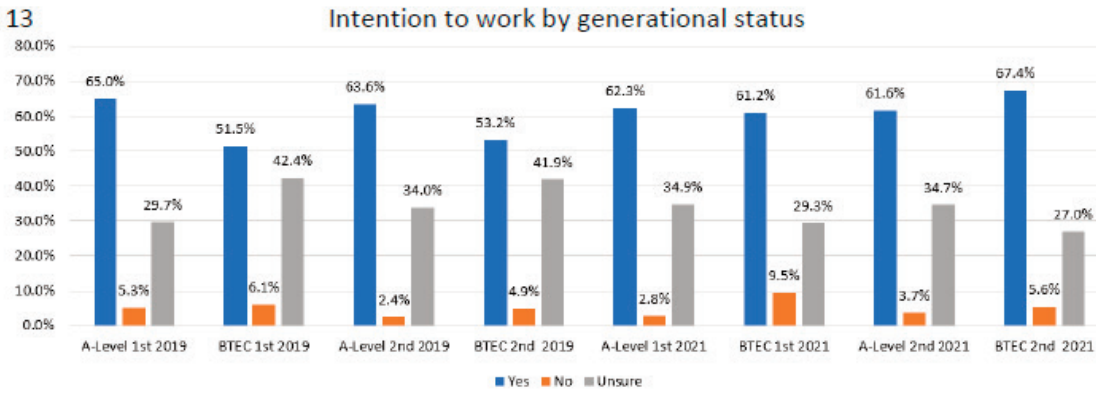
Impact of the pandemic on the decision making process

Figure 12 Intention to undertake a placement



Respondents completing the 2021 survey were asked whether the pandemic had impacted on their decision making process. A similar number of A-Level and BTEC respondents stated that it had not (see Figure 14). When examined by gender, BTEC male respondents were the most likely to state it had made

Figure 13



no difference to their plans with 92.8%.

When examined by highest entry qualification and generational status, there were no notable differences regarding the decision where to study as a result of the pandemic (see Figure 15).

Figure 14

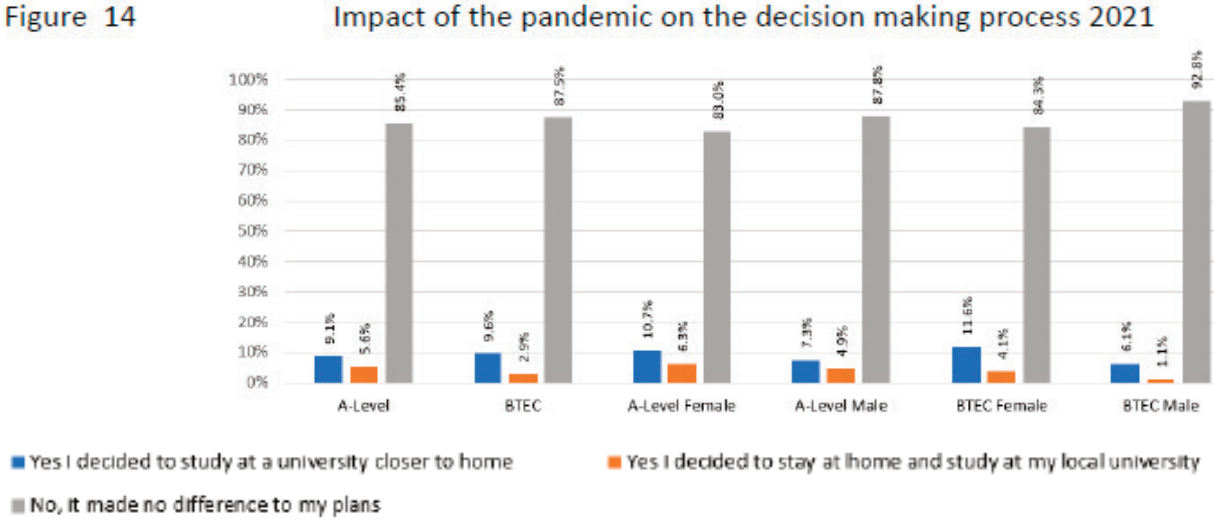
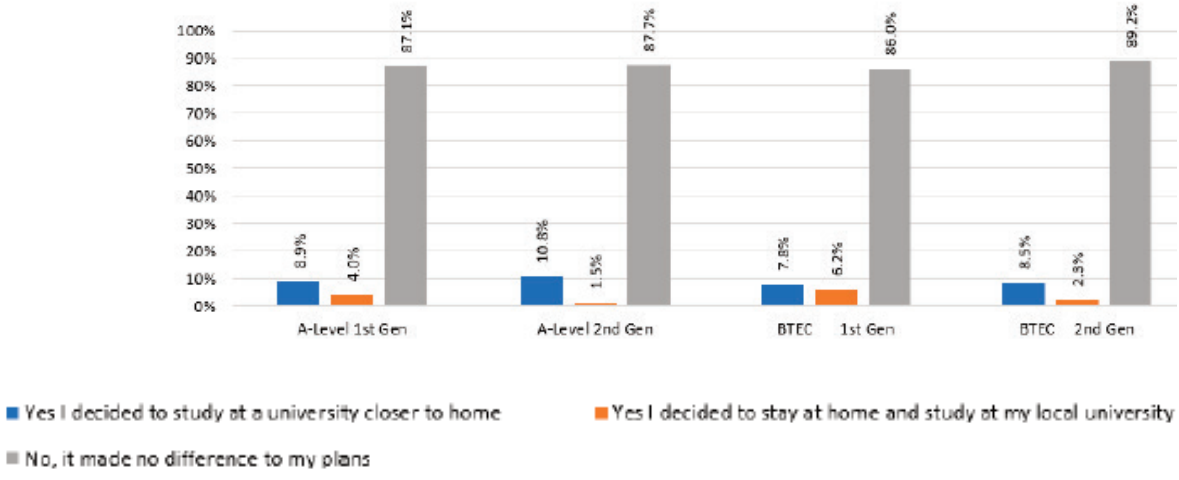


Figure 15 Impact of the pandemic on the decision making process by generational status



Type of accommodation whilst studying in the first year

When looking at accommodation choices, a much higher number of BTEC respondents intended staying at home and undertaking university study compared to their A-Level counterparts (see Table 13). In 2021, the survey was undertaken at two institutions that are city based which may explain the difference in responses. Although the pandemic may not have impacted on the decision making process for the majority of respondents, it is unclear what role COVID-19 played in the initial decision process.

When the accommodation intention of staying at home and attending university is examined by gender, there was little difference between female and male A-Level respondents across both surveys (see Table 14). However, there was between BTEC females and males. The responses across both

Table 13 Accommodation whilst studying

Type of accommodation	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Staying at home and attending university	**13.0%**	**19.0%**	**34.4%**	**47.4%**
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	9.5%	8.0%	6.8%	3.1%
Staying local but moving into private rented accommodation	1.9%	1.0%	2.4%	5.9%
Moving to the area and moving into university accommodation	70.3%	63.5%	42.3%	33.4%
Moving to the area and moving into private rented accommodation	5.2%	7.5%	12.9%	9.1%
Other	0.2%	1.0%	1.2%	1.3%

surveys were obtained from across the disciplines so this was not a factor in the findings.

When examined by generational status, there was a notable difference with 1st generation respondents across both highest entry qualification groups more likely to say they intended staying at home and studying. For A-Level respondents this accounted for 40.9% of 1st generation and

Table 14 Accommodation in the first year by gender

Type of accommodation	A-Level Female 2019	A-Level Male 2019	BTEC Female 2019	BTEC Male 2019	A-Level Female 2021	A-Level Male 2021	BTEC Female 2021	BTEC Male 2021
Staying at home and attending University	**14.7%**	**10.0%**	**28.0%**	**10.0%**	**37.3%**	**31.7%**	**52.8%**	**42.2%**
Staying local but moving into university accommodation	7.6%	12.8%	5.3%	11.0%	6.0%	8.2%	3.1%	3.3%
Staying local and moving into private rented accommodation	1.3%	2.6%	0.0%	2.0%	2.6%	2.2%	6.3%	4.9%
Moving into the area and into university accommodation	**70.1%**	**69.0%**	**58.5%**	**68.0%**	**41.8%**	**41.0%**	**27.0%**	**39.8%**
Moving to the area and into private rented accommodation	4.2%	5.6%	7.1%	8.0%	11.2%	15.3%	10.1%	8.1%
Other	2.1%	0.0%	1.0%	1.0%	1.1%	1.6%	0.6%	1.6%

24.8% of 2nd generation. For BTEC, both figures were higher with 51.7% of 1st generation and 41.5% for 2nd generation. This pattern was found in the 2019 survey, but the figures were much lower. For A-Level 1st generation it was 15.0% and for 2nd 10.6%. For BTEC, it was 23.4% and 8.0% respectively.

Distance travelled to university

When the distance travelled to university is examined, the majority of respondents in both surveys across both groups expected to travel 0-15 miles (24km) to their university. However, a substantial number of respondents expected to travel in excess of 16 miles (25km). In the 2019 survey, the mileage travelled between the two qualifications was similar. In 2021, a higher number of BTEC respondents intended travelling in excess of 11 miles compared to their A-Level counterparts. This in part could be due to a higher number of

BTEC respondents deciding to stay at home and study (Table 15).

As one might expect, there was a correlation between age and distance (see Table 16). As the distance travelled increased so did the number of older respondents. Although the vast majority of respondents were travelling less than 10 miles a day, a commuter student cannot just be defined by distance travelled. The time it takes to travel the distance also needs to be considered.

Table 15 Distance travelled to university

Distance	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Under 5 miles (under 8km)	56.9%	59.0%	63.6%	49.8%
5-10 miles (8-16km)	15.1%	17.3%	**17.9%**	**22.3%**
11-15 miles (17-24 km)	4.4%	2.2%	**6.8%**	**10.1%**
16-20 miles (25-32 km)	1.4%	2.2%	**2.2%**	**4.2%**
21-25 miles (33-40 km)	1.0%	0.0%	**2.4%**	**5.9%**
26-50 miles (41-80 km)	4.8%	6.5%	**3.7%**	**4.9%**
Over 50 miles (over 82 km)	16.4%	12.9%	3.5%	2.8%

Table 16 Distance travelled by age -PAQ 2021 only

Age	Under 5 miles		5-10 miles		11-15 miles		16-20 miles	
	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC
18	67.6%	51.5%	16.0%	20.8%	3.8%	6.9%	1.7%	4.6%
19	61.3%	54.2%	20.0%	18.6%	2.5%	13.6%	1.3%	5.1%
20	73.7%	39.3%	13.2%	17.9%	5.3%	17.9%	0.0%	3.6%
21	33.3%	53.8%	16.7%	23.1%	**16.7%**	**15.4%**	**16.7%**	**4.0**
22-25	35.7%	40.0%	14.3%	32.0%	**21.4%**	**8.0%**	**14.3%**	**7.1%**
26-30	50.0%	50.0%	37.5%	28.6%	**12.5%**	**14.3%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**
31+	33.3%	35.7%	47.2%	45.5%	**8.3%**	**7.1%**	**0.0%**	**0.0%**

Section 2 Prior learning experiences
Accessing material and submission of work

Accessing learning materials at school/college up to 2018/19 and 2019/20 prior to March 2020 lockdown

Respondents were asked to select all the ways in which they had accessed learning materials in their previous study at school or college. Table 17 shows the findings from both surveys of those that had completed their studies up to 2018/19 and of those who were in study in 2019/20 prior to the March 2020 lockdown.

For the majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents, handwritten notes and a course text book were the most common methods of accessing learning materials up to 2018/19 and for those in study in 2019/20 prior to the March 2020 lockdown. However, for BTEC respondents, reliance on these two sources was notably lower than those undertaking A-Levels. BTEC respondents reported using a much wider source of materials especially use of information on a school/college VLE (Virtual Learning Environment).

This is not a surprising finding as the majority of BTECs are taught in colleges where VLE's are commonly used, albeit maybe less sophisticated than those used in universities. Accessing books/materials in the school/college library for both A-Level and BTEC respondents in study in 2019/20 it was

Table 17 Accessing learning materials- All sources for those in study up to 2018/19 and 2019/20 but prior to the March lockdown 2020

Type of material	A-Level Up to 2018/19 2019	BTEC Up to 2018/19 2019	A-Level Up to 2018/19 2021	BTEC Up to 2018/19 2021	A-Level 2019/20 only Up to March 2020 2021	BTEC 2019/20 Only Up to March 2020 2021
Handwritten notes from classes	**89.8%**	**68.7%**	**92.4%**	**64.0%**	**93.8%**	**87.5%**
A course text book	**91.3%**	**52.9%**	**92.4%**	**59.3%**	**83.9%**	**65.0%**
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	57.7%	54.4%	41.5%	50.0%	44.4%	47.5%
Information on the school/college VLE	***49.2%***	***64.5%***	***28.3%***	***40.6%***	***33.3%***	***45.0%***
Handout of book chapters and information	63.4%	38.2%	*64.1%*	*40.6%*	*71.6%*	*42.5%*
Books/materials in the school/college library	35.3%	38.6%	49.0%	48.4%	35.8%	25.0%

lower than in 2018/19.

When respondents were asked what they considered their main source of information to be, the top two for A-Level respondents for those in study up to 2018/19 and those only in study up to March 2019 were similar with a course text book and handwritten notes from class (See Table 18). For BTEC respondents across both entry year groups, again there was more diversity across the sources especially using information on the school/college VLE and accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE.

Table 18 Access to learning materials -Main source for those in study up to 2018/19 and 2019/20 but prior to the March lockdown 2020

Type of material	A-Level Up to 2018/19 2019	BTEC Up to 2018/19 2019	A-Level Up to 2018/19 2021	BTEC Up to 2018/19 2021	A-Level 2019/20 only Up to March 2020 2021	BTEC 2019/20 Only Up to March 2020 2021
Handwritten notes from classes	**26.7%**	17.4%	**30.2%**	15.7%	**34.1%**	**36.6%**
A course text book	**51.2%**	**23.9%**	**50.9%**	**31.5%**	**46.3%**	**14.6%**
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	8.1%	**23.9%**	1.9%	**17.9%**	6.1%	**26.8%**
Information on the school/college VLE	8.0%	**20.8%**	3.8%	**19.2%**	8.5%	**14.6%**
Handout of book chapters and information	5.2%	3.9%	9.4%	8.7%	2.4%	7.3%
Books/materials in the school/college library	0.8%	8.1%	3.8%	7.0%	**2.4%**	**0.0%**

Accessing learning materials at school/college in 2020/21 (pre, during, post lockdown)- 2021 PAQ only

Respondents who had been in study in 2020/21 were asked to select all the sources they had used during the academic year (see Table 19). Up to December 2020 (before the January lockdown), for A-Level respondents, the top three sources were handwritten notes from classes then a course text book followed closely by handout of book chapters and information. For BTEC respondents, handwritten notes was first but much lower in usage than their A-Level counterparts

followed by accessing information on the school/college VLE then accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE. For both groups accessing books/information via a school/college library was low.

During the lockdown period of January to March, unsurprisingly accessing information on the school/college VLE was the most cited by both A-Level and BTEC respondents. For A-Level, the second and third most cited was accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE then a course text book. For BTEC respondents, the second and third sources were accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE and then handwritten notes from classes. Use of handwritten notes from classes and a course text book for BTEC respondents was much lower than for A-Level. During the lockdown period, accessing books/information via a school/college library was negligible. Understandably, library use during the lockdown period was low due to books being considered a potential COVID-19 spread hazard.

When respondents returned to school/college in April, A-Level and BTEC respondents pattern of accessing information generally reverted to that 'Up to December 2020'. However, the notable difference for both was the increased use of accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE after the return to study in April 2021. Although accessing books/information via a school/college library increased in use, it did not reach the pre-lockdown level.

When respondents were asked what they considered their main source of information during the lockdown period to be, *it was information on the school/college VLE* (see Table 20). Pre and post lockdown, for A-Level respondents it was *a course text book then handwritten notes from classes,* but for BTEC, *it was accessing information on the school/college VLE then accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE followed closely by handwritten notes from classes.*

Table 19 Access to learning materials -All sources for those in study in 2020/21-2021 PAQ only

Type of material	Up to December 2020		Between January and March 2021		After April and return to school/college 2021	
	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC
Handwritten notes from classes	**85.2%**	**67.2%**	65.2%	45.3%	**83.3%**	**60.1%**
A course text book	**78.1%**	45.9%	**64.9%**	35.3%	**74.1%**	43.7%
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	54.4%	**53.0%**	**66.7%**	**67.2%**	62.1%	**63.9%**
Handout of book chapters and information	**60.0%**	40.9%	33.8%	18.0%	**57.2%**	30.1%
Information on the school/college VLE	58.4%	**65.0%**	**79.0%**	**73.2%**	**62.4%**	**70.5%**
Books in the school/college library	24.9%	20.2%	7.7%	3.1%	22.7%	14.2%

Table 20 Access to learning materials -Main source for those in study in 2020/21-PAQ 2021 only

Type of material	Up to December 2020		Between January and March 2021		After April and return to school/college 2021	
	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC
Handwritten notes from classes	**33.5%**	**30.2%**	13.4%	13.2%	**30.9%**	**21.3%**
A course text book	**34.5%**	15.9%	**25.3%**	8.8%	**30.9%**	10.9%
Accessing information from electronic sources outside a VLE	5.6%	**14.8%**	10.9%	**26.4%**	6.9%	**21.9%**
Handout of book chapters and information	9.3%	7.7%	4.1%	4.4%	9.4%	7.7%
Information on the school/college VLE	16.5%	**30.8%**	**46.3%**	**46.7%**	**20.9%**	**38.3%**
Books in the school/college library	0.6%	0.5%	0.0%	0.5%	0.9%	0.0%

Submission of coursework at school/college up to and including 2019/20

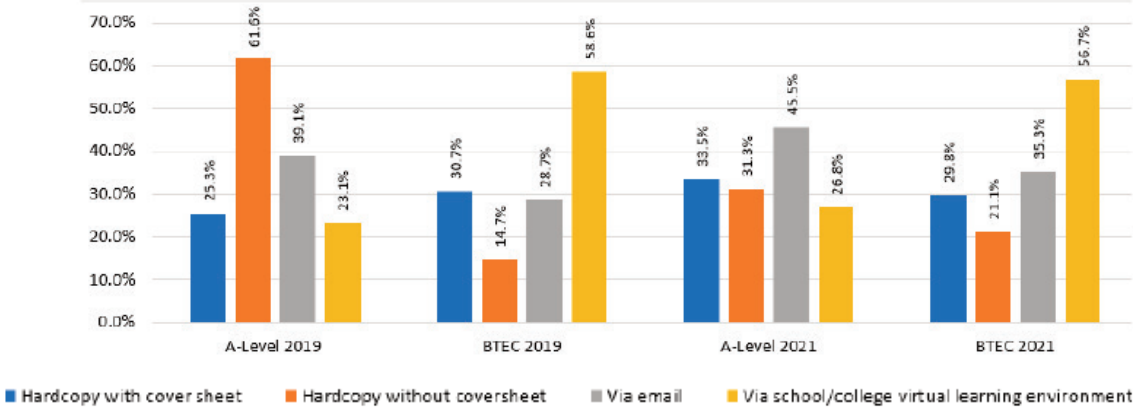
Respondents were asked to select all the methods by which they submitted their coursework, up to and including 2019/20, prior to the March 2020 lockdown.

For 86.9% of A-Level respondents in study up to 2019/20, submission of course work hard copy (25.3% with and 61.6% without a cover sheet) was the primary method whereas as for BTEC it was second with 45.4% (30.7% and

14.7% respectively) (see Figure 16). For BTEC respondents, the most cited method was *via a school/college VLE* with 58.6% whereas for A-Level it was 23.1%. *Via email* was cited in second place by A-Level respondents and third by BTEC.

The responses in the 2021 survey are similar (see Figure 16). Again, hardcopy submission (with or without a cover sheet) for 64.8% of A-level respondents was first with email in second place with 45.5%. For BTEC, it was via a school/college VLE with 56.7% then hardcopy submission (with or without a cover sheet) with 50.9%. For both A-Level and BTEC respondents, the use of email increased on the 2019 responses. Up until March 2020, submission of coursework was consistent across the different qualifications.

Figure 16 All methods of submission for those in study up to and including 2019/20 prior to the March lockdown



Submission of coursework at school/college in 2020/21 – PAQ 2021 only

When submission of coursework for those in study during 2020/21 is examined by highest entry qualification up to December 2020, A-Level respondents most common submission methods were *hard copy (with or with a cover sheet)* with 62.7% followed by via email with 50.1% (see Table 21). For BTEC, it was via *school/college VLE* with 69.9% then *via email* with 34.4%.

For both during the lockdown, *via email* and *the*

school/college VLE were the top two.

After the return to study in April 2021, the methods for A-Level respondents and BTEC reverted back to a similar submission pattern prior to the January to March lockdown with the exception of an increased use of submission *via the school/college VLE.*

Table 21 All methods of submission for those in study in 2020/21-PAQ 2021 only

Type of material	Up to December 2020		Between January and March 2021		After April and return to school/college 2021	
	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC
Hard copy with cover sheet	**22.4%**	20.2%	3.7%	3.2%	20.9%	10.9%
Hard copy without cover sheet	**40.3%**	9.8%	5.8%	1.6%	26.7%	6.5%
Via email	**50.1%**	**34.4%**	**63.7%**	**42.6%**	56.0%	38.2%
Via the school/college VLE	41.2%	**69.9%**	**65.2%**	**74.8%**	**58.4%**	**77.0%**
Not required to submit work	5.5%	0.0%	3.7%	1.6%	5.2%	1.1%
Other	0.6%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%

Section 3 Feedback

Understanding what is meant by feedback

When respondents across both surveys 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 by both A-Level and BTEC respondents that it was to raise their awareness of strengths and areas for improvement, and identify actions to be taken to improve performance.

A-Level

Acknowledging you on what you have done well and giving you constructive criticism on where you can improve and how to get there in order to succeed.

Feedback is advice on what I have missed out on in an answer and how I might restructure an answer for more marks as a way to learn for future questions alongside help on punctuation and grammar.

Correct answers to incorrectly answered questions and general advise to improve grade in future.

Criticism and praise about your work.

BTEC

Letting you know how you have progressed on a particular task or topic. Points you may have misunderstood or left out. Tasks you have successfully achieved. Reflecting on your overall performance. Reassurance that you are successfully on the right track.

A dissection of my written work explaining the right and wrongs, as well as elaboration with what to add and correct.

A teachers reaction and advice towards work I submitted about what was good and what could be improved. Feedback is a tool used for teachers to help students to further develop their work or in some cases praise them for the work done. Feedback usually tends to be given when there is an opportunity for the work to be even better.

Feedback method at school/college up to 2018/19- PAQ 2019 only

Respondents who were completing the PAQ in 2019 prior to the pandemic were asked to select all the methods for how they had typically received feedback (for either non-assessed or assessed work) in their studies up to 2018/19. The options provided reflected the main methods at the time. For A-Level respondents *written feedback (hardcopy)* followed by *face to face* with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually) were the top two cited, whereas for BTEC, it was the reverse (see Table 22). However, for BTEC respondents, feedback was delivered in a more diverse way with greater use of *email* and via the *school/college virtual learning environment.*

Feedback method at school/college up to 2019/20- PAQ 2021 only

The findings shown below for how respondents typically received feedback are only for those in study 'up to and including 2019/20' (prior to the March lockdown) from the 2021 PAQ. They reflect the findings from the 2019 PAQ.

Table 22 All feedback methods for those in study up to and including 2018/19- PAQ 2019 only

Feedback method	A-Level Up to 2018/19	BTEC Up to 2018/19
Written feedback (hard copy)	**91.3%**	**52.5%**
Written feedback via email	**33.1%**	**40.5%**
Audio (verbally recorded)	3.4%	5.5%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually)	**75.9%**	**83.0%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in person (as a group)	39.7%	21.0%
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	1.9%	13.0%

Additional methods were added to reflect the changes adopted during the pandemic.

The top three responses for both A-Level and BTEC respondents for how feedback was commonly given were *written feedback (hard copy), face to face in-person (individually)* and *written feedback via email* (see Table 23).
The notable differences between the entry qualifications were:

- 34.3% A-Level respondents were more likely to get face to face in-person feedback as a group compared to 19.2% of BTEC.

- 36.5% of BTEC respondents were more likely to receive their feedback via the school/college VLE compared to 14.9% of A-Level counterparts.

- 79.8% of A-Level respondents were more likely to receive written feedback (hardcopy) compared to 46.1% of BTEC.

It is important to note that for those in study up to and including 2019/20 prior to the March lockdown, use of webinars were not commonly used. They became more prevalent the following year as the pandemic continued. Furthermore, for A-Level students, learning stopped at the end of March when schools closed and it was decided to assess by coursework. The decision for BTECs was made much

later.

Feedback method at school/college in 2020/21- 2021 PAQ

Table 23 All feedback methods for those in study up to and including 2019/20-PAQ 2021 only

Feedback method	A-Level Up to 2019/20	BTEC Up to 2019/20
Written feedback (hard copy)	**79.8%**	**46.1%**
Written feedback via email	**39.5%**	**31.7%**
Audio (verbally recorded)	2.2%	2.8%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually)	**61.9%**	**49.0%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in person (as a group)	**34.3%**	**19.2%**
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	**14.9%**	**36.5%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor via webinar (Individually)	5.2%	1.9%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor via webinar (as a group)	1.5%	0.9%
I received no feedback as I submitted no work	0.0%	1.9%

only

When examined by entry qualification of those in study in 2020/21 (see Table 24), up to December 2020, A-Level respondents mainly received feedback via written (hard copy) then face to face in-person (individually) followed by written feedback via email. These findings reflect those from 2019. For BTEC, it was face to face in-person (individually) then via the school/college VLE then written feedback (hardcopy) which was much lower for BTEC respondents than for their A-Level counterparts.

During the January to March lockdown, for both groups, feedback was *via email* and *via the school/college VLE*. However, when teaching resumed in-person in April, a similar delivery of feedback pattern to that 'up to December 2020' for those groups resumed. For A-Level respondents, *feedback via email* which increased during lockdown, was retained.

Feedback method preference at school/college up to 2018/19

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents in study up to 2018/19, face to face in-person was the main preference

Table 24 All feedback methods for those in study in 2020/21 -PAQ 2021 only

Type of material	Up to December 2020		Between January and March 2021		After April and the return to school/college 2021	
	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC	A-Level	BTEC
Written feedback (hard copy)	**62.4%**	**28.9%**	8.3%	5.6%	**48.0%**	14.2%
Written feedback via email	**49.8%**	21.8%	**73.5%**	**44.9%**	**62.4%**	***44.2%***
Audio (verbally recorded)	12.6%	8.7%	24.0%	11.4%	12.6%	8.2%
Face to Face with the teacher/ tutor in-person (Individually)	**55.3%**	**50.8%**	6.7%	15.1%	**46.4%**	46.9%
Face to Face with the teacher /tutor in person (as a group)	38.4%	22.4%	4.9%	4.9%	32.0%	20.2%
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	29.2%	**50.3%**	**48.9%**	**54.6%**	38.4%	***53.0%***
Face to Face with the teacher /tutor via webinar (Indiv)	8.3%	12.0%	24.0%	24.0%	11.4%	12.0%
Face to Face with the teacher /tutor via webinar (by group)	4.0%	6.0%	21.5%	12.5%	8.0%	6.0%
I received no feedback as I submitted no work	1.8%	0.5%	2.4%	2.2%	2.4%	1.1%

although notably higher for BTEC (see Table 25). Written feedback (hard copy) was second for both although lower for BTEC respondents.Feedback method preference at school/college up to 2018/19

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents in study up to 2018/19, *face to face in-person* was the main preference although notably higher for BTEC (see Table 25). *Written feedback (hard copy)* was second for both although lower for BTEC respondents.

Table 25 Feedback method preference for those in study up to and including 2018/19-PAQ 2019 only

Feedback method	A-Level Up to 2018/19	BTEC Up to 2018/19
Written feedback (hard copy)	**29.7%**	**17.5%**
Written feedback via email	**10.3%**	**12.5%**
Audio (verbally recorded)	0.5%	0.5%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually)	**56.3%**	**63.5%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in person (as a group)	3.0%	1.0%
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	0.3%	5.0%

Table 25 Feedback method preference for those in study up to and including 2018/19-PAQ 2019 only

Feedback method	A-Level Up to 2018/19	BTEC Up to 2018/19
Written feedback (hard copy)	**29.7%**	**17.5%**
Written feedback via email	**10.3%**	**12.5%**
Audio (verbally recorded)	0.5%	0.5%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually)	**56.3%**	**63.5%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in person (as a group)	3.0%	1.0%
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	0.3%	5.0%

Feedback method preference at school/college up to 2020/21 prior to March 2020 lockdown

For both A-Level and BTEC respondents in study up to 2019/20 and in study in 2020/21, their preferred method for receiving feedback, which reflected previous findings, was *face to face (individually) with the tutor* (see Table 26). Again, for A-Level respondents *written feedback (hard copy)* was next followed by *via email*. However, for BTEC, the findings slightly varied from those previously with *via emai*l next then *via the school/college VLE.*

Table 26 Feedback method preference -PAQ 2021 only

Feedback method	A-Level Up to 2019/20	BTEC Up to 2019/20	A-Level 2020/21 only	BTEC 2020/21 only
Written feedback (hard copy)	19.0%	10.7%	20.2%	12.6%
Written feedback via email	**18.2%**	**22.3%**	**18.3%**	**20.6%**
Audio (verbally recorded)	1.5%	0.0%	2.2%	1.1%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in-person (Individually)	**54.7%**	**50.0%**	**47.2%**	**47.4%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor in person (as a group)	2.2%	1.8%	3.4%	1.1%
Via the school/college virtual learning environment	3.6%	**14.3%**	5.3%	**13.1%**
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor via webinar (Individually)	0.7%	0.9%	1.2%	4.0%
Face to Face with the teacher/tutor via webinar (as a group)	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	0.0%

Using feedback to help in future assignments at

school/college

When respondents were asked if they had read their feedback, 99% of respondents stated they had and they had used it to help with future assignments. Of the respondents who stated that they had not read the feedback, explanations included too generic, not personal and it was too late to help another assignment.

A-level

I don't always like seeing my feedback as I see it as not having done enough therefore I lack in confidence.

It was too hard to access.

Sometimes I do take my time to read them but mostly only when I know I have presented a high-quality piece of work. I know that I'm not the only one that does this .

By the end of the learning through lockdown I was fed up and didn't want to work.

Volume of work, amount of feedback given and sometimes unclear written feedback.

Often long and wordy and seemed like it was a copy and paste not personal.

Sometimes it was unnecessary after the work had been given in.

Volume of work, amount of feedback given and sometimes unclear written feedback.

BTEC

Most of the time my feedback was given by in person one to one talks with my teachers and tutors, also virtual video calls

plus general feedback to the whole class in person/virtually.

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, there was similarity in the responses provided although there was a slightly higher percentage of BTEC respondents in 2019 (see Table 27). There were no notable differences by gender and generational status between the two qualification groups.

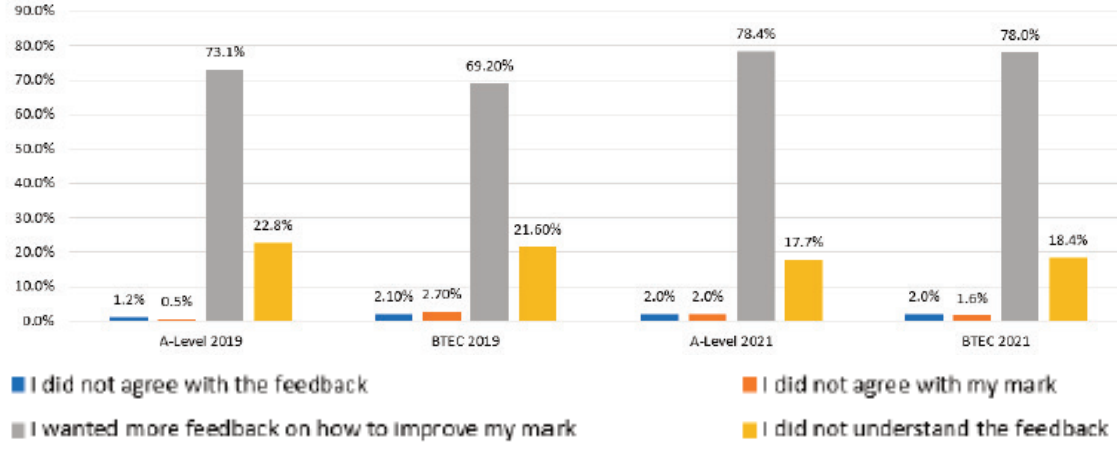
When asked for the reason for approaching a teacher/tutor, again there were no notable differences between A-Level and BTEC respondents (see Figure 17). For both groups, the objective for approaching a teacher/tutor was to get *more feedback on how to improve the mark.*

Table 27 Approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark at school/college

	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Yes	89.1%	92.5%	87.4%	86.8%
No	10.9%	7.5%	12.6%	13.2%

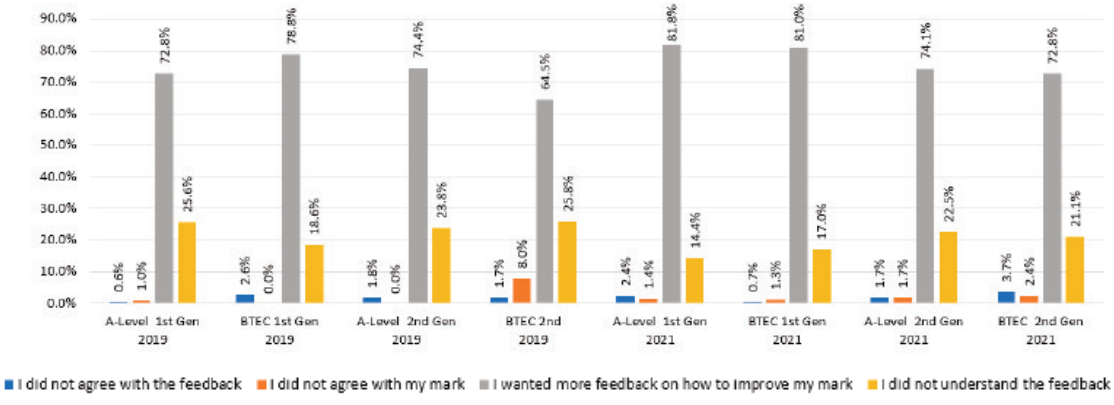
There were no major differences by gender across both samples. When examined by generational status, A-Level and BTEC 1st generation respondents were more likely to say that they had approached the teacher/tutor to get *more feedback*

Figure 17 Approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark



on how to improve the mark. Second generation A-Level and BTEC respondents were more likely to do this because *they did not understand the feedback* (see Figure 18).

Figure 18 Approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark by generational status



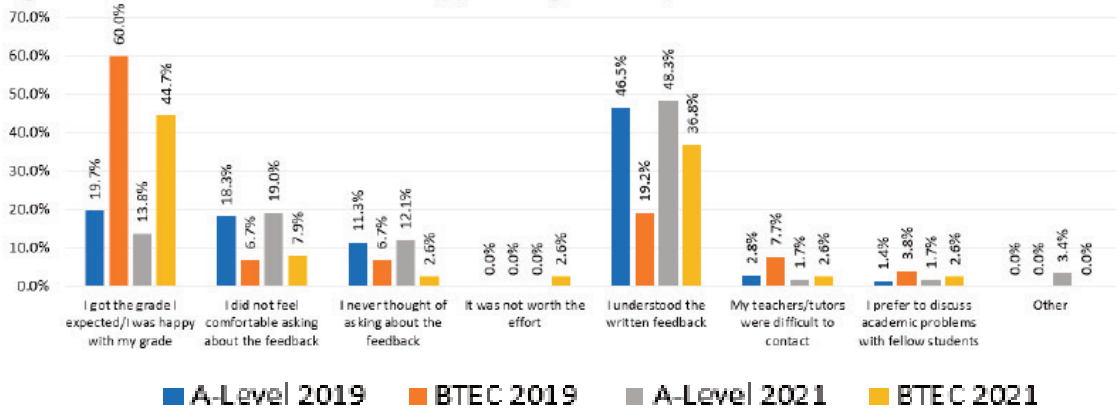
Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor

Respondents *not approaching a teacher/tutor* only accounted for 10.9% of A-Level and 7.5% of BTEC in 2019, and 12.6% A-Level and 13.2% of BTEC in 2021.

Respondents were asked to select one reason for *not approaching a teacher/tutor* (see Figure 19). For A-Level respondents across both surveys, the main reason was *I understood the written feedback* followed by *I got the grade I expected/I was happy with my grade.* These were also the top two cited by BTEC respondents but in reverse order.

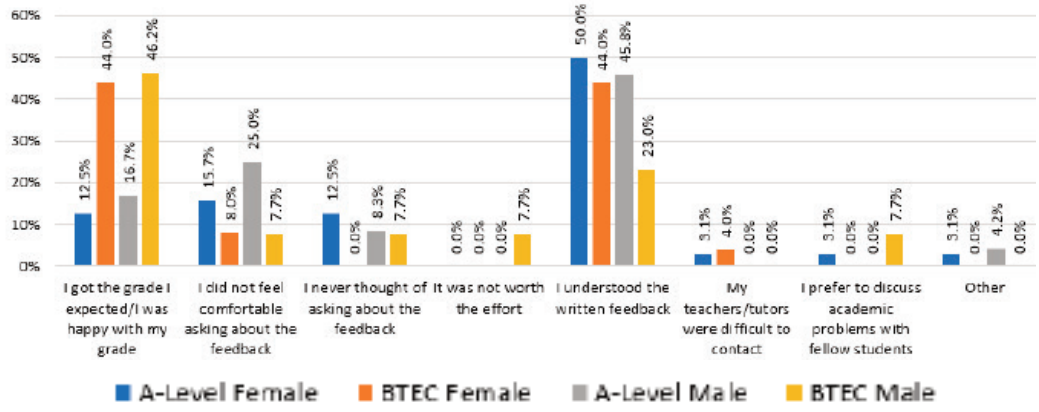
However, a higher number of A-Level respondents across both surveys stated that they *did not feel comfortable about asking for feedback* and they *had never thought about asking for feedback* compared to their BTEC counterparts. *Discussing academic issues with fellow students* was not a preferable option for either qualification group.

Figure 19 Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark



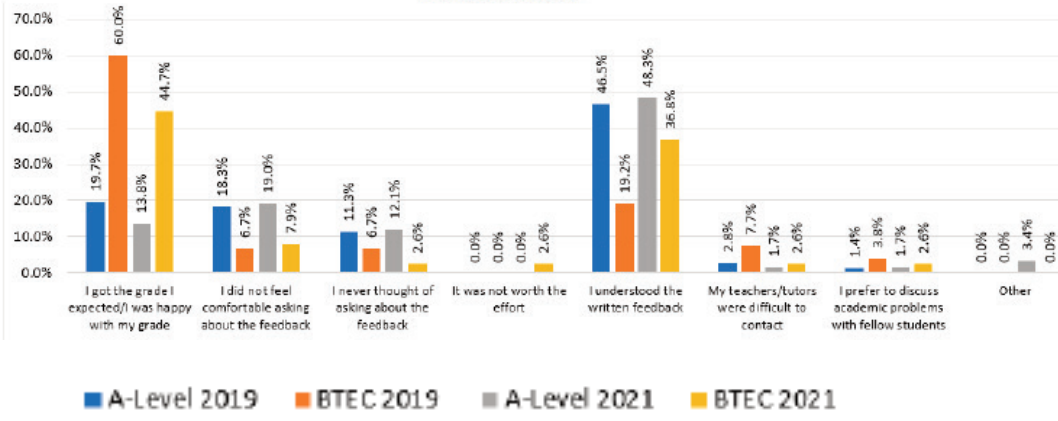
When examined by gender in the 2021 survey, female and male A-Level respondents (15.7% and 25.0% respectively) were more likely than BTEC (8.0% and 7.7% respectively) to say they felt uncomfortable asking for feedback (see Figure 20). Both female and male A-Level respondents were also more likely to say that they had never thought about asking for it (12.5% and 8.3%) compared to BTEC (0.0% and 8.3% respectively).

Figure 20 Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark by gender- PAQ 2021 o



When examined by generational status (see Figure 21), A-Level 1st and 2nd generation were notably less comfortable about asking for feedback (18.4% and 21.3% respectively) than their BTEC counterparts (8.0% and 0.0%) and more likely to never have thought about asking for feedback (13.2% and

Figure 21 Reasons for not approaching a teacher/tutor to discuss a mark by generational status -PAQ 2021 only

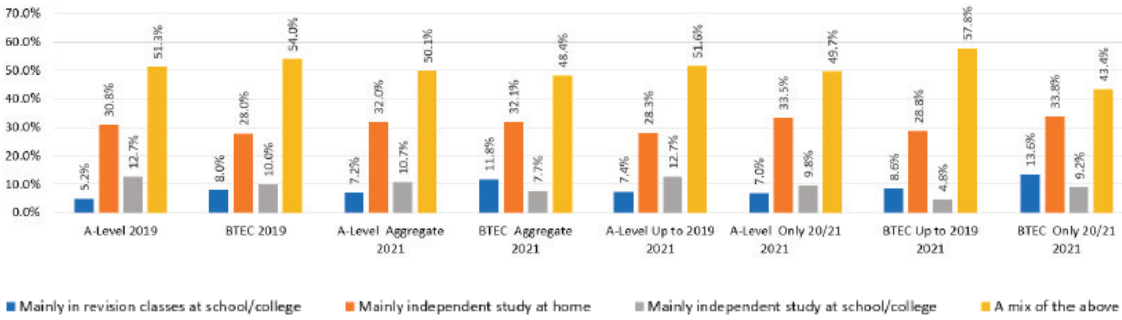


10.5%) than BTEC respondents (4.0% and 0.0%).

Revision undertaken in prior study

Across both surveys and qualifications, the most cited revision method was a mix of revision methods. However, for a third of A-Level and BTEC respondents, *mainly independent study at home* was the primary activity (see Figure 22).

Figure 22 Revision method up to 2019 and during 2020/21



Section 4 Study issues due to COVID-19 - 2021 only

The findings in this section only report those from the 2021 Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire as they refer to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Respondents who were in study in 2019/20 and 2020/21 were asked if they had experienced any study issues as a result of COVID-19 (see Figure 23). They were asked to select all that applied to them.

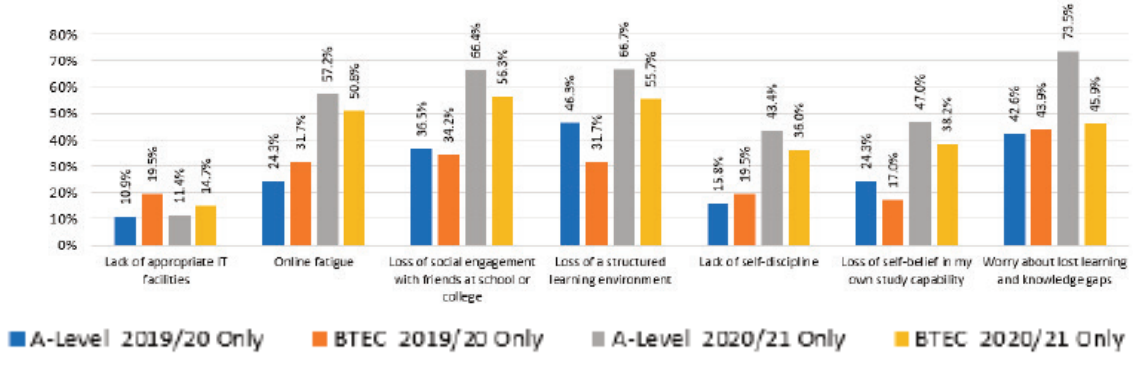
Study issues experienced in 2019/20 due to COVID- 19

For A-Level and BTEC respondents in study in 2019/20, which was in the first phase of the pandemic, the top three study issues were the same but in a slightly different order. For A-Level, they were *loss of a structured learning environment* followed by *worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps* then *loss of social engagement with friends at school/college.* For BTEC, it was *worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps* followed by *loss of social engagement with friends at school/college* then *loss of a structured learning environment.*

Study issues experienced in 2020/21 due to COVID-19

For respondents in study in 2020/21 during the second phase of the pandemic, all the concerns were higher than those reported by those in study in 2019/20 apart from *lack of appropriate IT resources,* which was one area identified as a major weakness at the start of the pandemic, and that received funding to support learning. For those in study in 2019/20, twice as many BTEC respondents compared to their A-Level counterparts had cited IT resources as a study issue. It is important to remember that the decision to halt learning for BTEC students occurred much later than for A-Level after the March 2020 lockdown.

Figure 23 All study issues experienced by those in study in 2019/20 and 2020/21-PAQ 2021 only



In 2020/21, the top four concerns for both groups were the same but again in a slightly different order.

A-Level

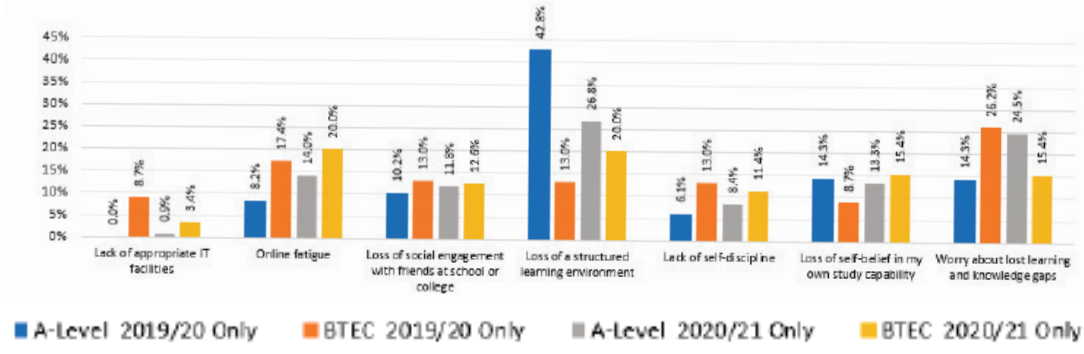
1). Worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps 1). Loss of social engagement with friends at school/college
2). Loss of a structured learning environment 2). Loss of a structured learning environment
3). Loss of social engagement with friends at school/college
4). Online fatigue

BTEC

1). Loss of social engagement with friends at school/college
2). Loss of a structured learning environment
3). Online fatigue
4). Worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps

Respondents in study in 2019/20 and in 2020/21 were asked what they considered to be their main study issue (see Figure 24). For those in study in 2019/20, A-Level respondents clearly stated it was *loss of a structured learning environment* with 42.8%. For BTEC, there was no one main concern but the most cited was *worry about lost learning and knowledge gaps* with 26.2%. For both groups of respondents in study in 2020/21, there was no notable main concern. The most cited for both were *loss of a structured learning environment* and *worry about lost learning* and *knowledge gaps.*

Figure 24 Main study issue experienced by those in study in 2019/20 and 2020/21-PAQ 2021 only

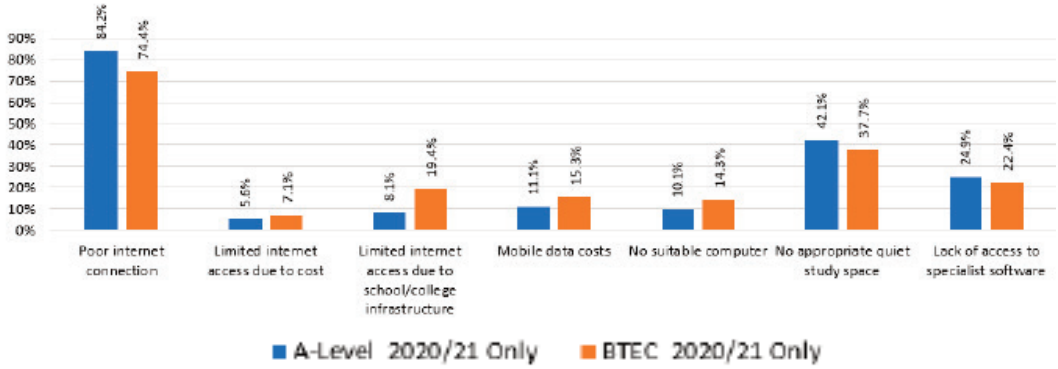


IT issues experienced in 2020/21 due to COVID-19

Those in study in 2020/21 were asked if they had experienced any IT issues. Of the A-Level respondents, 60.7% said they had and for BTEC it was 53.6%. When asked about the issues they had experienced, the top two notable ones for both groups were poor internet connection followed by no appropriate quiet study space (see Figure 25).

Section 5 Concerns and confidence levels in starting university

Figure 25 All IT issues experienced by those in study in 2020/21- PAQ 2021 only



Concerns about starting the course at university

There were 27 options relating to concerns about starting university study. Questions relating to COVID-19 that were added to the 2021 survey are in red italics in Table 28. Respondents were asked to select any that applied to them. Across both surveys and qualifications, similar concerns arose which are highlighted below with *coping with the level of study* being the main concern. In 2019, the order of concerns for A-Level and BTEC respondents was almost identical with a similar level of response. For A-Level respondents, *getting used to moving away from home* was a greater concern than for BTEC but a higher percentage of BTEC respondents intended studying whilst staying at home. In the 2021 survey, mental health and wellbeing and COVID-19 related questions were added which will be reported on separately. The top

four concerns were similar although in a slightly different order. *Mental health and well being* was a concern for both but higher for A-Level respondents. Again, *getting used to moving away from home* was a greater concern for A-Level than BTEC as were COVID-19 related concerns. Note: that in the 2021 survey at both institutions, the number of respondents by entry qualification deciding to stay at home and study increased especially for BTEC.

Due to the number of concerns, for ease of comparison by student characteristic, they are reported in three themes below. These are 'study related' and 'finance and settlement' concerns for both surveys then 'COVID-19 related' for the

Table 28 Top concerns on entry

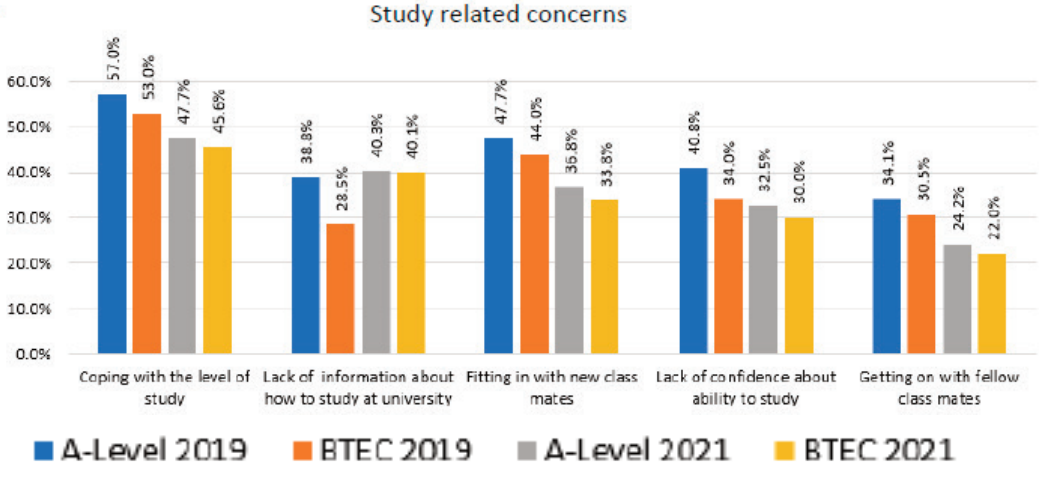
A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Copying with level of study 57.0%	**Copying with level of study 53.0%**	**Copying with level of study 47.7%**	**Copying with level of study 45.6%**
Fitting in with class mates 47.7%	Fitting in with class mates 44.0%	***Mental health &wellbeing 40.7%***	Lack of information about how to study at uni 40.1%
Getting used to moving away from home 44.8%	Getting used to moving away from home 37.0%	Lack of information about how to study at uni 40.3%	Fitting in with class mates 33.8%
Lack of confidence about ability to study 40.8%	Lack of confidence about ability to study 34.0%	Fitting in with class mates 36.8%	***Mental health &wellbeing 30.0%***
Lack of information about how to study at uni 38.8%	Getting on with fellow class mates 30.5%	***Potentially starting online 32.5%***	Lack of confidence about ability to study 30.0%
Getting on with fellow class mates 34.1%	Lack of information about how to study at uni 28.5%	Lack of confidence about ability to study 32.5%	***Knowledge gaps due to prior learning experience 22.6%***
Concerns about getting into debt 30.8%	Concerns about getting into debt 24.5%	Getting used to moving away from home 31.6%	Getting on with fellow class mates 22.0%
Having sufficient funding 22.5%	Having sufficient funding 24.0%	***Knowledge gaps due to prior learning experience 29.4%***	***Concerns about Covid19 and potential lockdowns 21.3%***
		Concerns about Covid19 and potential lockdowns 27.9%	***Potentially starting online 19.9%***
		Getting on with fellow class mates 24.2%	Getting used to moving away from home 17.8%
		Concerns about getting into debt 22.2%	Concerns about getting into debt 15.7%
		Having sufficient funding 18.3%	Having sufficient funding 15.0%

2021 survey only.

In terms of study related concerns, Figure 27 highlights a similar level of concern by qualification and by survey. In 2019, the notable differences between A-Level and BTEC respondents were regarding *lack of information about how to study at university* with 38.8% and 28.5% respectively and *lack of confidence about ability to study* with 40.8% and 34.0% respectively. In 2021, the responses for both qualification groups were almost the same.

When looking at finance and settlement concerns, the main differences across both surveys were A-Level respondents were more concerned *about moving away from home* and *getting into debt* than their BTEC counterparts (see Figure 28).

Figure 27

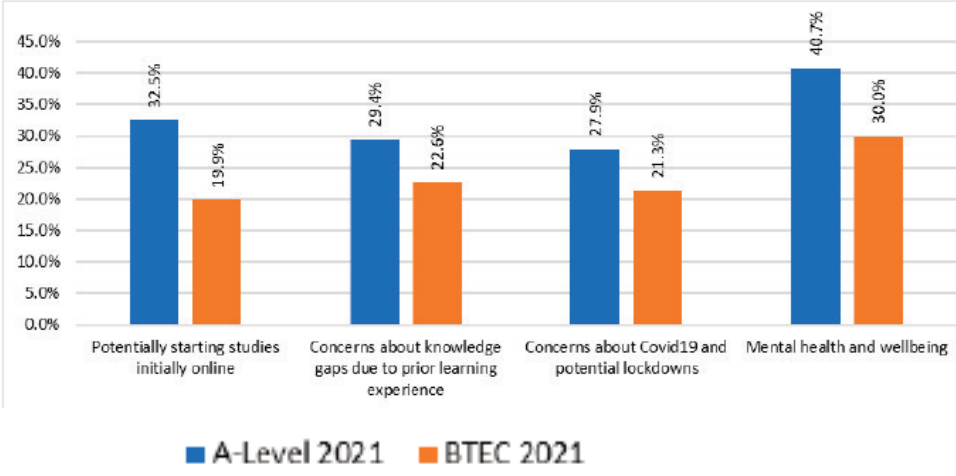


When examining COVID-19 related concerns, A-Level respondents expressed greater concern than BTEC especially with potentially starting studies initially online (See Figure 29). This finding could have been impacted on by prior learning experiences. BTEC respondents had greater diversity in accessing information at college.

Study related concerns by gender

When study related concerns are examined by gender across both surveys, a similar pattern occurs. A-Level and BTEC females cited higher levels of concern than their male

Figure 29 Covid related concerns -PAQ 2021 only



counterparts in every listed study related concern. A-Level females cited greater concern than their BTEC counterparts (see Figures 30-34).

BTEC males across both surveys cited higher levels of concern with coping with the level of study compared to their A-Level counterparts (see Figure 30).

A-Level and BTEC females across both surveys cited more concern with lack of confidence about ability to study

Figure 30 By gender

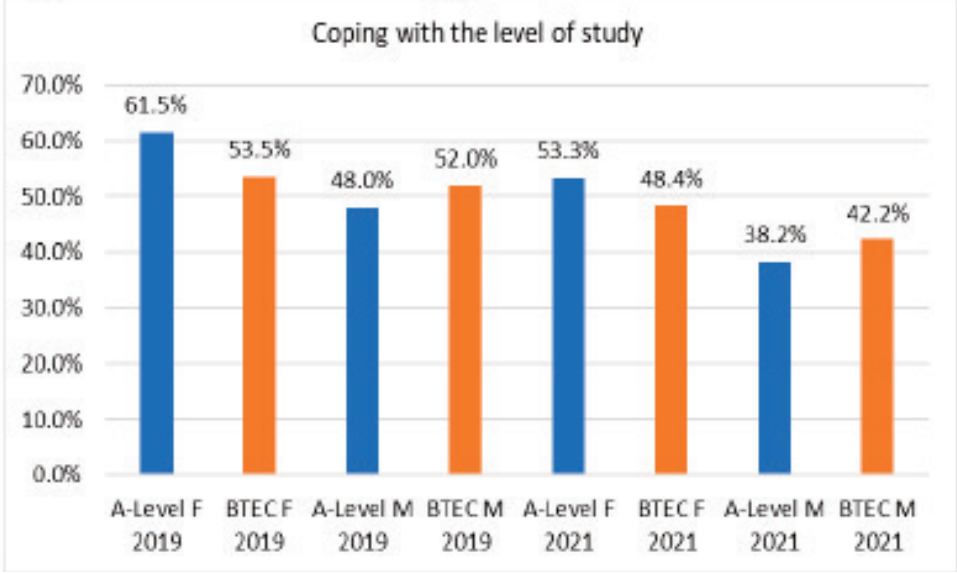
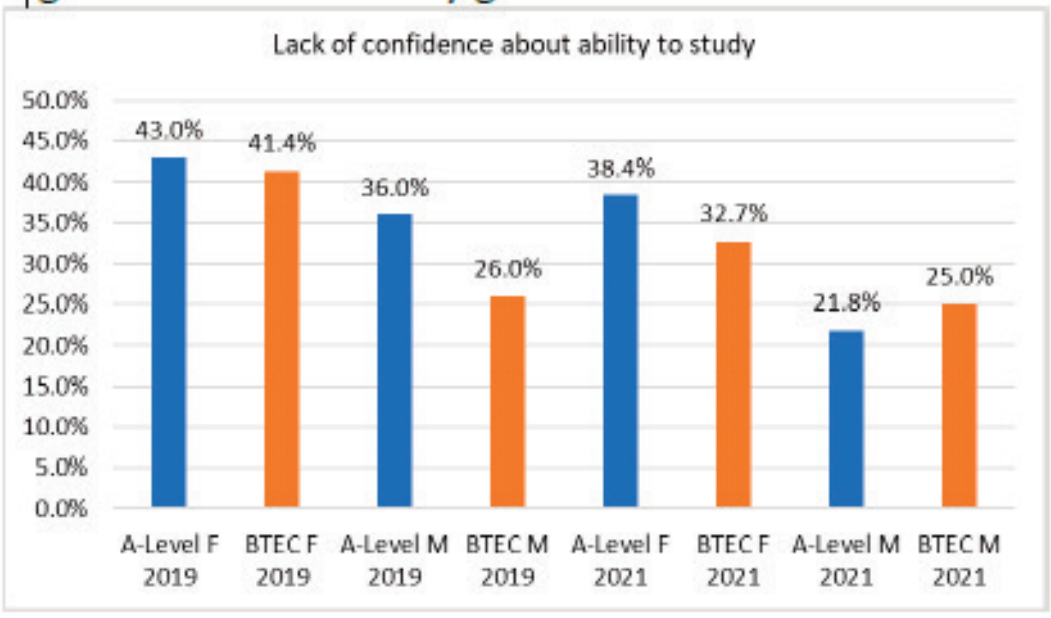


Figure 31 By gender



than A-Level and BTEC males (see Figure 31).

Females within each qualification and across both surveys cited higher levels of concern with *fitting in with new class mates* (see Figure 32) and getting on with fellow class mates (see Figure 33) than their male counterparts. A-Level females were slightly more concerned than BTEC Females.

Figure 32 By gender

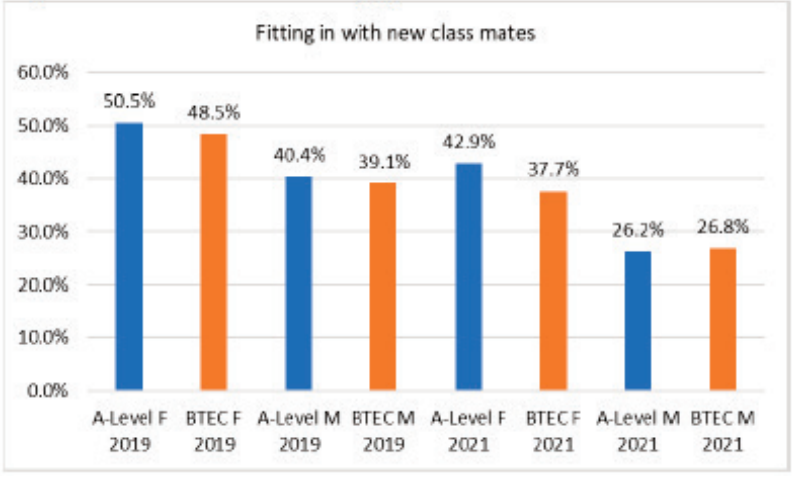
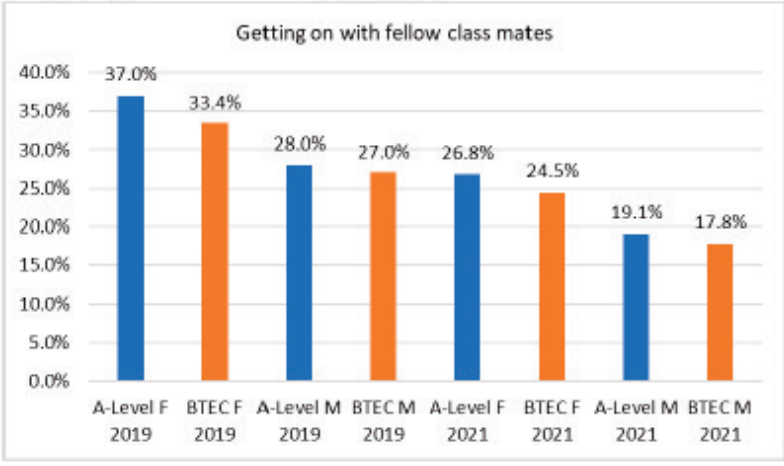


Figure 33 By gender

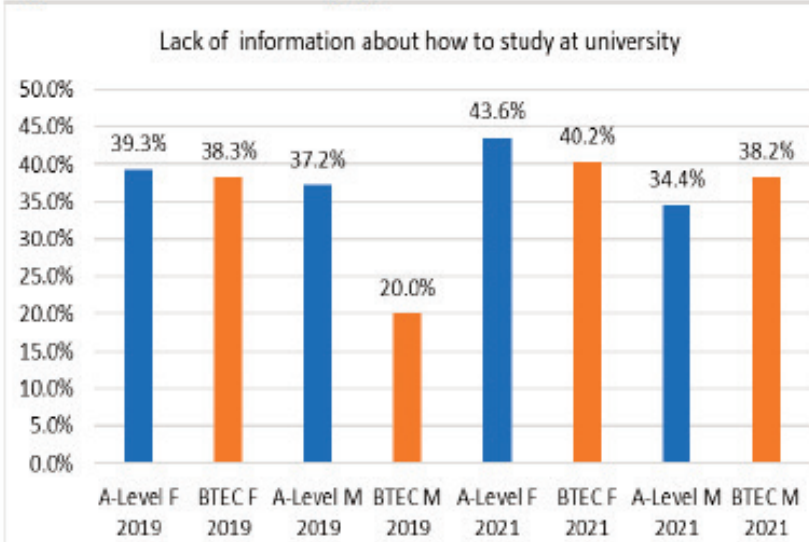


In the 2019 survey, BTEC males were least concerned about lack of information about how to study at university. However, in 2021, this was the case for A-Level males (see Figure 34).

Finance and settlement concerns by gender

A-Level females and males across both surveys cited higher levels of concern with getting into debt than their BTEC counterparts (see Figure 35).

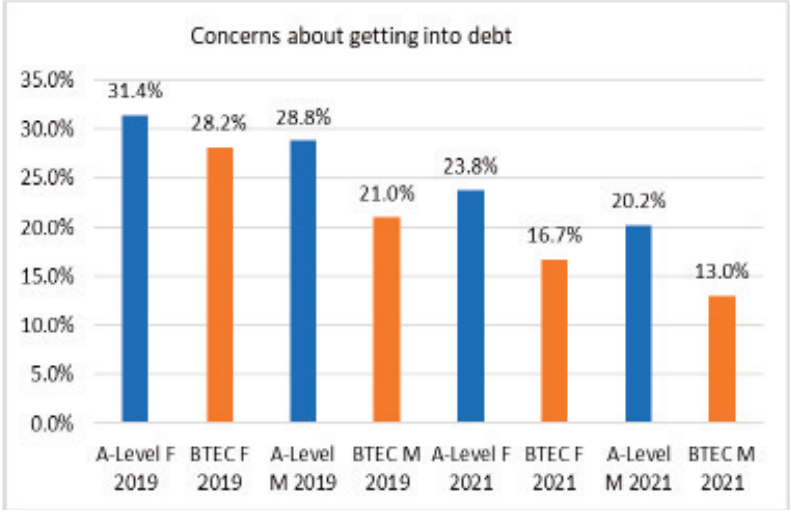
Figure 34 By gender



In 2019, there were similar levels of concern regarding having sufficient funding but in 2021, males were notably less concerned than females (see Figure 36).

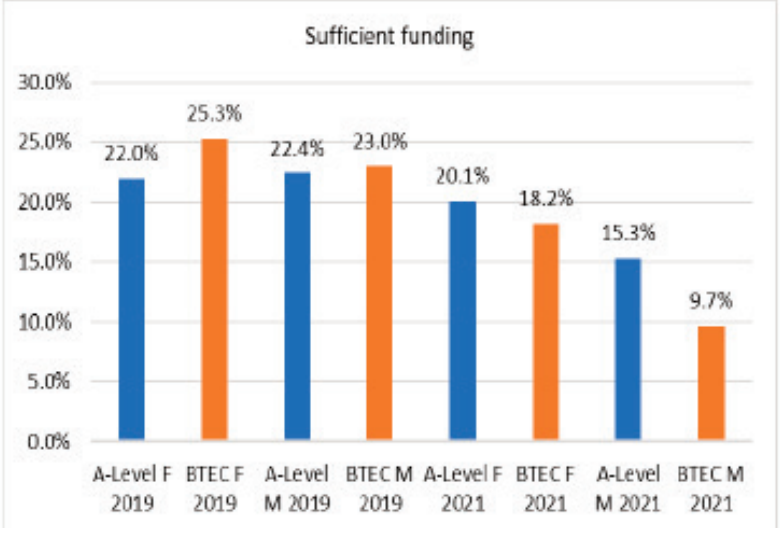
Across both surveys, female and male A-Level

Figure 35 By gender



respondents expressed greater concern than their BTEC counterparts in *getting used to moving away from home for the first time* (see Figure 37). It is important to note that a

Figure 36 By gender

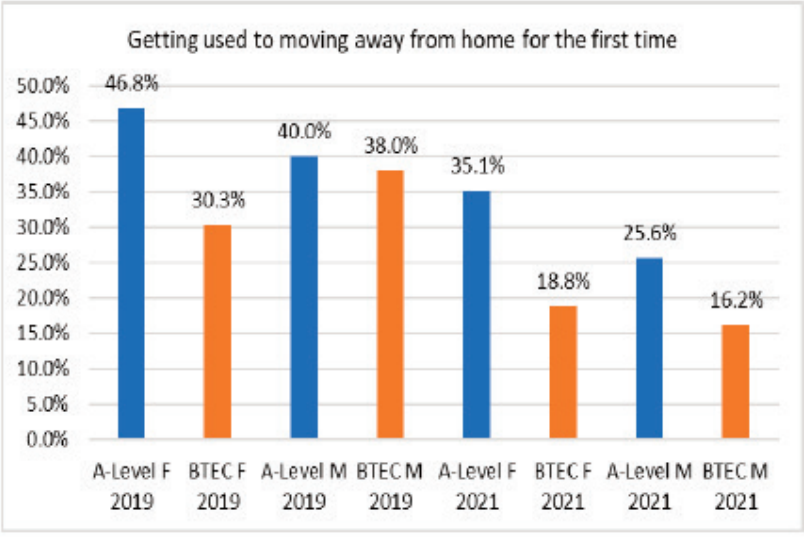


greater number of BTEC respondents across both surveys intended staying at home or staying local than their A-Level counterparts (refer to Table 5).

COVID-19 related concerns by gender - PAQ 2021 only

When examining the COVID-19 related concerns by gender, A-Level female and male respondents expressed highest

Figure 37 By gender



concern across all areas compared to their BTEC counterparts (see Figures 38-41).

BTEC females and males cited lower levels of concern with *potentially starting online* compared to their A-Level counterparts (see Figure 38). This finding may be influenced by BTEC respondents having a more diverse prior learning experience of using technology (see Section 2).

BTEC males were the least concerned about knowledge gaps due to their prior learning experience as a result of COVID-19 (see Figure 39).

Both A-Level and BTEC females expressed a much greater concern regarding their *mental health and wellbeing* than their male equivalents (see Figure 40). A-Level female and males were more concerned than their BTEC counterparts

Figure 38 By gender

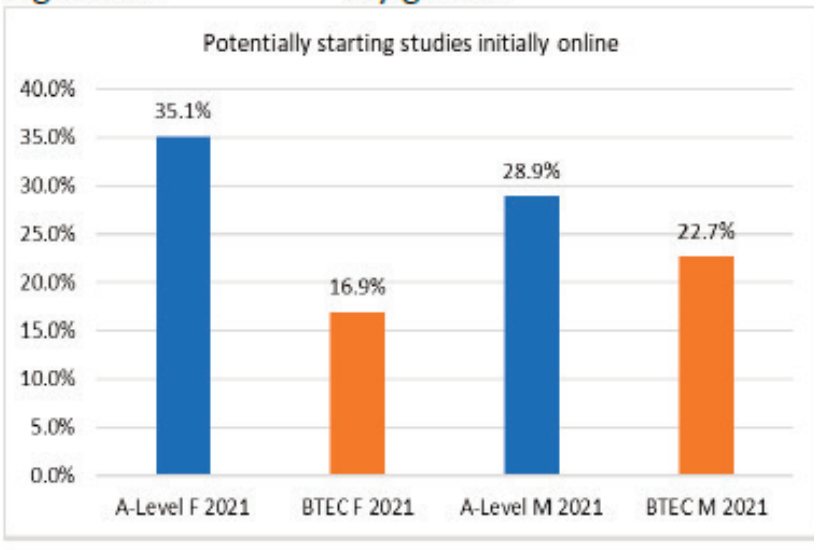
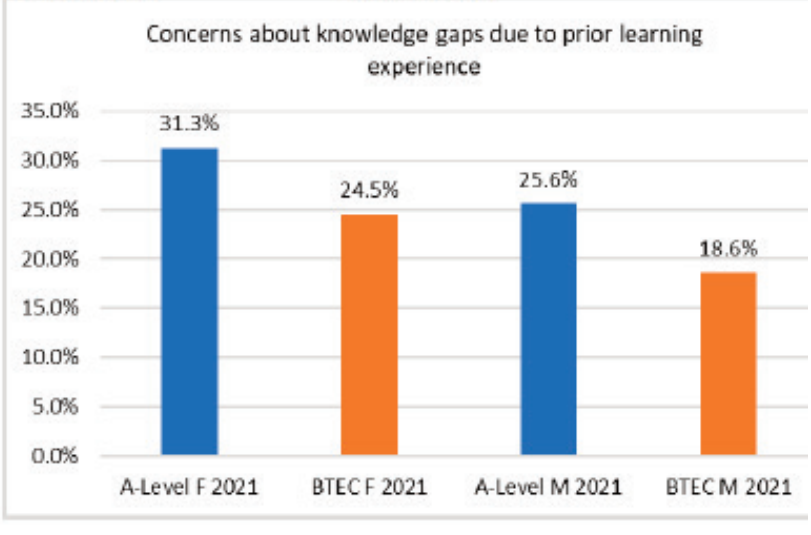


Figure 39 By gender



with BTEC males being the least concerned.

Both A-Level females and males expressed greater concern regarding *COVID-19 and potential lockdowns* than their BTEC counterpart (see Figure 41). Within each qualification, females expressed greater concern.

Study related concerns by generational status

When examined by generational status across both surveys and qualifications, respondents in 2021 were generally less concerned than those in 2019. COVID-19 could have been a

Figure 40 By gender

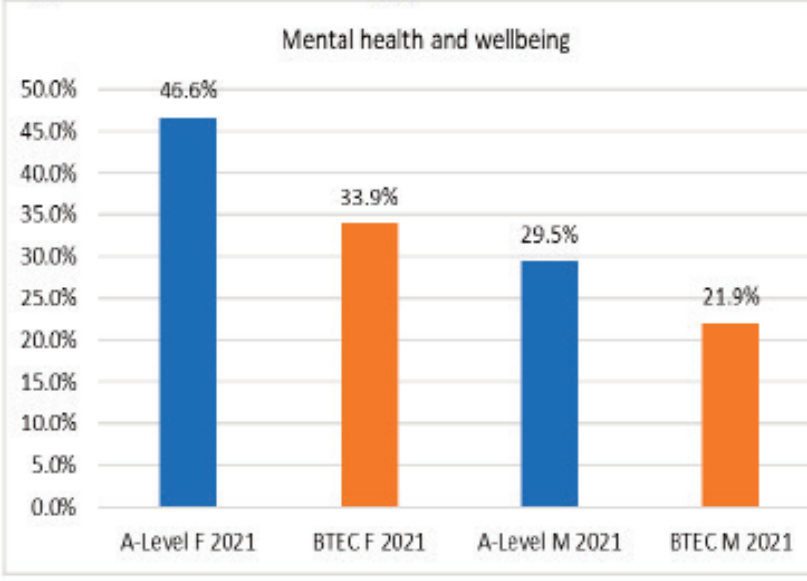
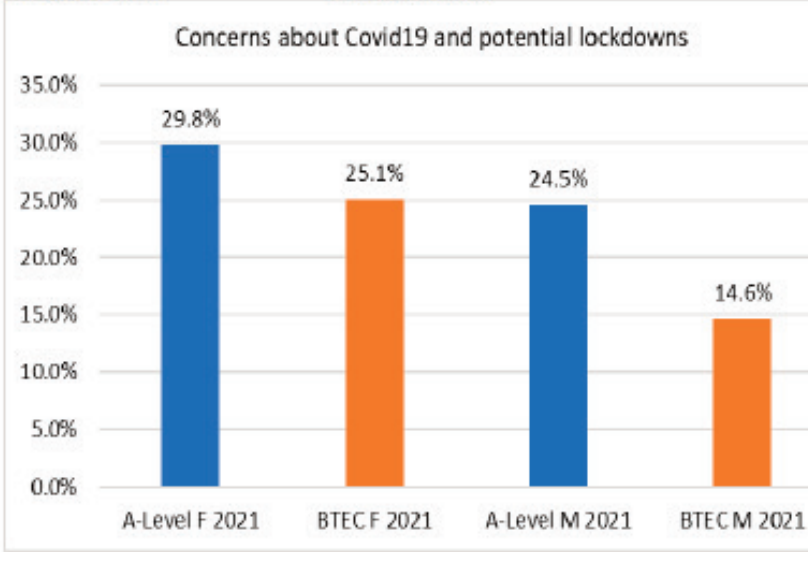


Figure 41 By gender

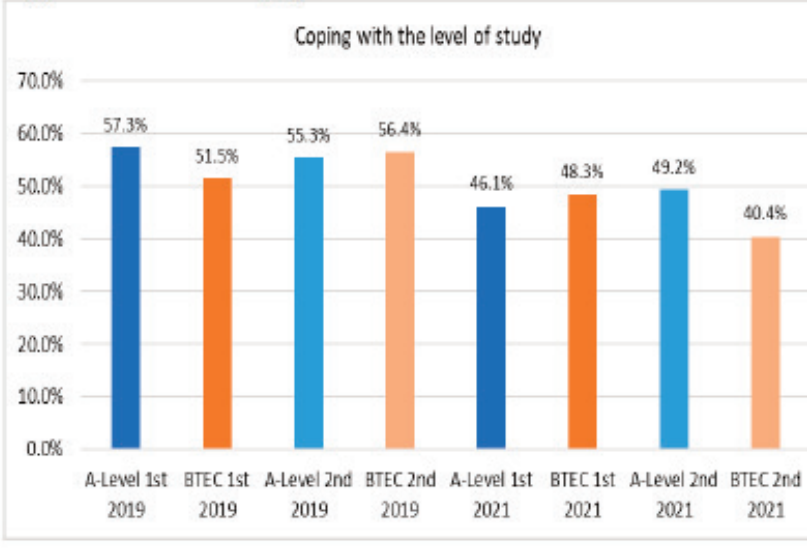


factor due to the way learning and assessment was undertaken during the pandemic. Across both surveys, there was similar levels of concern by qualification and generational status in terms of *coping with the level of study* (see Figure 42).

Across both surveys, A-Level 1st and 2nd generation expressed higher levels of concern regarding *confidence about their ability to study* than their BTEC counterparts (see Figure 43). BTEC 2nd generation had the least concern.

Across both surveys, there was similar concern across the two qualifications and generational status regarding *fitting in with new class mates* and *getting on with fellow students.* However, the percentage for both was lower in

Figure 42 By generational status

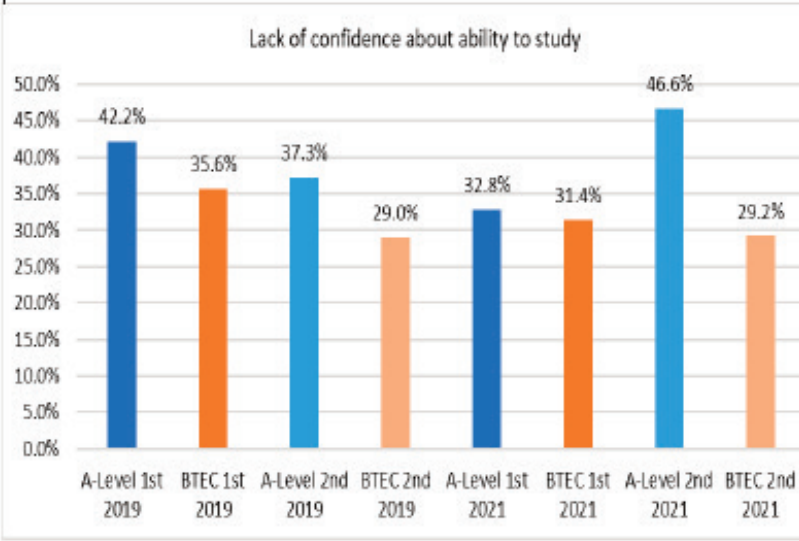


2021, which may have been as a result of the hybrid learning approach (see Figures 44 to 46).

In both the 2019 and 2021 surveys, BTEC 2nd generation were least concerned about *lack of information about how to study at university* (see Figure 46).

In 2019, A-Level 1st and 2nd generation respondents were the most concerned. However, in 2021, A-Level and BTEC 1st generation cited greater concern than their 2nd

Figure 43 By generational status



generation counterparts regarding *lack of information about how to study at university.*

Finance and settlement concerns by generational status

Across both surveys, A-Level 1st and 2nd generation respondents had slightly higher concerns about *getting*

Figure 44 By generational status

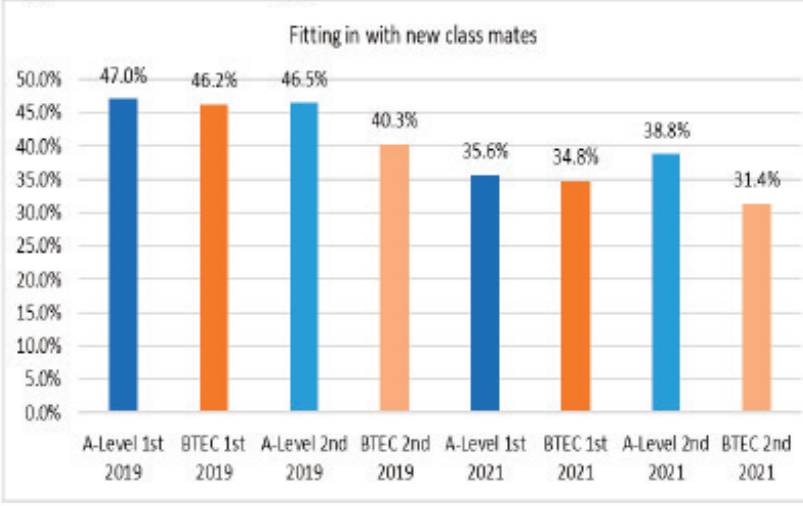


Figure 45 By generational status

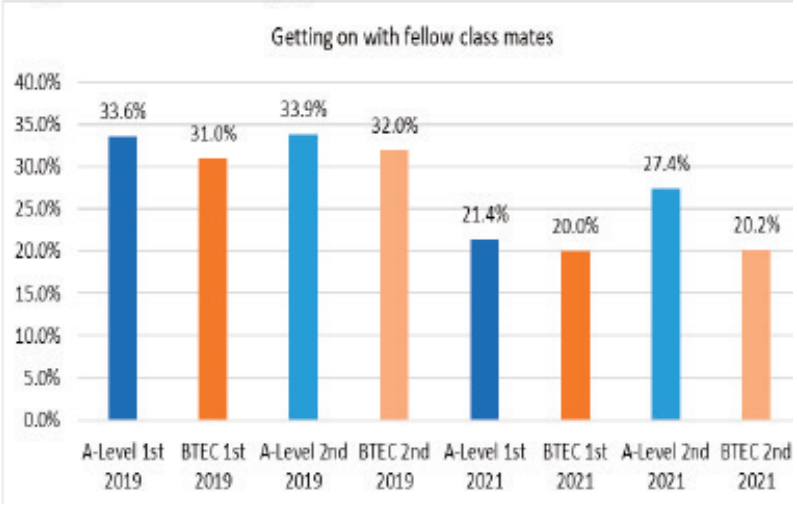
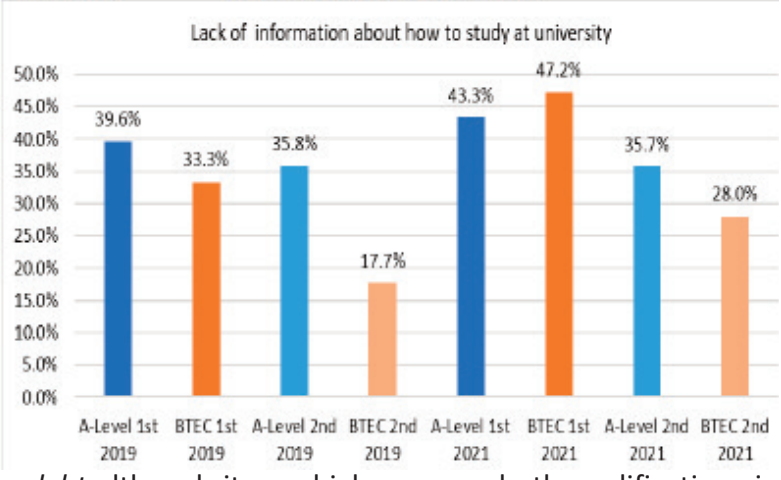


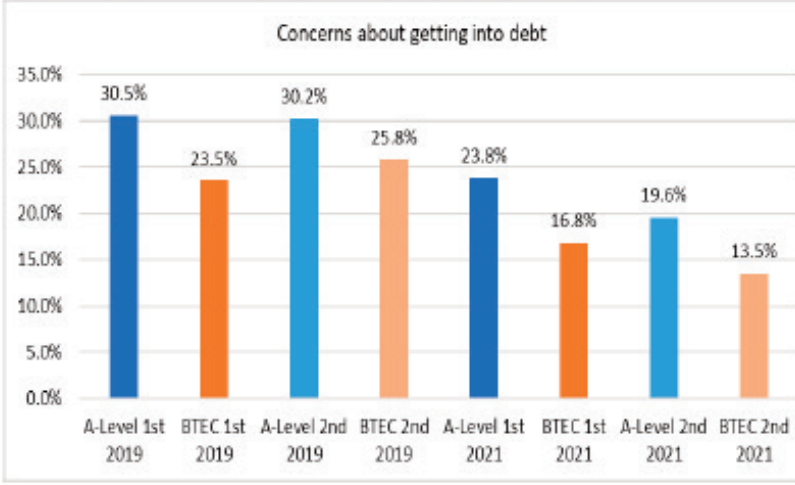
Figure 46 By generational status



into debt although it was higher across both qualifications in 2019 than 2021 (see Figure 47). In relation to having *sufficient funding*, BTEC 1st and 2nd generation respondents were slightly more concerned than their A-Level counterparts (see Figure 48). It is important to note that both A-Level 1st and 2nd generation respondents were notably more likely to receive financial support from their parents/guardians (refer to Figure 9).

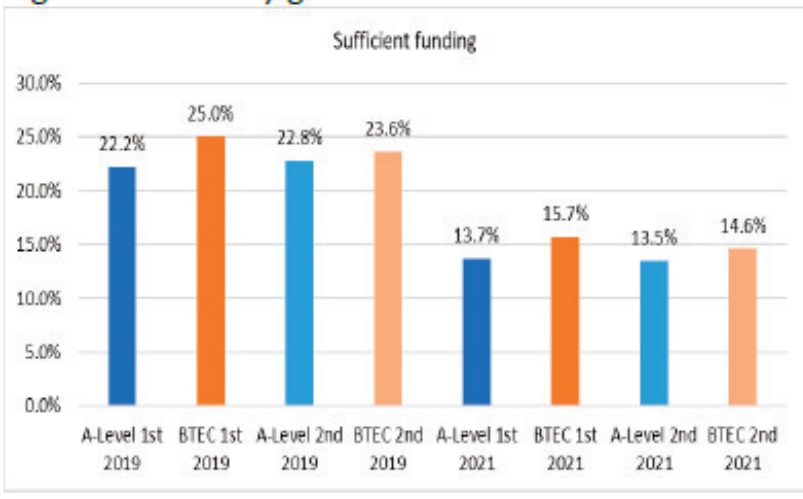
When concerns relating to *getting used to moving away from home for the first time*, BTEC 1st generation

Figure 47 By generational status



respondents were least concerned than their A-Level counterparts (see Figure 49). Again, this is likely due to

Figure 48 By generational status



a higher number of BTEC respondents deciding to stay at home whilst studying (refer to Table 12)

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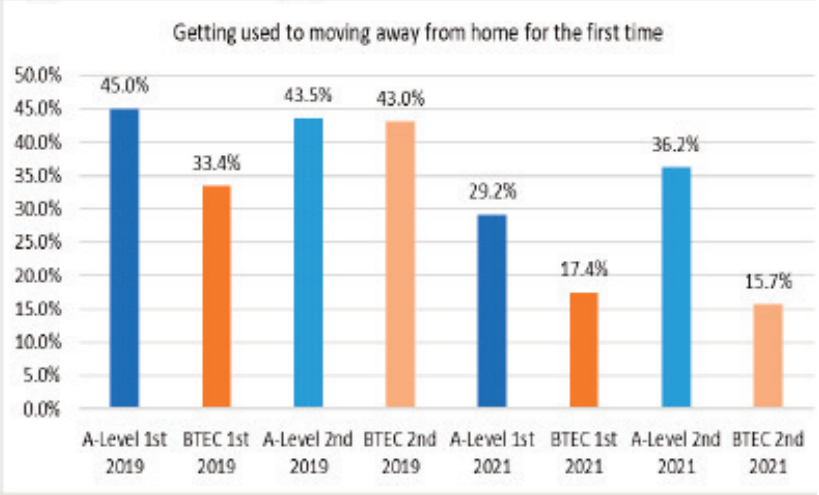
COVID related concerns by generational status-2021 PAQ only

In the 2021 PAQ, A-Level 1st generation respondents cited

Figure 49 By generational status



greater concern across three of the four concerns compared to the other respondents (see Table 29). BTEC 1st and 2nd generation expressed similar levels of concern although those who were 1st generation expressed slightly higher levels across all concerns.

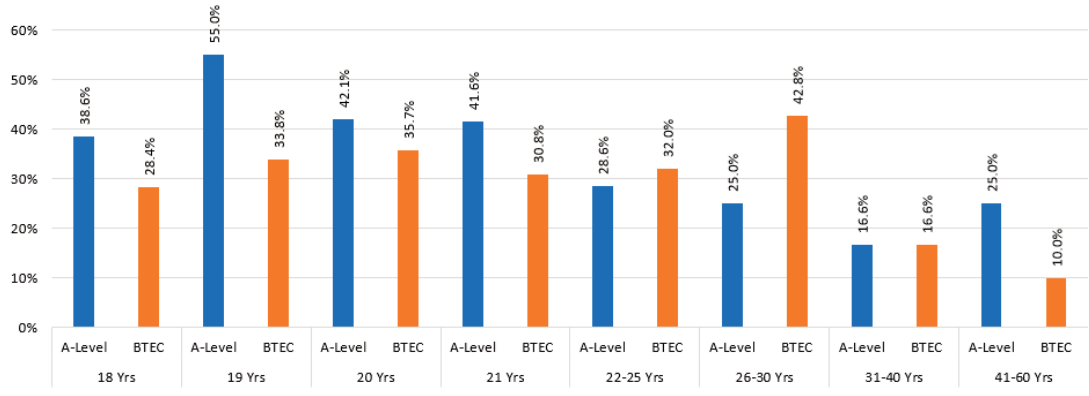
When examined by age, there were many shared concerns across the age groups. In terms of practical

Table 29 Covid19 related concerns by generational status

Covid19 concern	A-Level 1st 2021	BTEC 1st 2021	A-Level 2nd 2021	BTEC 2nd 2021
Potentially starting studies initially online	30.3%	21.3%	35.7%	20.2%
Concerns about knowledge gaps due to prior learning experience	32.8%	24.1%	24.8%	21.3%
Concerns about Covid19 and potential lockdowns	29.9%	21.9%	25.3%	19.1%
Mental health and wellbeing	41.2%	30.3%	38.8%	29.3%

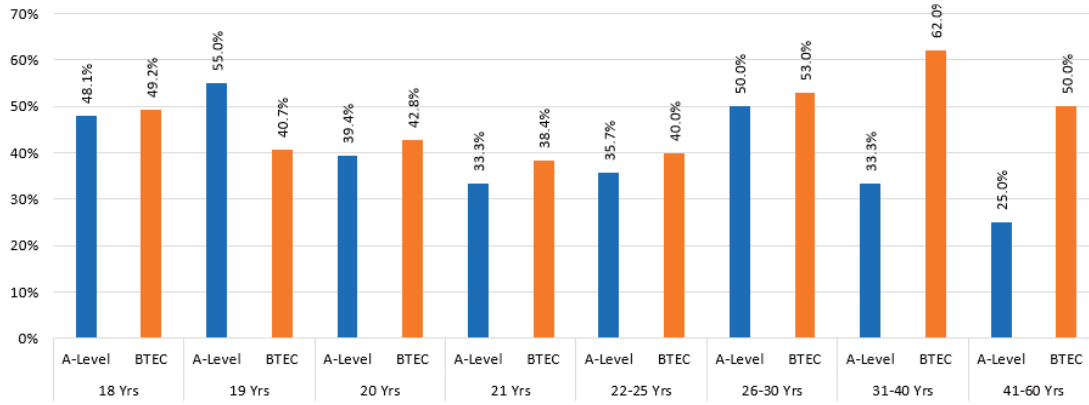
concerns, mental heath and wellbeing was a notable concern across all age groups and type of study (see Figure 50). The level of concern started to reduce for those respondents over 31 years of age. Amongst the age groups up to 21 years, A-Level respondents expressed

Figure 50 Mental health and wellbeing concern by age group - PAQ 2021 only



greater concern than BTEC.

When examining academic related concerns from the 2021 PAQ, coping with the level of study after the age of 20 was higher amongst BTEC than A-Level respondents (see Figure 51).

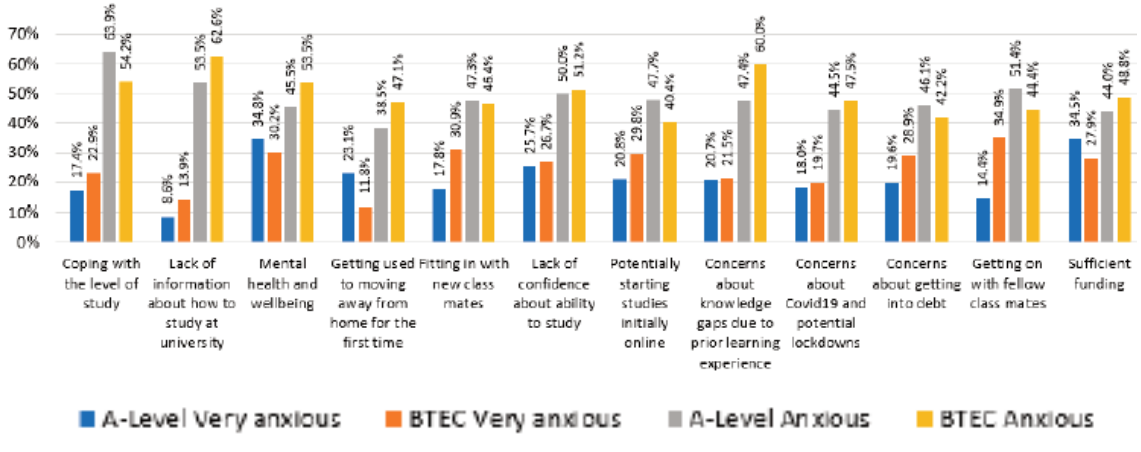


Anxiety levels relating to their concerns-PAQ 2021 only

Respondents were asked to rate their level of anxiety for their concerns. 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 12 concerns of respondents (see Figure 52). However, it must be noted when looking at anxiety levels, although some concerns had a small number of respondents, anxiety levels could still be high. For example, affordable childcare was a concern for a small number of respondents, but being very anxious/anxious was high especially amongst females respondents.

Figure 52 shows that there was a relatively high level of anxiety amongst respondents with the majority of A-Level and BTEC stating they were *anxious* across the top concerns. There were similar levels of being *very anxious* by highest entry qualification regarding *mental health and wellbeing, lack of confidence about ability and concerns about knowledge gaps.* Of those who expressed being *very anxious,* BTEC respondents were more likely to state that this was the case in *coping with the level of study, lack of information about how to study at university, fitting in with new class mates, getting on with new class mates* and *potentially starting online.* A-Level respondents expressed being *very anxious* more than their BTEC counterparts regarding *getting used to moving away from home for the first time* and *having sufficient funding.*

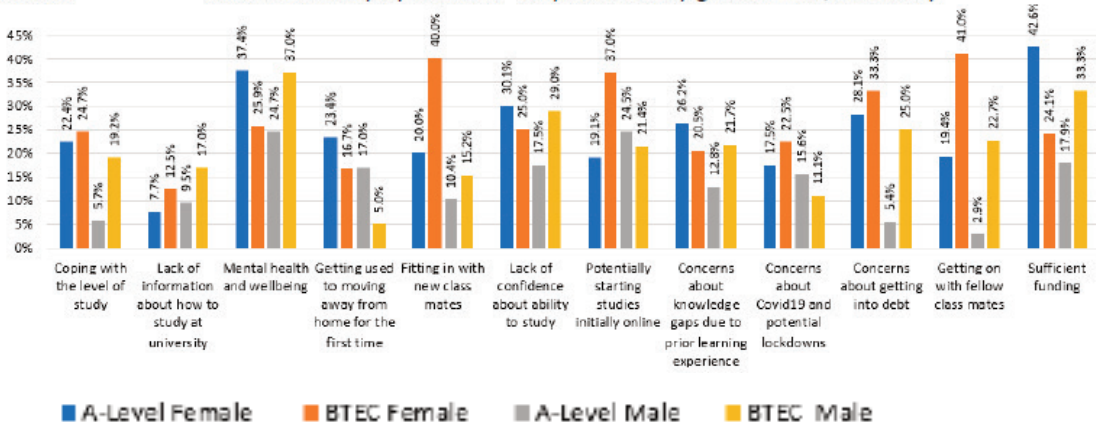


When examined by gender (see Figure 53), females were more likely to say they were *very anxious* compared to their male counterparts especially BTEC who were the most

very anxious across five of the 12 areas. A-Level male respondents were least *very anxious* across eight areas. A-Level females and BTEC males were similarly *very anxious* regarding *mental health and wellbeing* and *having sufficient funding.*

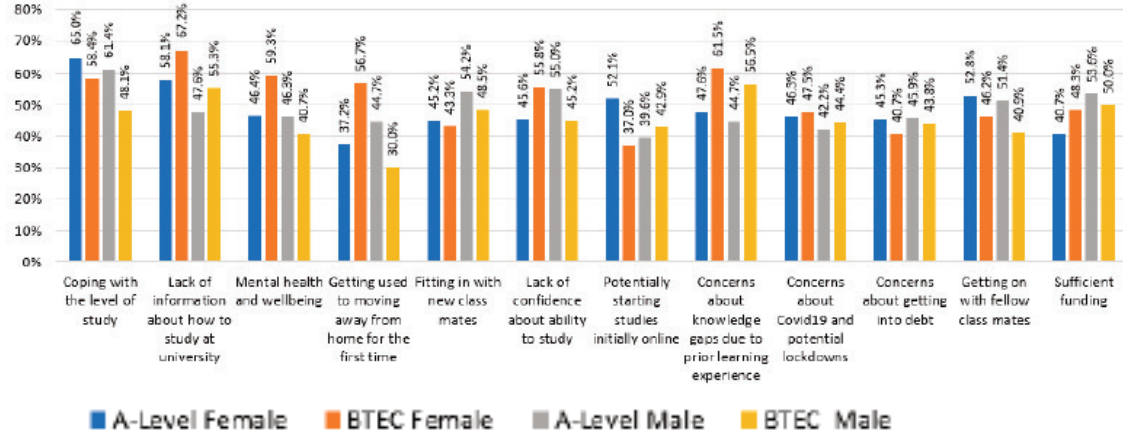
Being *anxious* was the most cited level of anxiety across highest entry qualification and gender (see Figure 54). A-Level and BTEC females were more likely to say they were

Figure 53 Level of anxiety by concern 'Very anxious' by gender-PAQ 2021 only



anxious than their male counterparts. A-Level females express the highest level of being *anxious* across four of the 12 areas and BTEC females across six. A-Level males was across two.

Figure 54 Level of anxiety by concern 'Anxious' by gender- PAQ 2021 only

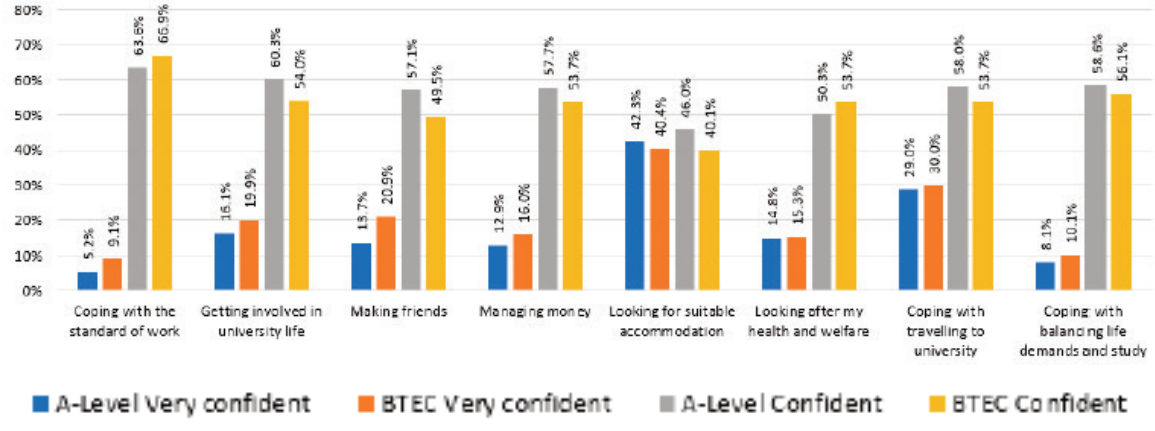


Confidence levels on starting university- PAQ 2021 only

Respondents were asked to think about how they felt about different aspects of starting their undergraduate course (see Figure 55). The majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents expressed a similar feeling of being confident across all areas. When looking at those who expressed feeling very confident, BTEC respondents accounted for the majority across seven of the eight areas.

When looking at those who cited *not being confident at all,* they only accounted for a small number of the A-Level and BTEC responses (see Figure 56). Approximately one fifth of A-Level and BTEC respondents stated they were *not*

Figure 55 Confidence levels on starting university 'Very confident and confident' -PAQ 2021 only



confident across all of the areas. There were many similarities in terms of levels of low confidence. The notable differences between the two qualifications was that more A-Level (19.2%) respondents than BTEC (13.2%) were *not confident* about coping with the standard of work.

When examined by gender, A-Level and BTEC females were noticeably more likely to state they were *not confident* across most of the areas than their male counterparts (see Figure 57). A-Level female respondents were notably *not confident* compared to other respondents in *coping with the standard of work, making friends* and *looking after my health and welfare.* All respondents were similarly *not confident*

Figure 56 Confidence levels on starting university 'Not confident and not confident at all' -PAQ 2021 only

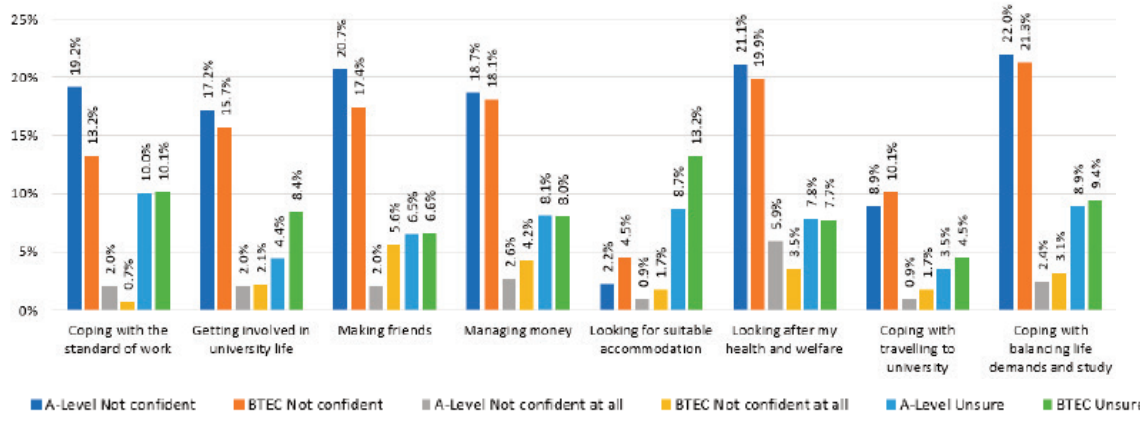
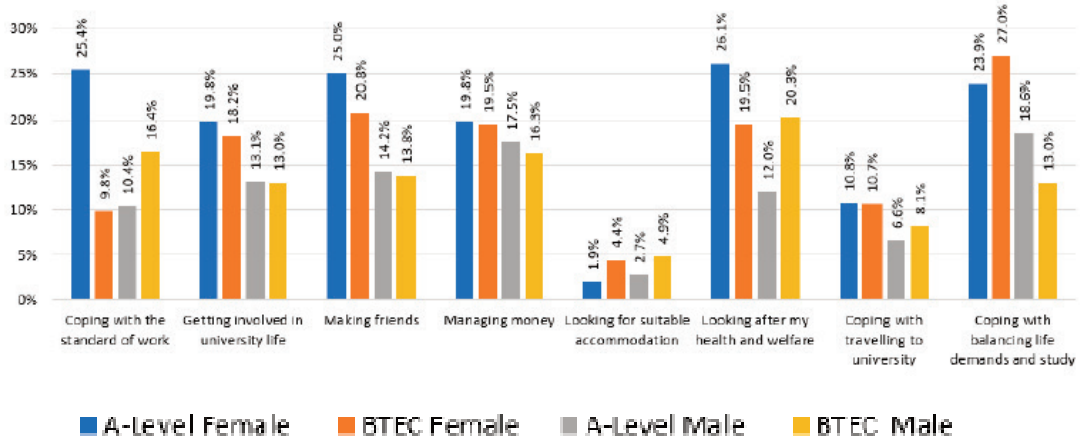


Figure 57 Confidence levels on starting university in 2021 'Not confident' by gender-PAQ 2021 only



about managing money.

Section 6 University study expectations

Expected contact and independent study hours

Respondents expressed diverse expectations regarding contact hours. Across both qualifications and surveys, there was a notable level of uncertainty about the expected 'contact hours' per week for their course (see Table 30). For A-Level and BTEC respondents in 2019 and 2021,

approximately one third expected the contact hours to range between 5-10 hours. This was closely a week closely followed by 11-20 hours for both, although A-Level was higher than BTEC across both surveys. When independent study hours were examined, 11-20 hours a week for A-Level and BTEC respondents across both surveys was the highest, but around a tenth of respondents expected to undertake over 20 hours a week. The discipline area is likely to have influenced responses.

Study style preference at university

Respondents were asked to select one method of how they would prefer to study on their university course. The majority of A-Level and BTEC respondents across both surveys stated they would like to study *both individually and in a group.* However, around a fifth from both groups stated that they would prefer to study *independently* (see Table 31).

Table 30 Contact and independent study hours

	A-Level Contact 2019	BTEC Contact 2019	A-Level Contact 2021	BTEC Contact 2021	A-Level Indep 2019	BTEC Indep 2019	A-Level Indep 2021	BTEC Indep 2021
1-4 hours	5.8%	5.0%	6.3%	10.8%	1.6%	3.0%	3.9%	4.9%
5-10 hours	**33.9%**	**35.5%**	**33.1%**	**30.3%**	**28.0%**	**22.5%**	**30.1%**	39.4%
11-20 hours	**30.8%**	**28.5%**	**25.1%**	**20.2%**	**42.8%**	**40.5%**	**35.5%**	**26.5%**
Over 20 hours	1.7%	1.0%	3.3%	6.6%	10.0%	11.5%	10.5%	7.0%
Unsure	**27.8%**	**30.0%**	**32.2%**	**32.1%**	**17.7%**	**22.5%**	**20.0%**	**22.3%**

Study assessment preference

The study preference of both A-Level respondents across both surveys was *a mix of exams and individual/group assessments* and *individual assessments* (see Table 32). However, for BTEC

Table 31 Study preferences

	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
I prefer to study independently	22.2%	23.0%	23.3%	20.9%
I prefer to study in a group	7.3%	6.5%	7.6%	9.1%
I like to do both	**70.5%**	**70.5%**	**69.1%**	**70.0%**

it was the reverse. Exams were the least preferred form of study assessment by both.

A sample of respondents' qualitative comments are provided below by study assessment preference for individual and a mix. No responses were provided for exam preference.

Table 32 Study assessment preferences

	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
I prefer undertaking group based assessments	12.0	12.9%	8.7%	11.5%
I prefer undertaking individual assessments	32.2%	**44.6%**	34.4%	**38.3%**
I prefer exams	**3.9%**	**0.7%**	**3.7%**	**1.7%**
I prefer a mix of exams and individual/group assessments	**45.4%**	38.1%	**43.1%**	37.3%
Unsure	6.6%	3.6%	10.0%	11.1%

Those that prefer to undertake individual assessments

Anxiety when working in a group tends to distract me from focussing on studying.

Individual assessments stop me being distracted and it provides me with flexibility.

I can become anxious around others and not talk then they think I am stupid.

Those that prefer a mix of exams and individual/group assessments.

Working independently allows me to be more comfortable with my own work/ creative space. But gaining more information/knowledge from my classmates helps me learn new things I may have not known.

Collaboration creates ideas, motives and more immersed answers allowing all members to excel in work. But at the same time independent work is more relaxed. And doesn't require peer assessment but your own thoughts.

Depends on my mood and the subject I am studying.

I am easily distracted so work better independently but also having other people there to motivate me also helps me along so a mix of both to keep me engaged is good.

Most useful feedback - PAQ 2021 only

Respondents were asked to rank in importance the most useful type of feedback they expect to receive at university (where 1= most important and 6 = least important) (see Table 33). The findings are only for the 2021 PAQ. For both highest entry qualification groups, the findings are similar.

A-Level and BTEC respondents cited the most important type of feedback was academic feedback telling me what I did not do well and how to improve followed by receiving academic feedback that is encouraging and raises my confidence. Academic feedback telling me what I did correctly was ranked highly in the top three.

Of the responses, generic feedback pointing to common mistakes across the cohort, informal discussions with students outside of class and discussing academic feedback with students in class were considered the least important for both groups.

Perceived study strengths and weaknesses - PAQ 2021 only

When A-Level and BTEC respondent's perception of study strengths and weaknesses are examined, the majority of responses fall into the strong or adequate categories (see Table 34).

A-Level respondents stated they had strong skills that were higher than their BTEC counterparts in four of the six study areas. BTEC respondents were notably more likely to perceive their study skills as adequate across five for the six areas and more weak in literacy and numerical skills than A-Level.

However, when examined by gender, differences in perceived study strengths and weaknesses emerge (see Table 35). A higher number of A-Level and BTEC females perceived their study and literacy skills to be very strong compared to

Table 33 Most useful types of feedback -PAQ 2021 only

Type of feedback	1 A-Level	1 BTEC	2 A-Level	2 BTEC	6 A-Level	6 BTEC
Generic feedback pointing to common mistakes across the cohort	8.7%	9.1%	12.9%	17.1%	21.1%	18.1%
Discussing academic feedback with fellow students in class	4.4%	5.6%	12.4%	8.0%	15.3%	17.4%
Informal discussions with fellow students outside of class	1.5%	4.9%	7.0%	5.2%	42.7%	36.9%
Academic feedback telling what I did not do well and how to improve	60.8%	50.9%	19.0%	25.4%	2.2%	2.8%
Academic feedback telling me what I did correctly	6.8%	7.3%	30.7%	25.4%	7.8%	13.6%
Receiving academic feedback that is encouraging and raises my confidence	17.9%	22.3%	18.1%	18.8%	10.9%	11.1%

their male counterparts, and notably their ability to organise study independently. A higher number of A-Level and BTEC males perceived their numerical skills to be very strong or strong than their female counterparts. A-Level females felt their skills were adequate in five of the six categories compared to A-Level males and for BTEC females this accounted for four of the six compared to BTEC males.

Table 34 Perception of skill strength-PAQ 2021 only

Study	Very strong		Strong		Adequate		Weak		Very weak		Unsure	
	A-level	BTEC	A-level	BTEC	A-level	BTEC	A-level	BTEC	A-level	BTEC	A-level	BTEC
Quick assimilation of ideas	5.2%	4.9%	40.3%	38.0%	45.8%	49.8%	3.9%	3.8%	1.5%	0.7%	3.3%	2.8%
Ability to organise study independently	14.8%	13.2%	41.4%	44.9%	35.1%	35.2%	6.5%	4.5%	1.5%	1.7%	0.7%	0.3%
Study skills	6.5%	6.3%	46.0%	37.3%	39.9%	49.1%	6.1%	5.6%	0.4%	1.0%	1.1%	0.7%
Knowledge of the subject	9.8%	7.0%	43.1%	43.2%	38.3%	41.5%	6.3%	4.9%	0.4%	1.4%	2.0%	2.1%
Literacy skills	21.1%	14.3%	50.5%	43.2%	25.1%	34.5%	1.7%	5.9%	1.1%	1.4%	0.4%	0.7%
Numerical skills	17.6%	9.4%	39.2%	30.3%	31.4%	44.3%	8.1%	12.9%	3.3%	2.8%	0.4%	0.3%

When perceptions of weakness is examined, male A-Level and BTEC respondents were more likely to say they had weak or very weak ability to organise study independently (see Table 36). Female A-Level and BTEC respondents were more likely to cite weak or very weak numerical skills compared to their male counterparts.

Expected use of university services

When examined by highest qualification, A-Level respondents were notably more likely to state that they expected to use health and wellbeing, academic support and careers and employment services than their BTEC counterparts (see Table 37) whereas BTEC were more likely to use IT/Tech support.

Table 35 Perceived study strengths by gender-PAQ 2021 only

Study	Very strong A-Level		Very Strong BTEC		Strong A-Level		Strong BTEC		Adequate A-Level		Adequate BTEC	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Quick assimilation of ideas	5.2%	5.5%	5.0%	3.3%	32.8%	50.8%	33.4%	43.9%	51.0%	39.3%	54.1%	45.5%
Ability to organise study independently	**19.8%**	**7.7%**	**18.9%**	**5.7%**	**46.3%**	**33.9%**	**44.7%**	**42.3%**	42.6%	30.6%	34.0%	41.4%
Study skills	8.6%	2.7%	6.9%	4.9%	42.5%	50.8%	35.8%	38.2%	42.5%	36.6%	50.3%	48.8%
Knowledge of the subject	7.1%	14.2%	8.2%	4.9%	39.9%	48.1%	39.0%	48.8%	44.8%	27.9%	45.3%	36.6%
Literacy skills	22.0%	19.1%	17.6%	8.9%	51.5%	50.3%	41.5%	46.3%	23.5%	27.3%	8.2%	3.3%
Numerical skills	**11.6%**	**26.8%**	**5.7%**	**13.8%**	37.7%	41.0%	23.3%	40.7%	34.7%	27.3%	49.1%	38.2%

Table 36 Perceived study weaknesses by gender-PAQ 2021 only

Study	Weak A-Level		Weak BTEC		Very weak A-Level		Very weak BTEC		Unsure A-Level		Unsure BTEC	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Quick assimilation of ideas	4.1%	2.2%	3.8%	4.1%	2.2%	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	4.5%	1.6%	3.1%	2.4%
Ability to organise study independently	**2.6%**	**12.0%**	**1.9%**	**7.3%**	**0.7%**	**2.7%**	**0.6%**	**2.4%**	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Study skills	4.9%	8.2%	6.3%	4.9%	0.4%	0.5%	0.0%	2.4%	1.1%	1.1%	0.6%	0.8%
Knowledge of the subject	5.6%	7.7%	5.7%	4.1%	0.7%	0.0%	0.6%	2.4%	1.9%	2.2%	1.3%	3.3%
Literacy skills	1.1%	2.2%	8.2%	3.3%	1.1%	1.1%	0.0%	3.3%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
Numerical skills	**11.2%**	3.3%	**18.2%**	4.9%	4.1%	1.6%	3.8%	1.6%	0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%

When examined by gender and qualification, females expected to use three of the services more compared to males (health and wellbeing, academic support and financial)

(see Figure 58). Both A-Level and BTEC males were more than twice as likely to use sport facilities compared to females. Both A-Level and BTEC females were almost twice as likely to use health and wellbeing compared to their male

Table 37 Expected use of university services

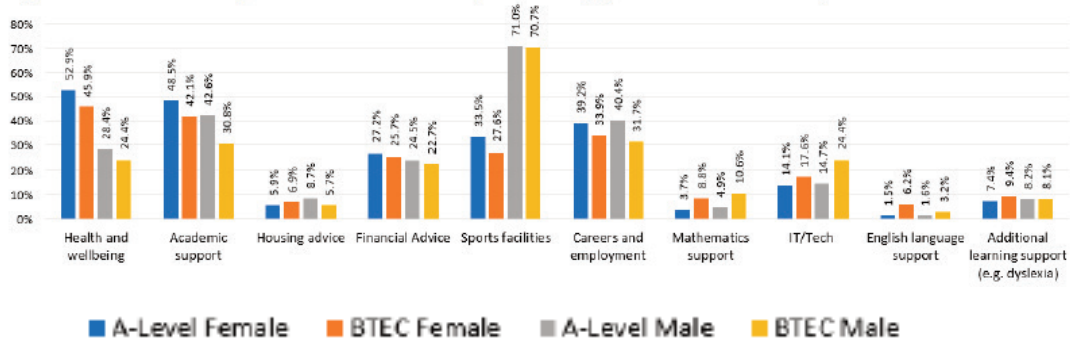
University service	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Health and wellbeing	**45.4%**	**41.5%**	**43.6%**	**37.3%**
Academic support	**50.0%**	**44.4%**	**46.2%**	**38.0%**
Housing advice	13.9%	8.6%	7.2%	6.3%
Financial Advice	26.8%	32.2%	25.7%	25.1%
Sports facilities	47.9%	43.5%	48.6%	46.0%
Careers and employment	**50.8%**	**44.2%**	**39.2%**	**32.8%**
Mathematics support	7.5%	7.9%	4.1%	9.4%
IT/Tech	Not an option in 2019	Not an option in 2019	**14.4%**	**20.9%**
English language support	1.5%	2.5%	1.5%	5.2%
Additional learning support (e.g. dyslexia)	8.3%	12.7%	7.8%	9.8%

counterparts. BTEC males expected to use IT/Tech support more than the other groups. These findings were also found in the 2019 survey. BTEC males were the least likely to use health and wellbeing, academic support, financial and careers and employment services.

Course appeal

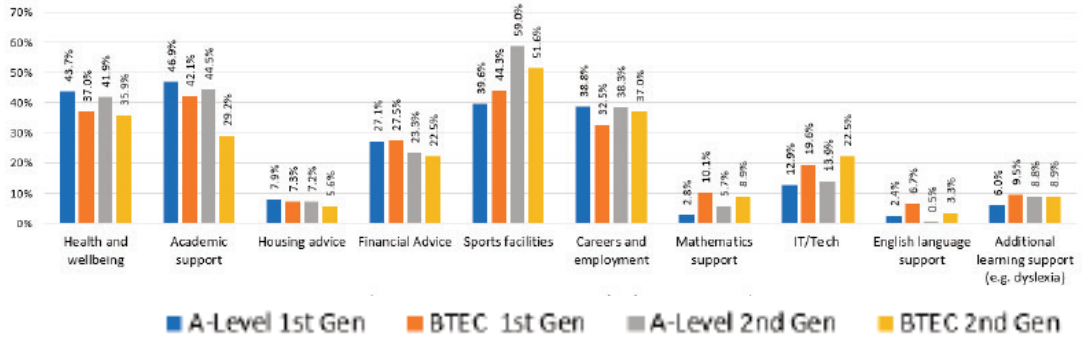
Respondents were asked to select up to five reasons about what they had found appealing about their chosen course. The most cited course appeal factors are listed in rank order

Figure 58 Expected use of university services by gender-PAQ 2021 only



by qualification and year of survey in Table 38. For both groups, the top five are similar but in a different order. For A-Level respondents in 2019 and 2021, course modules were cited first.

Figure 59 Expected use of university services by generational status-PAQ 2021 only



For BTEC respondents in 2021, employment prospects was cited first. BTEC respondents were more likely to cite course links with industry than their A-Level counterparts. For both groups, the university's league table position, unconditional offer based on predicted grades and contact hours were three of the least cited reasons.

Expected use of technology - PAQ 2021 only

Respondents were asked what to select the main source of technology they expected to use when accessing learning materials at university when they start their studies (see

Table 38 Course appeal

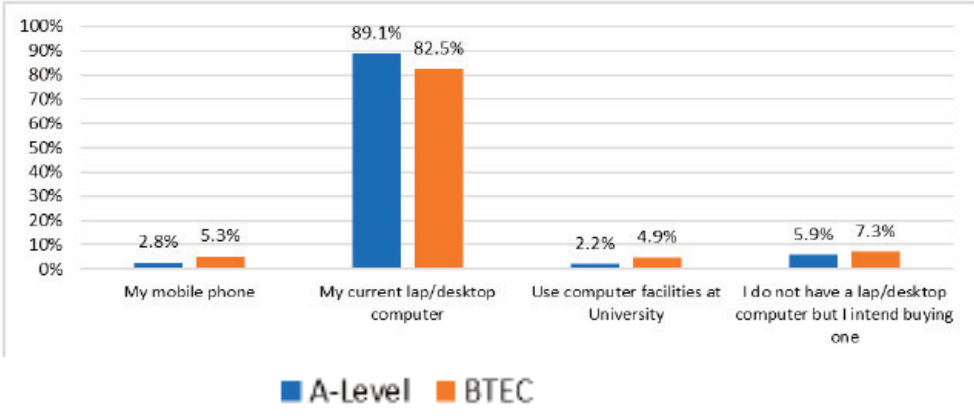
A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Course modules 51.7%	*Course links with industry* 56.6%	Course modules 57.1%	Employment prospects 51.9%
Employment prospects 50.8%	Course modules 51.8%	Employment prospects 47.1%	Course modules 47.7%
Placement opportunity 48.8%	Employment prospects 50.8%	Course specific facilities 41.2%	Course specific facilities 47.4%
Course links with industry 43.8%	Placement opportunity 48.6%	*Course links with industry 34.4%*	*Course links with industry 42.2%*
Course specific facilities 37.3%	Course specific facilities 49.2%	*Placement opportunity 31.2%*	*Placement opportunity 33.1%*

Figure 60). There was similarity between the two highest entry qualification groups with their current laptop/desktop computer being their main source of technology.

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' do value an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications, there was a notable amount of uncertainty especially amongst BTEC respondents across both surveys (see Table 39).

Figure 60 Expected use of technology



When the qualitative comments are examined explaining the respondent's selection, clear reasons were provided across both qualification groups. The key themes are listed below for

Table 39 Perception of how employers view an undergraduate degree

Course appeal	A-Level 2019	BTEC 2019	A-Level 2021	BTEC 2021
Employers value an undergraduate qualification more than pre-university qualifications	71.6%	66.0%	66.7%	49.5%
Employers value an undergraduate qualification in the same was as pre-university qualifications	6.1%	7.3%	7.4%	12.9%
Employers value an undergraduate qualification less than pre-university qualifications	0.5%	0.4%	0.9%	1.4%
I am unsure how employers value an undergraduate qualification	**21.9%**	**26.3%**	**25.1%**	**36.2%**

those who feel employers do value an undergraduate degree over pre-university qualifications and those who are unsure.

Employers do value an undergraduate degree over pre-university qualifications
The responses in 2021 fell into three broad categories.

- Demonstrates higher skills and knowledge.
- Individual ability.
- Required for a chosen profession/career in general.

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.

- Uncertainty as had not thought about it before.
- Uncertainty through limited experience.
- Depends on the subject and career to be pursued.

Section 7 Suggested support by A-Level and BTEC respondents

Below are the free text responses by A-Level and BTEC respondents on what support universities could provide and their own advice to themselves regarding the main areas of concern for them. It is important to note that each university provided much of the supported suggested which respondents may not have been aware of when completing the pre-arrival academic questionnaire.

Lack of information about how to study at university

- A basic guide to balancing university life with social life.
- A leaflet of useful tips and tricks.
- A good induction to the course and how to study.
- A large feeling of welcoming when I arrive.
- Advice and help on how to study well at university through emails, talks, videos.
- Previous students or course directors giving advice on ways to study/materials which were helpful.
- Advice and experience from current students about being at university.
- Explanations of how independent study is expected to be carried out.
- Having dedicated lectures or seminars on how to study e.g. how to reference and how to structure essays and create presentations.
- Providing time to get used to university life and my course.
- Online resources highlighting the differences between college and university.
- Providing some information about how to study and the differences between university study and previous studies.
- Online resources in how to adjust to new type of study.

Having a long commute to attend my studies

- Being able to access a mix of online and in-person learning for the course so do not have to commute everyday.

- Bursary for travelling.

- Advice on planning my travel journey.

Difficulties in fitting my study around my part-time work commitments

- Have a clear balanced schedule that allows fair time for both.

- Ask advice from people who have studied and did a part time job on the side.

- Discuss with my employer near my home if they can relocate me to a store close to the university, with a contract fitted around my timetable.

- Discuss my part-time working hours with my employer once I get my timetable.

- Having a timetable that is consolidated over a few of days so I can balance university and work life.

- Getting my timetable earlier enough so I can forward plan.

Coping with the level of study at university

- Allocating days where I focus on study work.

- Attend all classes and ask questions.

- Asking for support from module leaders and academic support and fellow students.

- Being aware of where I can access assistance with my education.

- Clear guidance about the differences between school and college between A-Levels and university assessment and

feedback.

- Develop a structured routine so that I do not fall behind.

- Information about well-being services and revision advice.

- Regular checks on progress and wider reading undertaken.

- Tutors talking to us about how to handle stress.

- Reasonable expectations by the university and myself as a result of the pandemic, and guidance when struggling with work.

Mental health and wellbeing

- Understand that a day off may be needed when I am fairing particularly badly or I may require extra explanations or extended deadlines for independent work/assessment.
- Advice on how to eat well on a small budget and what helps all round wellbeing.

- Clear and accessible information and advice on places and websites you can contact if you are worried about your mental health or those of fellow students. Also advice and information given out on what you can do if you worried about your own mental health and wellbeing.

- Support to feel confident about talking about mental health issues that can crop up.

Sufficient funding and getting into debt

- Budgeting advice and information on how to reduce debt and make money go further.

- Help students really struggling with grants and bursaries that aren't only available to the very lowest income

households.

- Being advised about what grants or bursaries are available.

- I will have to work 10-15 hours a week at some point to pay for university but have never been professionally employed so advice on obtaining a job would be helpful.

- Opportunities for paid work related to the course or at university.

Getting used to moving away from home for the first time

- Calling my friends and family in my free time.

- Taking things from home that make me happy for my room.

- Not isolating myself and keep in touch with family.

- Help with how to live with people who live very differently to you and how to cope with challenging flat mates.

- Make friends with my flat mates and establish a support group where we can talk about our concerns.

- Talk to current students to see how they got used to living.

- Understand that its normal to be nervous and ring home when I need but also go out with my new friends and flat mates.

Lack of confidence about my ability to study

- A supportive learning resources team.

- Try to develop a positive approach to my own learning.

- Learning to be kind to myself and understand that it might take some time to get used to studying again.

- Do not compare myself to others as we all are different.

- Regular feedback from tutors and the ability to ask questions and receive a response as quickly as possible.

- Tutors giving more short tests and quizzes to help students keep up with academic work.

- Have the courage and be encouraged to ask if I do not understand something.

Knowledge gaps due to prior learning experience

- Assess where the knowledge gaps are and work on them so I do not fall behind.

- Lecturers to be more understanding that some people may take longer to get back into education and offer feedback on how to improve.

- Communicate any gaps I think I have with tutors.

- Fill knowledge gaps by looking over missed lessons due to COVID-19.

- Give extended deadlines to students who have missed gaps in knowledge.

- The university to remember that there will be people struggling to make the transition.

Getting on with fellow students and fitting in with class mates

- Being confident and reaching out to others in the same

position.

• Build in frequent class discussions/group activities and ice breaking sessions.

• Being put into different groups within studies wherever possible so that interaction is possible with different students.

• Don't rush into forced social situations.

• Attend events where I can meet other students.

• Be open minded.

• University to try to provide a friendly environment that will help relax people so they will be friendly to one another.

• Just be nice and don’t be mean and cruel like social media can be.

• Perhaps group work and opportunities to meet each other and become familiar on the first day.

• Ways to contact and meet people I will be around before turning up.

• Offer a chance to introduce everyone to each other.

Part 5 Considerations moving forward

This report highlights the prior learning experiences, concerns and expectations on entry of A-Level and BTEC respondents which are two of the most common entry qualifications into higher education by UK domiciled students. Although the survey sample sizes are small, they highlight the consistent findings repeated within and between the two qualifications. It also highlights the challenges for educators, and provides a clear rationale for why it is essential to address the

differences in prior learning experiences on entry.

It reinforces and provides greater detail of the known factors that continue to create barriers preventing greater equality in higher education for students from different backgrounds. These have recently been recognised in the House of Commons Library Research Briefing by Bolton and Lewis (January 2023) that highlights four key primary areas which are:

- The prior attainment of students.

- Insufficient advice and support both before and during university.

- Financial concerns that deter young people from applying and can have a detrimental impact on experiences of higher education.

- The prevalence of sexual and racial harassment on campus.

Impact of student characteristics

Although analysis in this report did not include findings by certain characteristics due to sample size such as ethnicity, it is well established through existing research that student characteristics, including those that are 'protected' and type of entry qualification, impact on retention, progression and success. Many of these are in the Office for Students report on UK domiciled Student characteristics data: Student outcomes which are listed below (November 2022). Students have multiple characteristics that can impact positively and negatively on their progression and success.

Care experience

Full and part-time students who have experienced being in care had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who have not experienced being in care.

Disability
Students who self-reported as disabled tended to have lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who did not report a disability. However, this varied with domicile, as disabled, non-UK domiciled, full-time first degree qualifiers had a higher attainment rate than those who did not report a disability.

Estrangement
Full and part-time students who were estranged from their parents had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who were not estranged.

Ethnic minorities
The attainment rate of qualifiers from a minority ethnic background in 2020/21 was 9.6% lower than for white students (76.1% compared with 85.7%).

Free meals
Students who were recorded as eligible to receive free school meals (FSM) at any point in the six years up to key stage 4 (usually GCSE year) had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who were not eligible, across all modes and levels of undergraduate study.

Generational status
Students who reported that their parent(s) did not hold a higher education qualification had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students whose parent(s) held a higher education qualification.

Mode of study
Full and part-time students who have experienced being in care had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students who have not experienced being in care.

Polar and Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)

Young students from POLAR4 quintile 1 areas (the areas with the lowest rates of participation in higher education among 18 and 19 year olds) had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students from quintiles 2 and above.

Students from Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile 1 areas (the most deprived areas) had lower continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates than students from quintiles 2 and above.

Sex

In general, male students had lower continuation, completion and attainment rates across all levels of study than female students. However, male students had a higher progression rate at most levels of study.

Sexual orientation

Students who identified as lesbian, gay or bisexual had lower continuation, completion and progression rates than students who identified as heterosexual. Conversely, lesbian, gay or bisexual students had higher attainment rates, with an attainment rate of 86.3% for qualifiers in 2020-21 compared with 82.8% for heterosexual students.

Socio-economic background

Students whose parents worked in higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations had continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates which were higher than for students whose parents had never worked or were long-term unemployed.

TUNDRA

Across all four TUNDRA measures, students from TUNDRA quintile 5 areas (areas with the highest participation of young people in higher education) had the highest continuation, completion, attainment and progression rates.

The impact of disadvantage

The recent Sutton Trust report entitled *Social Mobility: The Next generation Lost potential at 16* (Holt-White and Cullinane, 2023) reinforces the impact of the student characteristics highlighted above in primary and secondary school of disadvantaged high attainers. Some of the key findings include:

- Disadvantaged high attainers are less likely to be White (62.0%), than average (75.0%) and other high attainers (79.0%). Among them, the number of Black African and Bangladeshi pupils is more than double their proportion in the population.

- They are also concentrated in London, with 25.0% attending school in the capital, compared to 14% of other high attainers.

- 16.0% of disadvantaged high attainers are a young carer – 11 percentage points more likely than other high attainers (5.0%). They are less than half as likely to have a parent with a degree, and four times more likely to live in a single-parent household compared to other high attainers.

- Disadvantaged high attainers tend to be eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) for less of their school time than other FSM students, highlighting the impact of persistent disadvantage on grades.

- Within the disadvantaged high attainer group, those most likely to fall behind at GCSE included boys, White and Black Caribbean pupils, those with Special Educational Needs, and pupils in the North East.

- Despite their high grades, 21.0% of disadvantaged high attainers agreed with the statement People 'like me don't have much of a chance in life', more than double the figure of other high attainers saying the same (10.0%).

- In Year 12, disadvantaged high attainers were nearly twice as likely to be at a Further Education college (12.0%) compared to other high attainers (7.0%).

In further education college, they are more likely to undertake BTEC and other Level 3 qualifications. When asked about what they are most likely to be doing in two years' time, disadvantaged high attainers were less likely to report that they think they will be studying compared to other high attainers, at 65.0% and 75.0% respectively. Additionally, a higher percentage of non-disadvantage high attainers obtained 7 to 9 GCSEs (see Figure 61).

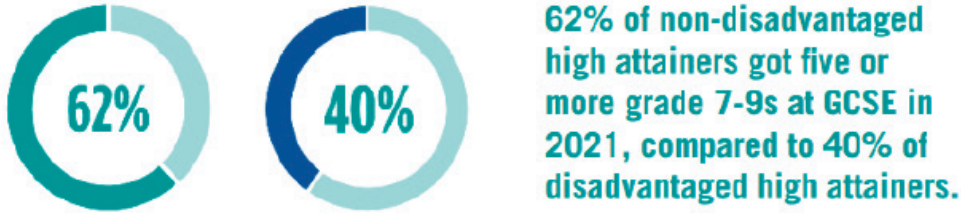
The impact of COVID-19 and the cost of living

In addition to understanding the impact of student characteristics, it is also important to consider and factor in external circumstances that can exacerbate these differences such as COVID-19 and the current cost of living crisis which has and is, affecting all students. However, those with greater disadvantage are more likely to suffer.

The impact of the COVID-19 legacy on new university students

When assessing the success of students who entered higher education at the start of the pandemic and progressed through, it will be essential to factor in the challenges

Figure 61 Grade attainment by non-disadvantage and disadvantage high attainers



Source: Holt-White and Cullinane, 2023 (p6)

experienced by new and returning students through the duration of their course which could be exacerbated for those with disadvantage. These include: challenges of COVID-19 Lockdown (isolation, mental health, financial challenges) and engagement with the rapid changes in delivery of teaching, pedagogy and assessment. For new students who entered higher education in the academic year 2022/23 who came straight from school or college, there needs to be recognition of the disruption that occurred throughout the key secondary education years, so knowledge, skills and experience may differ from previous years. We also have to recognise the ongoing impact of COVID as students progress through secondary education and ensure we are aware of their experiences in order to bridge any gaps. This is likely to continue through until 2025/26.

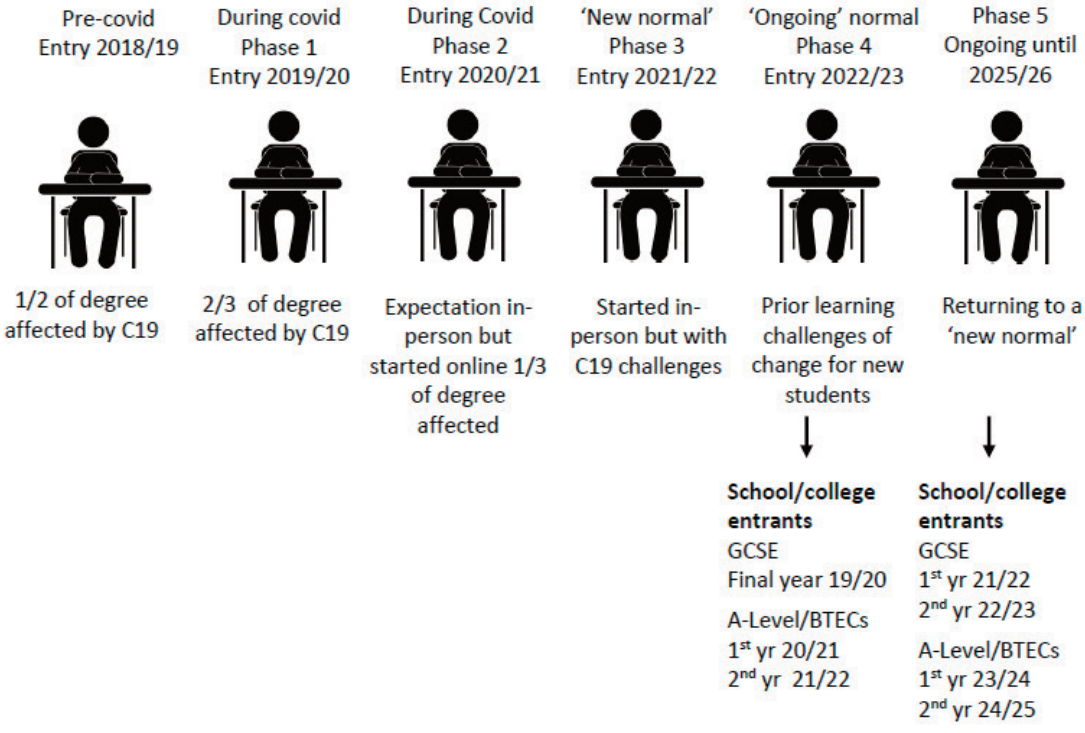
The Sutton report on social mobility found 37.0% of disadvantaged high attainers felt they had fallen behind their classmates as a result of the pandemic's disruption, compared to 22.0% of other high attainers (Holt-White and Cullinane, 2023).

The AdvanceHE and HEPI Student Academic Experience Survey since 2021 has asked respondents whether they had considered withdrawing from or leaving university. The responses were similar with 29.0% in 2021, 30.0% in 2022 and 28.0% in 2023 (Neves and Stephenson, 2023). When
Source: Student Academic Experience Survey, Neves and Stephenson, 2023 (p27)
asked the reason, the main one provided was mental and wellbeing (see Figure 62).

The impact of the cost of living crisis

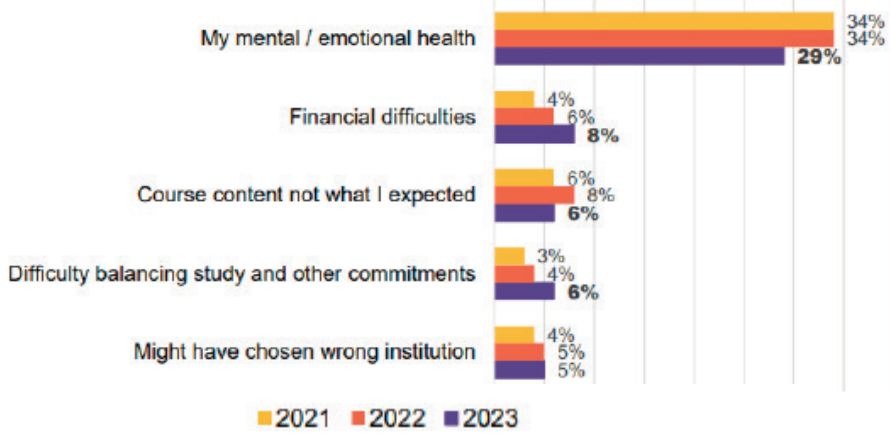
The challenges facing all students in higher education is very pronounced. For English domiciled students, the English maintenance loan has only risen by 2.0% which is the lowest compared to the other UK countries. The Student Academic Experience Surveys found an increasing number of respondents since 2015 have undertaken paid work but this notably increased in 2022 and 2023 (see Figure 63).

Diagram 11 Impact of the pandemic on new students entering university



(Source: Morgan, 2022b)

Figure 62 Reasons considered for leaving study

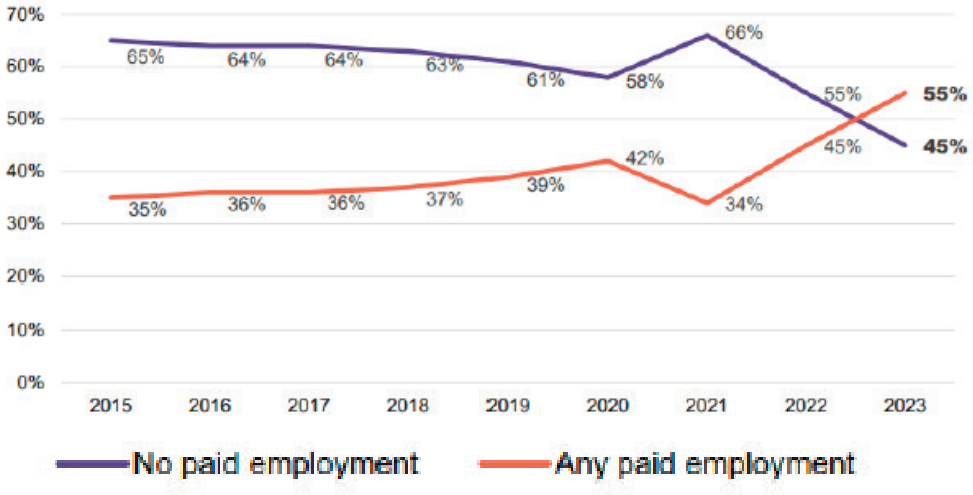


Source: Student Academic Experience Survey, Neves and Stephenson, 2023 (p35)

The Student Academic Experience Survey in 2023 found that the higher the hours of paid work per week was undertaken, the more likely students had considered withdrawing from their studies.

- No paid employment = 24% considered withdrawing.
- Working 1-9 hours of paid employment = 29.0% had considered withdrawing.
- Working in excess of 10 hours = 31.0% had considered withdrawing.

Figure 63 Students in paid employment



The report found a rise in the number of students relying on income from employment to cover most of their living costs at 14.0% of all students, a rise from 9.0% of all students in 2022 and 8.0% of all students in 2021.

Cutting back on necessities

The National Union of Students commissioned a survey in May 2021 showed that 60.0% of students responding to their survey had seen their income impacted by the pandemic, and

70.0% of students were worried about their ability to manage financially (NUS, 2021). It found:

- 1 in 3 students had cut back on food for lack of money.

- 1 in 10 students had turned to food banks.

- 2 in 3 students had found their loans did not cover their living costs.

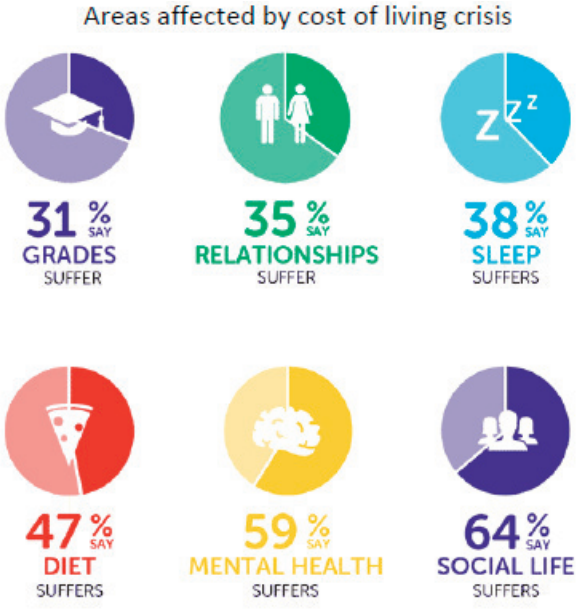
In the National Union of Students Cost of Living report in September 2022 (NUS, 2022), student respondents reported cutting back on a range of essential areas such as food (52.0%), heating (42.0%) and transport (42.0%) which all impact on their ability to engage effectively with their studies. Similar findings were found in Blackbullion's Student Money and Wellbeing Survey 2023 where student respondents reported cutting back on basic needs with 39.0% not turning the heating on, 16.0% cutting back on personal hygiene and 34.0% going hungry/eating less than their usual number of meals a day (Blackbullion, 2023).

Similarly, the Save the Student Money Survey 2022 found that student respondents suffered across a range of areas (see Diagram 12) (Brown, 2022).

In addition to this, they reported in their 2021 survey, that 10 of the 12 regions had average student living costs of £800 per month or less. Figure 64 highlights that the two most expensive regions in the survey were the South West of England (£866 per month) and London (£896 per month). However, in their 2022 survey, they found each region's average was above £800.

The cheapest region for students was the West Midlands, with average monthly living costs of £822 (see Figure 64). The South West of England and London remain the most expensive parts of the UK for students, but these have risen to £962 and £1,089 per month respectively. Compared to 2021, the average amount students spend on household bills and transport has increased in each region of the UK.

Diagram 12



Source: Student Money Survey 2022 – Results - Save the Student

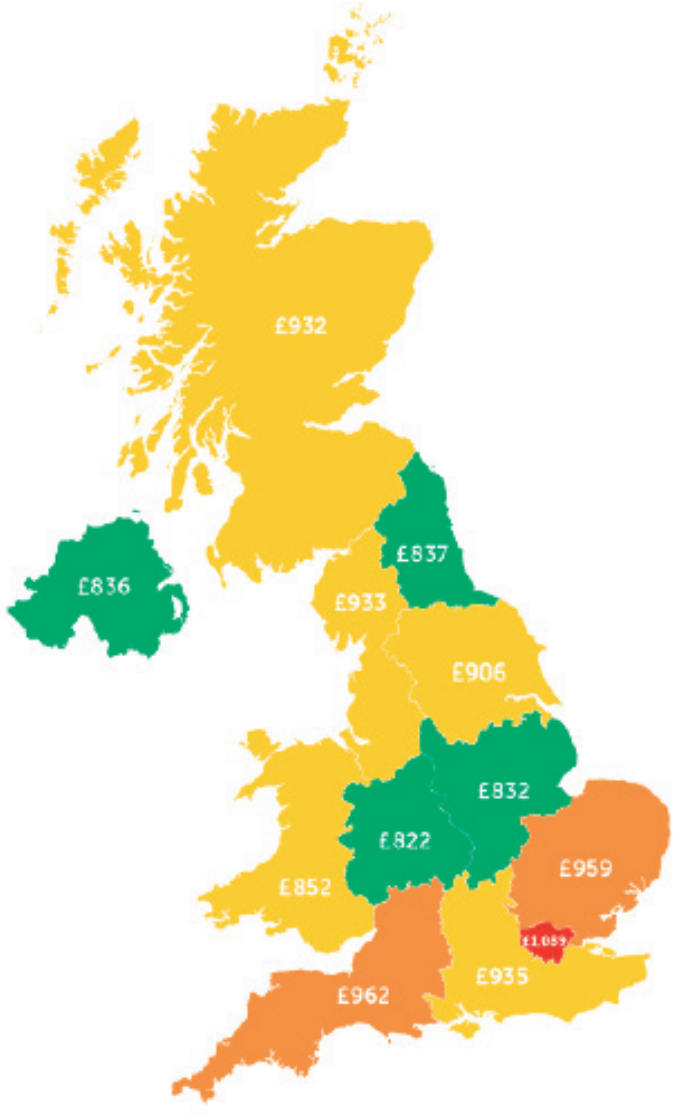
The 2023 report from the National Union of Students that focuses on student travel highlights a number of challenges (NUS, 2023). They found that the majority of students were spending between £11-£30 per week on travel, with 9.0% spending more than £50 per week. This financial burden is more pronounced for those from low-income backgrounds especially commuter students. It reinforced previous findings of the consequences of high transportation costs on students' lives outside of education. Students have had to forego socializing with friends (60.0%), participating in sports, clubs or societies (35.0%), visiting family (35.0%), and even affording meals (32.0%) due to the high cost of travel.

They found the experiences of travel for students, were although the majority of students felt safe while travelling, concerns about night-time travel, encounters with strangers, and the risk of harassment were prominent.

Impact on mental health and wellbeing

The National Union of Students 2022 *Cost of Living Report*

Figure 64 Map of cost of living



Source: Student Money Survey 2022 – Results - Save the Student

(NUS, 2022) also highlighted that the crisis had impacted on students health and wellbeing with 65.0% stating the impact had been major or moderate. Within this area, the crisis had added to anxiety and depression as well as leading to a lack of

sleep and proper eating. The survey found that the impact was more keenly felt among those above 23 years of age, those living in rented accommodation, women, nonbinary, disabled persons, and parents and carers.

Similarly, Blackbullion found 58.0% of student respondents in their survey said worry about money was negatively impacting on their mental health, with 94.0% saying it triggered stress, and 77.0% had feelings of hopelessness. The Save the Student Money Survey (Brown, 2022) asked about the effects of accommodation costs on health in general. They found 62.0% said their health had suffered due to worry with 53% stating that those who paid rent struggled to keep up with it. As was highlighted in this report, Blackbullion found that males were less worried than female student respondents who tended to be more cautious and planned for the 'worst-case scenario'.

Impact on educational attainment

As well as health and wellbeing, it is already being reported that the cost of living is having an impact on educational attainment. Blackbullion found that not only were 76.0% of student respondents worried that the rising cost of living would have a negative impact on their final degree result, but they also reported a demonstrable effect on their academic attainment. Sixty percent of those surveyed stated they had received a lower grade than expected on an exam or assignment in the last 12 months because of job commitments. The same proportion, 60.0%, stated they had received a lower grade than expected because they were too cold to study as a result of avoiding turning the heating on. Of the respondents, 55.0% stated they were performing less well because they felt too hungry to study or concentrate (Blackbullion, 2023).

As well as impact on health and wellbeing and educational attainment, research is highlighting that the cost of living is impacting on students considering whether to drop out of their studies. The Opinion Survey showed 7 out of 10 student respondents had considered dropping out of higher

education since starting their degree. Nearly two-fifths of those gave rising living costs as the main reason (Hanna, 2023) The MillionPlus Briefing looking at the Student Academic Experience Survey results found similar reasons amongst different groups of students respondents considering withdrawing from their studies (Jones, 2022).

- Problems with mental or emotional health were cited as the main reason student respondents had considered quitting with one-third of those polled.

- Twice the proportion of students aged over-25 had considered quitting due to finances than those under-21.

- Students living alone who tend to face greater financial outgoings than those in shared or university-owned accommodation were almost three-times more likely to cite financial issues as their main/most recent reason for thinking about quitting their studies.

- First generation students and students from lower participating areas were also more likely to have thought about leaving due to their finances

- Students in their first year of study were significantly more likely to report finances as their main reason for quitting.

The MillionPlus Briefing Report found that just as the same way that at-risk students are not distributed evenly across the student population, at-risk students are also more likely to study at modern universities. While modern universities educate around 46.0% of all undergraduates, a disproportionate number of the at-risk groups identified above study at such universities (Jones, 2022).

HEPI's Student Academic Experience Survey (Neves and Brown, 2022) found that while 4.0% of students who considered dropping out of university due to financial reasons in the Student Cost of Living Report survey's 2021 equivalent,

this number had risen to 6.0 % by 2022.

The Save the Student Money Survey (Brown, 2022) found that 82.0% had considered dropping out at some point (see Diagram 12). Reasons provided include:

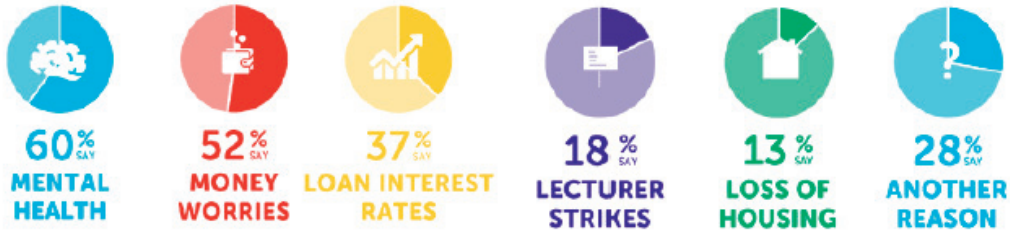
Impact on financial concern on entry

The Student Academic Experience Survey in 2023 found financial concerns for respondents on entry to university around cost of living was still a major concern between the 2023 and 2022 surveys but it was down from 52.0% to 49.0%. There was a similar increase in respondents stating that their main concern was now 'all of the financial concerns', which went from 17.0% in 2022 to 20.0% in 2023.

Entrenchment of inequality due to the cost of living crisis

The National Union of Students survey found that inequality was being entrenched due to the cost of living crisis citing 'Within the student population there are demographics who suffer enhanced disadvantages that compound the detriment to them. The groups of students most adversely affected are those which have often had the most difficult route into further or higher education – and/or people from groups that

Diagram 13 Reasons for thinking about dropping out

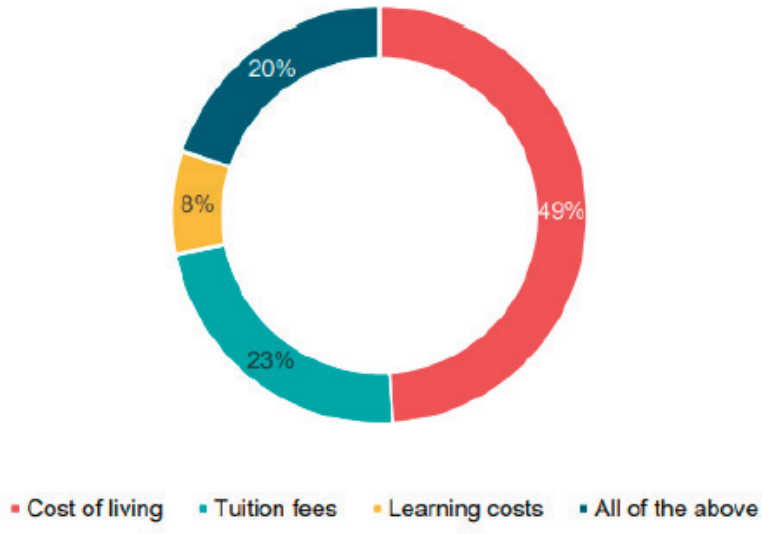


Source: Student Money Survey 2022 – Results - Save the Student

continue to be disproportionately under represented in further and higher education' (NUS, 2022; p15).

In particular, they found:

Figure 65 Main financial concerns when applying to university



Source: Student Academic Experience Survey, Neves and Stephenson, 2023 (p70)

- Trans and non-binary students, as well as students of colour are more likely to have less than £500 a month in income.

- Parents and carers are more likely to report extreme concern about their ability to get by financially than other students.

- Food bank usage is more likely among mature students, those in further education, disabled students, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

- Parents and carers are more likely to have sought assistance from a number of sources including credit schemes and credit cards.

Similarly, the Student Experience Academic Survey in 2023 found reinforcement amongst disadvantage groups of students as a result of the cost of living crisis and the need to

work (see Figure 64). Those who stated that they used income from employment to cover most of their living costs included:

- 28.0% of students working +10 hours of paid employment.
- 26.0% of students above 26 years of age.
- 21.0% of first-in-family students.
- 26.0% of students with caring responsibilities.

Respondents in the survey who were care-experienced students were less likely to state their maintenance loan or grants covered most of their living costs with 23.0% compared to other students with 44.0%. The difference was made up through scholarships (18.0% of care-experienced students, compared to 7.0% of other students), income from employment (19% of care-experienced students compared to 14.0% of others) and, concerningly, bank loans (7.0% of care-experienced students, compared to 3.0% of others) (Neves and Stephenson, 2023).

Foot note

[1] "What is a BTEC? Is it as valuable as an A-level? (whatuni.com) Calculating UCAS points based on predicted grades", *The Uni Guide*

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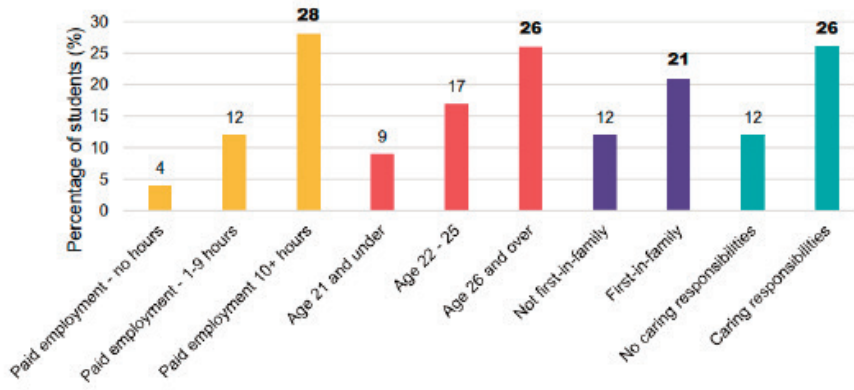
Figure 66 Student living costs funded by employment by student characteristics



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Margaret M Clark OBE

Learning to be Literate. Insights for policy and practice from more than fifty years as a researcher and teacher

By Margaret Clark OBE

Margaret M Clark *was awarded a DLitt for her early published research on reading and an OBE for her services to early years education. She has been elected to the Reading Hall of Fame, an independent organisation that recognises lifetime achievement in the field of reading. She was Professor and Head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham and is now a Visiting Professor at Newman University.*

Key words: Reading, literacy, English, Scotland, community study, word blindness, linguistics

Abstract: *This article is based on an Open Lecture I delivered at the University of Strathclyde on 26th October 2023. While the lecture was recorded the transcript was only of limited help in preparing this article, as written English bears little resemblance to speech written down. This is something of which the current government seems to have limited awareness if one studies their current policy for teaching reading in state primary schools in England. The lecture, and this article highlight the key findings in my own research into literacy covering a career of over fifty years but also includes insights from the many international researchers whose publications I have studied. Many of them I have been fortunate enough to meet.*

It concerns me that we may now be ignoring many of the insights from linguists in particular, some from as early as 1970s and 1980s into learning to read in English, which is not a phonically regular language. This is more serious when one considers that for many children learning to read in UK, English is not even their first language.

While decoding is one important element in learning

to read current emphasis on decoding often out of context, seems to dominate early instruction in England at least. Many children growing up in our print filled environment will by the time they start school have begun to develop awareness of print, a few will even be reading with understanding, Little acknowledgement of these very different starting points seems to be present in much current teaching of reading and in the courses for students training to be teachers. In addition to my research reports and articles I have published several books summarising my findings and I have edited others with chapters by distinguished literacy researchers from many countries, my own colleagues and my students.

My career started with three years as a teacher in a five-teacher primary school in Scotland, during which time I studied part-time for a degree in education and psychology. This was followed by two years as a lecturer in Jordanhill College of Education. From 1966-1979 I was a lecturer in the Psychology Department at the University of Strathclyde, then from 1979 until 1988 when I took early retirement, I was Head of the Department of Educational Psychology in the University of Birmingham. Since 2001 I have been a Visiting Professor at Newman University continuing to lecture, publish and edit books. Since 2012, when the phonics check became mandatory for all Year 1 children attending state schools in England many of my publications and two research projects have had as their focus the effect of the phonics check and the government's insistence that in state schools in England the only way to teach reading should be by synthetic phonics.

Between 1966 and 1988 not only was I undertaking research into literacy and other aspects of education I was also lecturing so I was able to introduce my students to ongoing research, encourage them to undertake their own research and have many participate in my research.

My research has been stimulated by my belief either that a particular education policy was not sufficiently grounded in evidence or that there were conflicting views to be evaluated. Throughout my career I have kept in touch with schools, including as a volunteer working with children with

difficulties thus trying out my views in practical settings. I have also interviewed many parents seeking their views on education policies and their effect on their children. I was a consultant in 1980s with Wendy Dewhirst to a Granada television series, *Time for a Story.* These were ten-minute programmes for 4-6 year-old children with Bill Oddie as presenter introducing and reading stories specially written for the programme by well-known children's authors. Wendy and I planned the programmes and wrote handbooks for teachers with follow up activities. Subsequently I have undertaken courses for teachers using material from the series and published suggestions for teachers based on these courses (see Clark 1994).

Two contrasting research studies between 1966 and 1979

I undertook my first two major research projects into learning to read during my time at the University of Strathclyde between 1966 and 1979.

Reading Difficulties in Schools

The first research, a community study of children with reading difficulties, started with 1544 children in Dunbartonshire, all children in state schools in the County, born within five months of each other who therefore started school on the same date. These 1544 children were tested individually on a reading test at seven years of age. Those still at risk and of average intelligence were followed over the next few years with individual testing to investigate just how many children of average intelligence continued to be at risk and what if any common features distinguished such children.

Many years earlier there had been reference to 'Word Blindness' and in 1960s there was controversy about 'dyslexia' or 'specific reading difficulties'. Children who were referred to a medical practitioner would be labelled dyslexic, possibly having special concessions in examinations as a consequence. A child with similar difficulties seen by an educational psychologist was unlikely to be so labelled. I decided that it would be valuable to undertake a community

study assessing the extent of the problem in a normal school population and whether such children had similar characteristics. I also worked briefly with a child neurologist in the assessment of older children for the Exam Board to ensure that all children were treated equally whoever had diagnosed them and how they had been labelled. Subsequently new regulations were put in place by the Board.

My interest in dyslexia was known and I was visited at the university by an adult dyslexic lad in his twenties, the most severe case I have seen. I persuaded him to talk to my students about his experience. He told us that he didn't read until he was about 12 years of age but was lucky enough to attend a school where, in spite of that, he had a wide curriculum and later with the support of a scribe he successfully completed a university degree. When I met him his writing and spelling on a note he sent me was still like that of a young child. Now computers should be a great benefit to such children and to adults with dyslexia. My interest in dyslexia continued, and some years later I appeared as an expert witness for Hampshire in a case where teachers in one of their primary schools were accused of negligence in their treatment of a boy who it was claimed they should have recognised was dyslexic. The case against the County was dismissed.

My research commenced with the individual testing of 1544 children about the age of seven all born within five months of each other. Fifteen per cent of the children in that age group in the County could not read independently after two years at school with a slightly higher incidence of boys. This study provided data based on individual testing of a complete age group of children on many aspects of development which it had been suggested might be associated with learning to read. Children of average intelligence who were still failing to learn to read were tested again after three years in school. I found at this time in that County, even with overcrowded classrooms, frequent changes of staff only 230 children of average intelligence were still having difficulties. The report of the research was

published in 1970 as Reading Difficulties in Schools where the results are summarised in Chapter 12. That research and many of my others are also reported in *Learning to be Literate* 2016.

Young Fluent Readers

The other major research into reading I directed was a very different study as it involved a sample of 32 children referred by their schools as already reading when they started school at five years of age, and therefore before any teaching of reading in school group situation had taken place. A preschool child had been brought to our department by his father and tested by a colleague who did not confirm the father's belief as to how gifted his young son was. When the boy started school his teacher contacted me as she discovered he could already read with understanding. I decided it would be worth studying a sample of such children and interviewing their parents to investigate what if anything they and their families had in common and what if any formal tuition had contributed to their success. These children and their parents came to the university several times during their first few years in school where they were tested individually and their parents interviewed. This study was of 32 children first seen at around five years of age who attended school in the West of Scotland. The report of that research was published in 1976 as *Young Fluent Readers: What can they teach us?* and was also summarised in *Learning to be Literate* in 2016.

Although clearly there were some features about these children and their families that were unique that study revealed lessons that we should have learnt and some that have still not yet been learnt! For most of these children the stimulus and desire to read was from the children themselves and they had not been subjected to formal tuition. Some of the children were as interested in writing as they were in reading even if their motor co-ordination was still limited.

Most of these children found the local library to be a valuable source of books and not all the families had a large supply of their own books. Stories provided a rich source of

enjoyment to the children, particularly the girls who soon began to attempt to read for themselves and some even to compose their own stories seeking help only when they couldn't solve a problem for themselves (see Clark 1994 for illustrations of some of the children's attempts at their own stories). While the girls tended to be mainly interested in stories, a number of the boys had wider interests which the librarians were able to help satisfy. In my recent research published in 2020 not only did we question teachers about the effect of the phonics check on young children but also a sample of parents most of whose children had passed the check. We asked whether they thought the check should remain mandatory and a number of parents (and of the more experienced teachers) felt that it should not, and that current government policy with its emphasis on decoding and introduction of alien non words in the check had been detrimental to their children's progress in reading.

Since the time of my earliest research into reading I have been interested in the value of stories read to children in introducing young preschool children to print, and the importance of dialogue with the reader. It is disturbing that school libraries are even now not mandatory in UK and that schools in the more disadvantaged areas are the least likely to have such a facility. There also seems to be less time devoted to reading stories to young children in school, which will affect the disadvantaged children most. Recent research by the National Literacy Trust has shown that children are now reading for enjoyment for less time than in previous years. I have just been informed by the National Literacy Trust that they released a new report and launched a new website, *Libraries for Primaries*. The report sets out their argument for every primary school to have a library (see https//www.librariesforprimaries.org.uk).

My Studies and Publications in Literacy 1979-1988

In 1979 I moved to Birmingham where from 1979 until 1988, when I took early retirement, I was a Professor in The Faculty of Education and Head of the Department of Educational

Psychology. There one of my research interests and that of many of my students continued to be literacy. It was during my time in Birmingham that I was with Wendy Dewhirst a consultant to The Granada Series Time for a Story. I also spent three months working with Marie Clay in Auckland, whose sensitive observation of children learning to read was internationally recognised (see Reading the Patterning of Complex Behaviour 1972 and Becoming Literate by Marie Clay 1991). Chapter 7 in Clark, 2016 is my tribute to her contribution, in particular to analysing children's progress in the early stages of learning to read and comparing the errors of those on the way to success and those failing. The phonics check to which so much funding has been devoted in England does not provide any diagnostic information and only a pass or fail is recorded. The focus is on whether or not a child reads 32 words out loud correctly, if only 31 the child has to re-sit the check the following year.

I spent several weeks lecturing in Australia and subsequently have kept in touch with research there and several researchers from there have contributed to my edited books (see Reading the Evidence: Synthetic Phonics and Literacy Learning. 2017). I was invited by Frank Smith to speak at a seminar he organised in Canada where I met a number of international researchers. The publication based on the seminar *Awakening to Literacy,* editors Goelman H, Oberg, A and Smith, F (1984) should I feel still be recommended reading on current literacy courses. During my time at the University of Birmingham I had funding which enabled me to hold a number of symposia and publish the proceedings, several of which were on different aspects of literacy. I also had funding to invite academics to spend time as Priorsfield Fellows with us and participate in our research.

New Directions in the Study of Reading (1985) which I edited has chapters not only by overseas contributors such as Mogens Jansen, Marion Blank, Uta Frith and Emelia Ferreiro but also chapters by my own students. There are two important sections where already contributors including Jessie Reid and Margaret Donaldson, who were stressing the

similarities and differences between oral and written languages refer to the 'disembedded nature of written language'. In 1994 I published a further book *Young Literacy Learners: How we can help them*. This book was aimed to help practitioners and students. It has examples of my practical work with children based on the Time for a Story series, and ways in a creative context of giving young children experience of the 100 commonest high frequency words which in print in English account for half the total words in written English. In written English it is essential if one is not to guess that one has a strategy to recognise the words that appear less frequently which account for ninety per cent of the different words. This is why decoding should play an important part in learning to read but not to the exclusion of other aspects. There is a section in that book in which I discuss the reading writing connection.

My publications on reading since 2001

Since 2001 I have been a Visiting Professor at Newman University and in addition to publishing articles critiquing the evidence base for the DfE's claim that there is only one best method of teaching reading, namely synthetic phonics, I have been evaluating the phonics screening check which since 2012 has been administered to all children in Year 1 around six years of age in state primary schools in England. Any child who fails to reach the arbitrary pass mark of 32 of 40 words read aloud correctly, has to resit the check the following year. Improving the pass mark each year has come to dominate the curriculum in English state primary schools and Ofsted Inspections. Preparation for the check is even dominating reception classes in many schools. Yet the test is not used to diagnose difficulties and the first twelve words to be read by the child are alien or not real words.

Recently I have directed two research studies . In the first study we sought the views of headteachers, teachers and parents as to the effect of the phonics check and whether they thought it should remain mandatory. In the second research we sought the view of the staff in institutions

training teachers where the government was insisting that to remain valid to train teachers, they must give priority to synthetic phonics. These two research reports can be read and downloaded from the Newman University website by typing in Professor Margaret M. Clark.

For the first of these researches we sought the views of headteachers teachers and parents on the effect of the phonics check, whether they believed it was having any detrimental effects and whether it should remain mandatory. The report of that research published in 2018 is: *The Phonics Screening Check 2012-2017: An independent enquiry into the views of head teachers, teachers and parents*. Clark, M M, Glazzard J, Atkinson S, Bailey J and Reid S.

Our forms were widely distributed and we received returns from 230 head teachers 1348 teachers a number of whom were themselves parents of children who had sat the check and by 419 parents, mainly mothers. Most of the teachers believed that the check did not provide them with information on individual children they did not already have and few thought it should remain statutory as did few parents and few parents were happy about the government's literacy policy, feeling it was having a detrimental effect on their children's progress towards reading with understanding.

The second report published in 2020 was an Independent research into the impact on literacy courses at institutions delivering initial teacher education in England considered the impact of the systematic phonics policy on literacy courses in institutions delivering initial teacher education in England. Clark M M, Glazzard J, Mills C, Reid S and Sloan J.

This consisted of a survey completed online by 38 respondents and we followed this with interviews of ten of these participants who had completed the survey. It was clear that government policy dominated courses and that there was little time for an analysis of alternative approaches other than that required by DfE and Ofsted.

Final Comments

During my time as an academic I have kept in touch with schools not only through my research but as a volunteer helping children with reading difficulties. This experience has kept me grounded in practice and been the incentive for my research. Either I have felt policy was not backed by sufficient evidence or there was conflicting evidence.

While most of my own research into reading was into children in primary schools, I have also edited research by colleagues and students on preschool children developing awareness of print and in secondary schools. I am not anti phonics as some have claimed. Decoding is important in learning to read in English, but should be taught in a meaningful context and is only one aspect of learning to read with understanding.

In the reference list to an article published in 1991 entitled 'Sensitive Observation and the Development of Literacy', there are many authors whose findings we would do well to consult as so many of their insights seem now to be overlooked.

In my most recent article in 2022 I considered how we could develop a research-literate teaching profession in England with the knowledge and expertise to critique government policy. We would need to review Ofsted's hold over schools and ensure that in future it is open to dialogue.

One would hope that school libraries do become mandatory in UK, receiving sufficient funding to collaborate with public libraries. This could enable children even from more disadvantaged homes to experience a wide range of written language to stimulate their imagination and enlarge their experience.

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Elizabeth Ellis

Education is still failing students by pedalling debunked learning styles

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By Elizabeth Ellis

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Key words: Learning styles, learning behaviours, inclusive learning.

Abstract: *The education industry needs to shake off the ethos of learning styles. There is no evidence designing lessons for different learning styles accelerates student learning, yet teachers are consistently directed to keep these pseudoscientific style categories in mind.*

By continuing to perpetuate learning styles, we can cause harm to learners at all levels, from school to higher education. Elizabeth Ellis, Head of School of Digital Education at Arden University, explains why we should move towards learning behaviours instead.

Why do educators believe in learning styles? As noted in research by Willingham et al., the proposed 'solution' of using learning styles has been to create categories of learners. For many, learning styles offer a middle ground between treating every student the same and treating every student uniquely.

Once exposed to all these seemingly reliable (or at least not overtly unreliable) ways to learn, confirmation bias – the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information consistent with one's existing beliefs – could easily support the belief that learning styles are viable.

For example, if a teacher was helping a student struggling with a concept and tried a few ways of explaining to

no avail, but then decides to draw a diagram and the idea clicks, it is natural for the teacher and student to conclude that the student must be a visual learner. But perhaps it was an effective way to communicate that idea, and any learner would have benefited from the diagram.

The harm in learning styles

Adopting the learning style method can cause more harm than progress, including: the creation of unwarranted and unrealistic expectations among educators; matching a student to a learning style could waste time and resources, and it could potentially demotivate students.

The learning style theory can enhance self-limiting beliefs – particularly for students who have had prior poor formal education experiences. Adopting a learning method or a particular label such as 'visual learner', can plant the idea for a student that they can't learn unless information is presented in a particular way.

Ironically, learning styles can also prevent students from taking ownership of their learning, as the responsibility shifts back to the teacher and their ability to present information in the required format. And if information given in the preferred method, such as via audio for a supposed auditory learner, is not retained by the student, it could demotivate the learner through the belief that they can't learn that material and thus struggle with the subject when another explanation or method may be needed.

Developing more inclusive learning

Prioritising inclusive pedagogies that recognise, value and support all students to succeed is vital. By focussing on 'learning design' throughout the educational journey, educators can not only consider students' current levels of knowledge and ability, but also focus on what they want them to gain.

It offers an important baseline that builds in universal elements, including digital skills, capability, graduate outcomes and authentic assessment.

There are a plethora of learning design frameworks and approaches that can be applied to learning experiences, from a 5-minute micro lecture to a 4-hour online workshop. Frameworks, such as UCL's Conversational Framework and its attendant ABC method, provide educators with a stage that can be populated by the dialogue of educator with student and put into action with a range of activity types that allow students to engage with topics in multiple ways.

This steers away from the idea that students need to engage in specific, simplistic styles to acquire knowledge. Instead, incorporating learning design frameworks encourages the kind of complexity that aids learning – taking a tricky concept and bringing a student through a journey that includes reading, watching, communicating and creating an artefact, all to enhance understanding and demonstrate it.

But we can also take learning design a step further, by building on research from 2018, which demonstrated that students studying online at a distance, displayed distinct learning behaviours.

Learning behaviours (Ellis, Gallagher and Peasgood, 2018) is based on the idea that when students learn, they display core identifiable behaviours recognisable and replicable but emphasised or de-emphasised due to particular factors, such as: personal preference, proficiency, digital skills, and their current place in the education journey.

The research identified that students that display learning behaviours are more likely to progress positively throughout their education. These behaviours are:

- Goal-setting - the tendency to set goals and plan.

- Time - prioritising time to spend studying and sticking to a study schedule.

- Focus - avoiding clutter and distraction, including 'digital' distraction.

- Note-making - the tendency to make and store notes,

either digital or physical.

- Digital-preferred - the ability to use technology to carry out tasks, whether choosing to do so or not.

- Help-seeking - the ability to connect with other people for support with their studies.

- Elaboration - the desire to seek information and relate new ideas to ones already known.

The urge to engage in learning styles often comes from a good place. But differentiation based on a neuromyth harms the efforts of both teacher and student.

We can push back on the idea that in some way it is about modifying student behaviours or training learners to behave in a particular way that ensures success. Learning design augmented by learning behaviours champions differentiation based on knowledge, engagement, and skills development. It also champions putting the student at the centre of their learning journey and giving them the confidence to own it.

Revolutionising modern teaching with AI technology

By Nicola Pearce,
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Key words: AI, ChatGPT, lesson plans, technology.

Abstract: *The adaptation of AI in education can bring a multitude of benefits to both students and teachers. By effectively using AI, educational leaders can drastically improve educational outputs by harnessing innovation, teaching and learning practices, as well as accelerate students' academic progress as revealed by a recent report from UNESCO. By tackling some of the greatest challenges facing education, such as overwhelming workflows and generic curriculum, AI can provide a revolutionary approach to the way students are taught.*

Although there are many advantages that come from the implementation of AI, UNESCO's report also emphasizes the importance of a human-centric approach to AI, essential in order to address existing knowledge-gaps, along with cultural diversity and self-expression. As AI is increasingly incorporated into education it is crucial that we understand the possibilities it brings, and how to develop alongside it.

Many students and teachers have become greatly familiar with the well-known AI tool; Open AI's ChatGPT, for good and for bad. Due to its ability to generate content including text, music, images, code, and any form of data it has gained a huge amount of attention in the public eye. Many educators have used ChatGPT as an assistive technology helping them to reduce workloads and prove valuable assistance when developing curriculum and teaching. Interestingly, the education sector was amongst the top three

users of ChatGPT in 2023, showcasing it value to teachers and students. The tool has however also been seen as a threat to integrity, as some argue it enables students to cheat, and plagiarise material, emphasising the importance of implementing thorough measures to regulate its use within education.

Thinking of new and creative approaches to teaching can be challenging to teachers, however AI can provide an answer to the problem. By providing teachers with the ability to personalise lessons and curriculum to students, as well as constantly analysing academic progression and student performance, teachers can accommodate individual students by providing them with support tailored to their individual needs and availability.

AI has great potential to transform education, but this does not come without risks. The UK's Education Secretary, Gillian Keegan recently emphasised the importance of creating awareness around all aspects of AI including its many opportunities as well as risks. As teachers implement AI into the classrooms, teachers need to ask themselves how they can teach their students to use these technologies in a way that is both safe and secure.

Educators can gain many benefits from incorporating AI technology into their teaching, such as reduced workloads, and streamlined workflows. By automating time-consuming processes such as attendance monitoring, managing permissions, and thorough monitoring of student's progress. But with the rapid development of the technology, they also need to be cautious about the way they utilise it. By implementing proper training and raising awareness regarding the risk the technology brings, they can continue to use it in a most advantageous way.

AI will no doubt change the face of many industries, but is the education industry ready for new generative AI technologies?

AI-powered classrooms AI in the classroom

One of the key benefits of implementing AI technologies into

everyday learning is creating more personalised learning opportunities.

AI-powered educational tools can open a range of opportunities for teachers to personalise learning techniques for individual students. By analysing student data, AI can adapt learning materials and curriculum tailored to the individual student, by providing students with the opportunity to learn at their own pace and get assistance in areas where they would need it. AI can also analyse data on student performance and then provide tailored support and extra tuition to students struggling with certain topics and subjects. By offering students rapid feedback through AI, students are able to quickly identify and correct their mistakes.

An AI-powered classroom offers teachers the opportunity to personalise their lesson plans, without adding to their mounting workload. With speedy feedback from AI assistants, teachers can then offer students direct advice on their educational progress, whilst also identifying and correcting mistakes quickly. By not only recognising students' individuality, but also appreciating it, it can contribute to personal growth amongst students and encourage students and teachers to be appreciative of each other's differences.

By utilising interactive displays, students are able to take an active part in their own learning as well as their classmates' learning, by allowing all students to share thoughts and opinions with the rest of the class. This furthermore enables teachers to respect their students' individuality and limits, by allowing them to express and showcase their abilities in their own unique way. The utilisation of these digital tools can however be overwhelming for some teachers, with an overload of material, feedback, and data, but with the support of AI, the assessment and monitoring of students can be greatly automated and help take away from the pressure.

The implementation of these tools additionally enables teaching to take place outside of the physical classrooms by opening the door to online learning. AI developments provide tutoring opportunities, feedback

models, providing students and teachers with information they might need even when they find themselves unable to physically attend classes. Teachers can make use of tools such as virtual tutors in situation where a substitute might be needed, providing students with a virtual tutor able to answer questions and provide instructions and information in a way that mimics a human interaction.

Recently developed AI-powered teaching and learning platforms can consistently assess students and give them personalised feedback, whilst also recommending any relevant 'microlessons' to help target areas for students to work on. AI-powered platforms and applications from AI education platforms such as CENTURY Tech and Coursera can be easily downloaded onto the latest interactive displays within classrooms, offering teachers a simple way to access detailed performance reviews for each student, so they can tailor lessons and extra credit work according to their strengths and weaknesses in certain subjects.

Safeguarding and AI-risk management

Bringing AI into the classroom can only serve to assist teachers and help ease workloads by automating tasks such as marking and assessment. With AI becoming more widely used in everyday life, children and young people are becoming more exposed to these technologies. Teachers therefore must ensure they teach students about the risks and disadvantages of using AI, as well as outlining the significant benefits, to effectively equip them with the needs of the future workplace.

Whilst AI can enable enhanced personalised learning, there is the notable absence of human and emotional support when offering constructive criticism and feedback on a student's progress. Therefore, teachers must work in tandem with AI tools to offer students the benefits of AI-assisted teaching, but continue to balance interpersonal interactions between students and teachers to cater to students' social and emotional learning.

AI technologies should be deployed in a manner that enhances human capacities, not in a way that replaces them,

and distinguish between human intelligence and artificial intelligence, in a way to work with AI and not against it. This is essential in order to avoid skills gaps and ensure students do not solemnly depend on technology.

Additionally, to the potentially diminished emotional learning, there is the risk that students will use AI in assessment settings such as tests and quizzes, when solving homework problems, and essay writing. A recent survey reported that 30% of university students have used ChatGPT on written assignments. This could lead to students not learning the essential curriculum and skills provided by the teachers and schools. It is, however, argued that AI tools do not lead to an increase in number of students that cheat, but the tools they use to do it. This opens a world of opportunities for software developers and tech experts to develop solutions that can detect AI tools, potentially making cheating easier to detect.

Alongside these concerns, there is the issue of privacy. Any new technology brings about its own unique privacy concerns, and AI is no different. With AI monitoring and analysing students' performance within a classroom, in addition to enhanced online discussion boards, there must be a consideration that this technology will collect and store sensitive and personal data. Therefore, IT teams and educational leaders must ensure they secure the data collected by AI-powered technologies, and also document the use of this for each student's progression.

Transparency is key when using AI and the privacy of student's data must be maintained and secured from any potential data breach. Teachers, parents, and students all need to have a clear understanding of and access to information about how their data is stored and used in AI systems. So schools must ensure they are providing information on what specific data is collected, as well as from whom, and the way it will be used. Additionally, there is the consideration of cyber security, and finding the right gatekeepers for the deployment of AI. By implementing cyber security training for school staff, IT departments as well as

teachers, and students can help increase awareness around potential cyber-attacks and enables teachers and students to quickly detect these attempts and protect each other.

The future of education powered by AI

AI has the potential to become a formidable tool for teachers within the classroom. If used correctly, this technology will fundamentally change and improve many aspects of a student's education, from their assessments to developmental learning as well as assisted feedback and support. AI can be used across a range of classrooms from younger years to higher education, where plagiarism detections, exam integrity, academic research and analysis of student metrics will become more prominent within the next few years.

AI provides a range of opportunities both to students and to teachers and is not limited to a narrow set of tasks. Students can use AI in situations where they might be studying, by coming up with tests, quizzes and flashcards, as well as summarising tricky information and providing them with material that is easier to understand. Additionally, they can look for guidance and help from AI in order to work on their own self- development.

As AI can provide rapid and on-the-spot responses and feedback, it can help remove pressure from teacher's workloads, as well as ensure students development and progression in situations where they might not be able to get feedback directly from their teachers. As the use of AI continues to grow in education, teachers should be aware of the many opportunities it provides, such as analysing, structuring and writing text, transforming prompts and text into video and images, which allows them to focus on teaching. AI may however not provide results comparable to human designed and developed curriculum, and the technology must be used in tandem with humans, not as a replacement.

The implementation of AI can also provide teachers and students with an arena to engage, through technological

tools such as interactive displays. These solutions are unique due to their ability to cater to the individual students needs and skills. By allowing students to share thoughts and ideas and present what they've learned in ways that they're comfortable with. AI is already being used by students when doing their homework, with help and guidance from teachers, and it is likely that the use of AI in education will continue to grow over the coming years.

It is however essential that teachers and educational leaders consider the risks they're faced with, posed by AI, and ensure that these dangers are mitigated. There needs to be transparent communication between educators, teachers, parents and students, ensuring all parts involved are provided with clarity around data collection and management, as well as how the potential risks it brings. Teachers and students should be provided with security training, as well as information regarding safeguarding and safety measures, allowing them to take full advantage of AI.

There is no doubt that the future of education will continue to develop and change, and experts are constantly debating what the future classroom will look like. AI is undoubtedly set to have a big impact on how teachers teach, and how students learn, and educators need to be open to implementing AI tools in the classrooms, preparing them for a future educational system driven by AI.

Select Committee Reports

We continue our series of reviews of all parliamentary select committee reports on education, which we started in volume 25 beginning with January 2018.

Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, House of Commons Select Committee on Education, HC 1800, published on Friday 8 September 2023.

Support for Childcare and the Early Years: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report, the Education Select Committee's sixth special report of session 2022/23. HC 1902. Published on 18 October 2023.

Appointment of HMCI

Appointment of His Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills, sixth report of the House of Commons Select Committee on Education, HC 1800, published on Friday 8 September 2023.

This is a short report. On the 19 July 2023, the Secretary of State for Education, Rt Hon. Gillian Keegan, wrote to the Committee to say that Sir Martyn Oliver, currently CEO of Outwood Grange Academies Trust, had been chosen as the Government's preferred Candidate to take up the post of the His Majesty's Chief Inspector at OFSTED.

The Committee was invited to hold a pre-appointment hearing with the Candidate.

The Committee interviewed Sir Martyn on the following:

- the role and powers of the His Majesty's Chief Inspector of OFSTED;
- the Candidate's priorities, if appointed;
- how his previous experiences have prepared him for this role;
- the challenges facing OFSTED today;
- the challenges facing the education sector today.

The Committee concluded that Sir Martyn Oliver was appointable for the post.

During his evidence to the Committee, Sir Martyn said that his three priorities for Ofsted were engaging in what he called "the big listen". He thought that there were three ins to Ofsted. He said: "The first is information. What is it that Ofsted thinks we need to know? What do we need to know

from you, from the sector, about the sector? Then there is insight—ascertaining from the sectors what they think that we need to know and to hear our replies. Then there is the input—the ultimate beneficiaries, the children and the parents."

Sir Martyn asked himself what do parents and children think about Ofsted? "What is the quality of information? How much faith do they put on the single-word judgment, for example, when you look at the report? It is amazing once you are nominated. Every time I drive around and I see those banners outside schools, I think to myself, "What will they do if it is not that one word?" I am not saying that they should not have that one word, I am asking, 'What will you do? How do we then safeguard? If you have 10 words, how do we safeguard?' I could say to you that every one of my schools has a good quality of education, but not every school is good. That worries me, so I would be interested to see from parents' point of view what they think because that is ultimately the beneficiary of our work."

Childcare and the early years

Support for Childcare and the Early Years: Government response to the Committee's Fifth Report, the Education Select Committee's sixth special report of session 2022/23. HC 1902. Published on 18 October 2023.

The report from the select committee on support for childcare and early years settings made 23 recommendations. The Government rejected the Committee's recommendation that business rates should be scrapped for childcare settings, and that they should be zero-rated for VAT on their business purchases.

Ministers said they had frozen business rates for the next five years and that rate relief schemes already provide discounts to childcare providers and others. The response said there are no plans to alter terms for VAT. It also rejected the call for a review of tax-free childcare, a policy controlled by the Treasury rather than the Department for Education.

The Government did not fully accept the Committee's call for it to work "with childcare providers and local authorities" to set the hourly funding rate that will be paid to childcare providers when the universal 30-hours childcare entitlements are rolled out. Witnesses to the inquiry said providers who are already struggling could otherwise be left insufficiently funded. The Department for Education's (DfE's) response said it recognises the importance of setting funding rates with local authorities, had uprated the hourly rate for 2023/24, and was providing additional funding via the early years supplementary grant.

Agreeing with a Committee recommendation, the Government confirmed it will amend town planning legislation so that funding from the Infrastructure Levy, which property developers pay to local authorities after planning permission is given, can be used to pay for childcare facilities.

There was a positive response to the Committee's call for government to remove barriers faced by social housing

residents whose tenancies block them from operating as childminders in their homes. DfE said it is "engaging with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and a range of housing sector stakeholders including social and private landlords, to identify and reduce property related barriers to childminding".

DfE did not directly respond to MPs' calls for it to prioritise career development of early years practitioners as a means of improving retainment of staff in the sector, and giving it parity of esteem with staff working in schools. The Department said it is developing a national campaign "to boost interest in the sector". It also aims to boost recruitment with efforts to "remove barriers to entering the sector, by ensuring qualifications are suitable and easy to understand", and by introducing new types of apprenticeship for becoming a childcare professional.

In total the Government accepted fully four of the Select Committee's recommendations, accepted a further 11 in part and rejected or failed to respond to eight.

Education Committee chairman Robin Walker MP said: "We maintain that there is a powerful case for reviewing the funding levels for childcare settings, the working of tax free childcare and, given their vital contribution to the economy, the taxes they incur. We hope the Government is eyeing up ways to help the sector in its Autumn Statement, which will build on the positive announcements made in the spring.

"We accept that not every one of our recommendations is in the gift of ministers at the Department of Education, but our report stressed and ministers have accepted the importance of cross departmental work on these issues. We shall continue to press for action across Government to support this vital sector.

"Meanwhile it is encouraging that ministers are working on ways to boost recruitment and retention in the sector, and to remove unfair barriers that stand in the way of social housing tenants becoming childminders."

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