Office for Students: National Student Survey Cognitive Testing 2022

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1. <u>Executive summary</u>

1.1 Background and method

As part of the ongoing National Student Survey (NSS) review, survey questions had been redeveloped from the previous agreement statement format to operationalised questions with item-specific scales.

The Office for Students (OfS) commissioned Shift Insight to conduct qualitative research to test comprehension of the redeveloped survey questions. An additional aim of the interviews was to test the use of these item-specific scales to ensure that students would feel confident responding to the modified format of the questions.

Shift Insight conducted 55 English-medium and five Welsh cognitive testing interviews with a diverse range of students who had completed at least one year of, or had recently finished, an undergraduate course. The aim of these interviews was to test the wording of questions from the NSS, to ensure that the questions were phrased appropriately for the intended audience.

1.2 Overarching findings and recommendations

In general, the item-specific scale versions of the NSS questions were well received by participants. Using different scales for each question was felt to be appropriate and did not hamper their ability to answer the survey. A majority did not find it difficult to switch between scales across the survey.

Where 4- and 6-point scale variations were tested, preferences for scale length were mixed. However, our analysis showed that neither was sufficiently problematic to mean that participants could not answer questions using either version.

Overall, 4-point scales were felt to be quicker to read and comprehend, required less cognitive load and thus made the survey quicker to complete. However, in many cases, 6-point scales were felt to be more appropriate in the survey and more likely to generate useful data as they allowed students to truly reflect their experiences. In particular, inclusion of absolute options at each end of the scales (e.g. 'always' and 'never') was popular.

The NSS questions themselves were felt to flow well and most were well understood by the intended audience, with few differences in interpretation between participant types. However, there were several questions and scales, as indicated below, that would benefit from further revisions to improve comprehension.

Recommendations

The points below provide an overview of the high priority recommendations resulting from the research. A full set of prioritised recommendations can be found in bulleted form in the conclusion.

The higher priority recommendations are focused on questions and scales where participants struggled to answer or had significant issues with the language used.

High priority recommendations

Question 1: How often are teaching staff good at explaining course content?

- Change from a frequency scale to asking instead how good staff are at explaining course content.

Question 2: How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?

- Consider changing the Welsh translation of engaging from 'ddeniadol' to 'diddorol'.

Question 9: To what extent does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you've already learnt?

- Consider changing the question to ask 'how well' this is done, as opposed to 'to what extent'.

Question 15: How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?

- Consider changing to a frequency scale.

Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?
- Use this question as the summative question wording, instead of question 37.

2. **Background**

The National Student Survey (NSS) has been running annually since 2005, asking students in their final year of study about several aspects of their course. The survey is one of the key tools that helps ensure high quality teaching across institutions.

It was developed after a review of the higher education sector in 2003, based on the Australian student survey model.

There have been two main iterations of the survey, the first running from 2005 to 2016 and the second from 2017 onwards, which is the current form, with 27 core questions and a bank of optional responses. This second version of the survey was developed after a number of rounds of cognitive testing in 2015 and 2016, with those findings informing changes to the question set.

In 2020, the Office for Students (OfS) conducted a substantial review of the NSS, which had been requested by the universities minister to address concerns about how the survey might create a burden or impact on standards, while ensuring it remained a useful indicator of student opinion. More detail on the history of NSS development and detailed information on the review can be found [here](#).

To date, the review has included the following stages:

- An open consultation process conducted in summer 2021, generating a range of new themes and questions for testing.
- A series of cognitive interviews conducted between August and September 2021, testing the new themes and questions, as well as some existing questions on the NSS with revisions based on previous review findings.
- A wider pilot, run concurrently with the NSS in 2022. The pilot included questions redeveloped from the previous agreement scale format to operationalised questions with item-specific scales.

The OfS commissioned Shift Insight to work with them on the development and cognitive testing of the new operationalised questions and the item-specific scales prior to a second pilot. A full list of questions that were tested in this research can be found in Appendix 7.2 Question Set.

This research provides cognitive testing on the new operationalised questions and item-specific scales in relation to students studying BA or BSc higher education courses. The research aims to:

- Help to ensure that survey participants interpret the questions in the NSS in the way in which they were intended, reducing the potential for measurement error.
- Test the appropriateness and usability of the recently developed item-specific scales.
- Inform recommendations to the UK regulatory and funding bodies regarding the new questions that are in development.

3. <u>Methodology</u>

3.1 Research stages

The research included the following stages:

- **OfS internal reviews:**
  - Internal reviews conducted by the OfS, to inform the development of the new questions and the item-specific scales.
- **OfS-Shift Insight workshops:**
  - A workshop conducted with the OfS and Shift Insight to devise wording for the new questions and item-specific scales.
- **Full cognitive interviews:**
  - 50 interviews conducted using a cognitive interviewing approach. The cognitive interviewing technique involved participants reading out the questions and 'thinking aloud' as they considered the question and their answer to it. This approach helps to ensure that survey participants interpret NSS questions in the way they were intended, reducing the potential for measurement error.
  - 45 of the interviews were conducted in English language. They lasted approximately one hour each and were conducted over the phone or Microsoft Teams. These were full cognitive interviews, testing comprehension of the new question wording and any difficulties with the language used. The item-specific scales were also tested for comprehension within these interviews.
  - Five of the full cognitive interviews were conducted in the Welsh language, testing the Welsh translation of the NSS questions and scales.
- **Scale-check interviews:**
  - 10 further cognitive interviews were conducted, focusing on the item-specific scales. During these interviews, fewer questions were tested in comparison to the full cognitive interviews and a greater emphasis was placed on cognitively testing the scales used with each question. These were conducted in English language.

3.2 Question list

This research focused on testing a subset of the NSS questions that were under review, as opposed to testing the whole survey. A full list of the question sets tested is given in Appendix 7.2 Question Set. This details which questions were tested within the full cognitive interviews (with 50 respondents) and which were tested in scale-check interviews (with 10 respondents).

3.3 Approach to analysis

Interviews were analysed using the following steps:

- **Interviewer workshop:**
  - To develop key themes in relation to each question and the survey overall
  - To inform development of a code frame
- **Coding of anonymised transcripts in Atlas.ti by:**
  - Question

- Question group
  - Top-line themes
- **Secondary coding by question to specifically identify the nature of:**
  - Difficulties in answering the questions
  - Difficulties with specific language used in the questions
  - Issues with response scales

To support and evidence future decision-making, the OfS wanted to understand the frequency with which areas of difficulty or ambiguity arose during the interviews. Code frequencies relating to any difficulties have been reported in brackets in the report commentary to allow the 'tracking back' of any future decisions to specific examples in the interviews.

3.4 Recruitment of participants

We completed a total of 60 interviews between June and August 2022.

Participants were recruited through:

- An opt-in question in the NSS pilot
- Shift Insight's research panel
- Social media

A sampling strategy was designed to ensure representation from student groups across the audience.

A breakdown of participants is given in Appendix 7.1 'Participant Profiles' (including subject, delivery format, mode of study, provider type, location, provider size and participant demographic profile).

Quotes have been used throughout the report to illustrate the findings. These are linked to abbreviated attributions (in which HEI refers to a higher education institution, AP is an alternative provider and FEC is a further education college), referenced with an interview identification number in brackets.

4. <u>Key findings</u>

4.1 Item-specific scales

4.1.1   Use of item-specific scales

The questions presented to students in the interviews were operationalised, using item-specific scales appropriate to the question. Participants were specifically asked how they found the process of switching between different scales in the survey and how this impacted their ability to complete it.

Overall, most participants (33) had no issues with the use of different scales across the survey and found it easy to switch between the different scales.[1] Many participants (15) commented that using different scales made logical sense as each question was asking something different.[2] Others (13) commented that they felt it made the survey more engaging as it required them to read each question more closely and made it less repetitive.[3]

> 'I think switching between them is fine because the way that the questions are worded, having the same scale every time wouldn't work and I think if you were to have the exact same scale the entire time, by the end you could be very bored. I think switching it up keeps it more engaging…When you change the wording, it fits the question a little bit better, rather than if you were to give me a number scale which is effectively what it would be if it was all the same.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (46)**

However, some participants (10) did voice difficulties in switching between scales, stating that they would prefer a standardised scale across the survey. For many, this was not because they found the scales difficult to understand, but rather stemmed from a desire to reduce the cognitive load when taking the survey and speed up the process of completion.[4]

> **[How did you find changing up the different scales?]** 'It does make it slightly more of a mental effort, but I don't think it's going to put me off doing the survey.' **[If I asked how easy or difficult it was to use a different one?]** 'Slightly difficult.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (2)**

Across the survey, 4- and 6-point versions of different scales were tested. In some cases, preferences differed based on the individual question being asked. Reactions to these scales are detailed in the analysis of each question. Overall, preferences for different scale lengths were mixed with no clear preference among students.

Some (11) expressed a preference for shorter response scales, largely as they were quicker to read and therefore easier to comprehend when scanning through the survey.[5] Conversely, others (10) expressed a preference for longer scales, often finding they gave more room for reflecting nuances in their experiences.[6]

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[1] Code: Scales_Easy to switch between scales (33)
[2] Code: Scales_Scale changes make sense (15)
[3] Code: Scales_More engaging (13)
[4] Code: Scales_Difficulty switching between scales (9)
[5] Code: Scales_Prefer shorter scales (11)
[6] Code: Scales_Prefer longer scales (1)

Other overarching comments on scale points included:

- **Preferences for a midpoint in scales:** A substantial number (24) felt that question scales could benefit from a neutral middle option. While they would not always personally select this option, it was felt to present a more balanced scale.[7]
- **Numerical scales:** Some (8) felt questions would be easier to answer on a numerical sliding scale, as opposed to needing to decode each written response option.[8]
- **Scale point differences:** Some (13) commented that it was difficult to distinguish the real difference between scale points, often when considering the difference between 'fairly', 'very' and 'extremely'.[9]

4.1.2 Specific scale comments

4.1.2.1 Frequency scales

A larger number of participants (33) preferred a 6-point version of the frequency scale than a 4-point version.[10] Some participants (12) preferred a 4-point scale because it was quicker to read and therefore easier to scan, comprehend and provide a response to.[11] Those who preferred the 6-point scale stated it was helpful to have the option of 'always' (11),[12] and it was important to split out 'rarely' and 'never' as they mean two different things (17).[13] They also felt that having more scale points enabled them to more accurately evaluate their experience.

4.1.2.2 Extent scales

When considering the 'extent' scales, preferences for a 4- or 6-point scale were more varied.

There was a slightly greater preference for a 4-point scale (19).[14] Again, some preferred this as it was quicker to read and comprehend, with additional points felt to be unnecessary. In some cases (7), they also found the additional points on the 6-point extent scale difficult to define, and felt that the points overlapped with each other.[15] For example, they had difficulties discerning the difference between 'a small extent' and 'a very small extent'.

Others (15) preferred a 6-point scale, again feeling that it gave them more room to express nuances and truly reflect their student experience.[16]

4.1.2.3 Wellness scales

When considering the wellness scale, preferences again were mixed. Some (11) preferred a 4-point scale,[17] while others (19) preferred the 6-point version.[18] Reasoning was not specific to the wellness

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[7] Code: Scales_Want a midpoint (24)
[8] Code: Scales_Prefer numerical (8)
[9] Code: Scales_Options too similar (13)
[10] Code: Frequency scale_Prefer 6 point (33)
[11] Code: Frequency scale_Prefer 4 point (12)
[12] Code: Frequency scale_Scale points_including always (11)
[13] Code: Frequency scale_Scale points_splitting rarely and never (17)
[14] Code: Extent scale_Prefer 4 point (19)
[15] Code: Extent scale_Scale points_6 point_Option overlap (7)
[16] Code: Extent scale_Prefer 6 point (15)
[17] Code: Wellness scale_Prefer 4 point (11)
[18] Code: Wellness scale_Prefer 6 point (19)

scale itself, but rather reflected broader preferences for either shorter scales for ease, or longer scales to reflect nuances in experience.

4.2 Question group: Teaching on my course

- **Question 1: How often are teaching staff good at explaining course content**? [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 2: How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 3: How often is the course intellectually stimulating?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 4: How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?** [Always / Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely / Never / This does not apply to me]

Questions 1, 2 and 4 were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

Question 3 was tested in the scale-check interviews (n=10).

4.2.1   Question 1: How often are teaching staff good at explaining course content?

4.2.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants were thinking about how clear staff made certain aspects of the course to them. This included:

- How well they were able to understand course content, including previous positive and negative experiences on their course, and how this varied by teacher and class.
- Different types of classes, such as consideration of lectures and seminars, practical and theoretical components of classes as well as online and in-person elements.
- Teaching style and approachability of staff, including their use of resources, how well they were able to answer student questions, and whether lecturers were seen as being 'up to standard'.
- How well key course information was explained by staff at the beginning of their course, and whether they had been given a key breakdown of information, including deadlines, key information about modules, course layout and assessments.

> 'This question I think is asking me how good the people were that taught me the courses, how clear they made what they were teaching to me, and how they presented the new knowledge that I was taking on and made it easy.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Medium HEI (13)**

4.2.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some (4) participants raised concerns that the question was too vague,[19] making it difficult to know how to apply it to their own experiences. A couple of participants found the term 'course content' in

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[19] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Clarification on where it applies (4)

particular to be confusing, being unsure whether this referred to learning objectives or class content, or whether this included both theoretical and practical components of their course.[20]

A couple of participants felt the question could be made clearer if it stated which information was being referred to – for example, whether this meant explaining class content or information about the course structure more broadly.[21]

Some students struggled to answer this question in terms of how often course content was well explained. These issues included:

- Some (9) mentioned it being difficult to average out their experience across different modules and lecturers, with some being seen as better than others at explaining course content.[22]
- One participant mentioned struggling to base their answer on only a few instances in the year, expressing concern about then picking 'often'.[23]
- One participant queried what year of their studies the question applied to.[24]

4.2.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants were asked whether they felt the current frequency scale worked well for the question, or if it would be better to instead ask about how good staff were at explaining course content.

The frequency scale was considered appropriate by several participants (8), who found this helped to average out their experience across tutors and across time, rather than focusing on specific good or bad instances.[25]

However, several other (12) participants had a preference for a scale that assessed quality instead.[26] They felt that this would be clearer and more useful in assessing the quality of the teaching rather than the regularity of how good teaching.

A few participants (3) gave an alternative suggestion of using a numerical scale, feeling it would make the question easier and quicker to answer.[27]

Another consideration (1) was that, instead of asking how often content had been well explained, the question could ask whether this had been done consistently.[28]

Some participants commented on the number of response options given in the scale:

- Two expressed how an 'always' option could be provided, feeling that there needed to be an extreme positive option.[29]
- Similarly, one explained that they felt 'rarely' and 'never' should be split out.[30]

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[20] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Course content (2)
[21] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Question wording (2)
[22] Code: Q1_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (9)
[23] Code: Q1_Difficulties answering_Sample it applies to (1)
[24] Code: Q1_Difficulties answering_Year it applies to (1)
[25] Code: Q1_Scale _Preference for frequency scale (8)
[26] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_scale_Preference for scale using quality (12)
[27] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_scale_Preference for numerical scale (3)
[28] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_scale_Explained consistently (1)
[29] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_scale _Include always (2)
[30] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Splitting rarely and never (1)

- One discussed wanting a middle ground option between 'fairly' and 'not very'.[31]
- One mentioned how having fewer options (three to be exact) would make it easier to decide on an answer.[32]

Others struggled with the terminology used in the scale, including:

- **Often:** Some (6) were confused about what timescales this referred to, i.e. what would constitute 'often'.[33]
- **Good:** One participant felt that this was vague, as someone could speak well, but might not explain the course content.[34]

4.2.1.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups. However, one participant, who was studying graphic design, found the term 'course content' difficult to apply to their course, as the course constituted more self-led education rather than what would traditionally be considered 'course content'.[35]

4.2.1.5 Recommendations
HIGH PRIORITY:

- Change from a frequency scale to asking instead how good staff are at explaining course content.

4.2.2   Question 2: How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?

4.2.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants were thinking about the level of involvement within the class, how interested they were in the course content, and how staff had facilitated this engagement through lectures and seminars.

Different types of teaching were considered as well as how teachers tried to motivate students through more creative teaching styles. Some students also considered their own personal interest in the topic when answering this question.

One participant considered how the course had been marketed to them before they started it. They were considering how appealing the course had been made to seem.

4.2.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

There were various elements of the question or specific language that some students found difficult when answering.
Students cited specific issues with language, including:

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[31] Code: Q1_Difficulties answering_Middle ground option (1)
[32] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Scale_Preference for 3 groups (1)
[33] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Scale_Often (6)
[34] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Good (1)
[35] Code: Q1_Difficulties with language_Course content_Creative course (1)

- **Engaging:** Two participants found the term 'engagement' vague, feeling this could mean different things to different students.[36]
- **Staff:** One participant was unsure which staff this referred to.[37]
- **Subject:** One participant was unsure whether this meant the subject overall or individual modules.[38]

A few participants (3) expressed difficulty with the phrase 'how often', finding it difficult to quantify their experiences in this way.[39]

Similarly, some participants (6) experienced a challenge in trying to average their experiences for this question, with different staff having very different teaching styles and levels of engagement.[40]

One participant found it difficult to separate their own personal interest in the subject when answering this question. They felt that if they had chosen to study a particular topic, they were already likely to find this engaging, regardless of the staff.[41] Conversely, the teacher might have made the subject engaging, but if the student was not interested in the subject, they would not enjoy it as much and this would have been down to the subject itself rather than the teaching.

4.2.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale
Most felt that the scale worked well for this question. However, participants who found this less appropriate suggested ways to improve this:

- Three participants preferred a numerical scale for the question, such as 1-10.[42]
- Two participants had difficulty with the term 'often' in the question and scale.[43] One suggested 'most of the time' as a better alternative.
- One participant preferred a scale that explored how good teaching staff were at making content engaging – for example, using a wellness scale.[44]
- One participant felt that the question could instead ask about how many of their teachers made the content engaging.[45] One other participant suggested rephrasing the question to be about the percentage of teaching staff making the content engaging.[46]

When looking at the response options, the following comments were made:

- A few students (3) felt that there needed to be absolute options at each end of the scale, i.e. 'always' and 'never'.[47]
- One participant felt the option 'This does not apply to me' was counterintuitive, as they felt every effort should be made to make a session engaging.[48]

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[36] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Defining engaging (2)
[37] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Staff_ (1)
[38] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Subject (1)
[39] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_How often (3)
[40] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (6)
[41] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Engagement if studying (1)
[42] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Scale_Preference for numerical scale (3)
[43] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Scale_Often (2)
[44] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_Scale_Preference for similar wellness scale (1)
[45] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Scale _Preference for frequency of teachers (1)
[46] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Use of percentages (1)
[47] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Scale_Preference for absolute options (3)
[48] Code: Q2_Difficulties with language_This does not apply to me (1)

- Another participant expressed how there should be a middle ground option, with examples given as 'fairly', 'somewhat' or 'not very'.[49]
- Similarly, one participant wanted an option between 'fairly often' and 'not very often', but they were not sure what this should be.[50]

> 'Very often is a difficult one, because you've got rarely or never at the other end, whereas very often does not equate to rarely. It could be most of the time instead.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (6)**

4.2.2.4 Differences by participant group

Welsh interview participants (3) suggested that the translation of engaging ('ddeniadol') did not suit the context of the question.[51] They commented that the current translation normally would be used to refer to physical aesthetics, thus making it inappropriate in the context of the question and survey. One of these participants suggested using 'diddorol' instead, as it translates more directly to 'interesting'.

4.2.2.5 Recommendations

HIGH PRIORITY:

- Consider changing the Welsh translation of engaging from 'ddeniadol' to 'diddorol'.

MID PRIORITY:

- Consider using a 6-point scale with options for 'always' and 'never'.

4.2.3 Question 3: How often is the course intellectually stimulating?

4.2.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Participants considered many areas when discussing this question, including:

- The level of stretch and challenge within the course, including whether they often encountered something new.
- Whether the course was pitched at an appropriate level.
- How much the course made them think.
- Level of engagement with the course material.
- Whether the course content would have an impact on their career.
- The technicality within the course.

> 'I would say, is the course challenging you intellectually? Are you feeling as though it is at an appropriate level? Not too easy, as opposed to not too hard. I feel as though it's asking if it is at the right level in terms of easiness, is it too challenging?'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (46)**

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[49] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Middle ground option (1)
[50] Code: Q2_Difficulties answering_Option between options (1)
[51] Q2_Difficulties with language_Welsh_engaging (3)

4.2.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

The question was generally well understood. However, a couple of participants noted a challenge in being able to average out their experiences across different modules.[52]

4.2.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Most felt the scale worked well for this question. However, there were comments on changes to the specific scale points used:

- One participant explained that they felt there was a lack of distinction between the options 'not very often' and 'fairly often'.[53]
- Another participant had a problem with the option 'This does not apply to me', as they did not understand the need for this option.[54]
- One participant felt there should be more options to allow for more nuances.[55]

> 'It's a 4-point scale almost, so if that was up to 6 where there's a bit more room for nuance then that could be beneficial.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (46)**

4.2.3.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.2.3.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY

- Consider changing to a 6-point scale.

4.2.4 Question 4: How often does your course challenge you to Achieve your best work?

4.2.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants considered how lecturers challenged them, including:

- Course level – considering whether the course was pitched at the right level to be challenging but achievable.
- Course content – comparing different modules and whether the course was engaging or allowed for exploration.
- Assignments – consideration of the types of assessments used (practical, written, oral), how challenging these were, whether they were repetitive, the timeframes given, or whether they were provided with previous examples to reach higher grades.
- Lecturer involvement – consideration of method lecturers used to help them to achieve and push themselves to achieve their best. Considering whether they were left to their own devices with little guidance or whether staff were more engaged and involved.

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[52] Code: Q3_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (2)
[53] Code: Q3_Difficulties with language_Scale_Lack of distinction between options (1)
[54] Code: Q3_Difficulties with language_Scale_This does not apply to me irrelevant (1)
[55] Code: Q3_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (1)

- Personal effort – how their own personal expectations and efforts affected their experiences and level of challenge.

4.2.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

In most instances, the question was well understood. However, some students found elements of the language in the question difficult, including:

- **Course:** A few participants (4) had difficulty with this word, unsure whether this referred to staff, content assignments or also included their own personal efforts.[56] Another student specifically mentioned achieving their best work was not always all about the course, but also their own motivation to do well.[57]
- **Best work:** Some (6) felt that this was difficult to understand because it was 'vague' and 'very broad'.[58]
- **Challenge:** A few students (3) felt it was difficult to understand what constituted a course challenging them.[59] One student also found this difficult to evaluate because they felt different time periods could be more challenging than others.[60]

> 'If anything, I suppose achieve your best work could be explained in a bit more detail, like what do you mean by achieved my best work? Do you mean in terms of grades? Or in terms of how often I study?'
>
> **Arts, Part-time, Medium AP (22)**

One participant expressed finding the question generally confusing, not knowing how to interpret it.[61]

One student felt the question should be split into two, first asking about how the course challenged them, followed by a question asking how often they were encouraged to achieve their best work.[62]

One participant suggested rewording the question to: 'How much does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?'[63]

4.2.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants were asked if they had any preference between a 4- and 6-point scale for this question. A large group (11) preferred the 4-point scale because they felt it was less confusing and easier to answer when only reviewing a smaller number of options.[64]

A substantially larger group (30) preferred the 6-point scale, feeling that it gave more depth and room for nuances in their answers.[65] The inclusion of 'always' was viewed positively by many (11) students.[66]

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[56] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Course (4)
[57] Code: Q4_Difficulties answering_Personal motivation (1)
[58] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Best work (6)
[59] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Challenge (3)
[60] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Challenging at different times (1)
[61] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Interpretation of the question (1)
[62] Code: Q4_Difficulties answering_Splitting the question (1)
[63] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Scale_Better how much does your course challenge you (1)
[64] Code: Frequency Scale_Prefer 4 point (11)
[65] Code: Frequency scale_Prefer 6 point (30)
[66] Code: Frequency scale_Scale points_Including always (11)

Similarly, the splitting of 'rarely' and 'never' was considered a good option by many participants (17).[67] However, a couple of participants recognised the distinction between these words, but felt unclear about its usefulness to have these split out in the question.[68]

> 'I think this one [6-point scale] works a lot better, there are a few more options that weren't in the previous ones and I was able to give the answer always.'
>
> **Arts, Part-time, Medium AP (22)**

When considering the range of scale options given, the following additional comments were made:

- One student wanted a middle option to help them answer the question.[69]
- In a similar vein, another student requested an additional option between 'very often' and 'fairly often'.[70]
- One student felt the option 'This does not apply to me' was unlikely to be selected by anyone and so was unnecessary.[71]
- Another student explained how they struggled to differentiate between 'not very often' and 'rarely'.[72]
- Another student suggested that they would prefer a numerical response scale for this question.[73]

4.2.4.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.2.4.5 Recommendations
MID PRIORITY:

- Consider changing from a 4-point scale to a 6-point scale, including options for 'always' and 'never'.

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider clarifying what the term 'best work' means within the context of the question

4.3 Question group: Learning opportunities
- **Question 5: To what extent have you had the chance to apply theories and concepts that you have learnt?** [To a great extent / To some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 6: To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?** [To a great extent / To some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 7: As part of your course, were you required to work with other students?** [Yes/No]

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[67] Code: Frequency scale_Scale points_Splitting rarely and never (17)
[68] Code: Frequency scale_Scale points_Recognises distinction of rarely and never_Unclear on usefulness (2)
[69] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Option between options (1)
[70] Code: Q4_Difficulties answering_Different categories (1)
[71] Code: Frequency scale_Uncertainty for this does not apply (1)
[72] Code: Q4_Difficulties answering_Struggle to differentiate between 'not very often' and 'rarely' (1)
[73] Code: Q4_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer numerical scale (1)

- **Question 8: When working with other students as part of your course, how helpful was this for your learning?** [Very helpful / Fairly helpful / Not very helpful / Not at all helpful / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 9: To what extent does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you've already learnt?** [To a great extent / To some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 10: To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?** [To a very great extent / To a great extent / To a small extent / To a very small extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 11: To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas or concepts in depth?** [To a great extent / To some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]

Questions 5, 7, 8, 9 and 11 were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).
Question 6 was tested in the scale-check interviews (n=10).

4.3.1 Question 5: To what extent have you had the chance to apply theories and concepts that you have learnt?

4.3.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants were thinking of any practical elements of their courses that had allowed them to put into practice and apply what they had learnt. The types of practical elements and considerations of where they were able to apply learning differed based on the type of course taken and included application within:

- Placements – specifically for those on practical courses.
- Practical work within their course – including lab work, practical classes and workshops.
- Tutorials and seminars.
- Other modules – how well content linked between modules.
- Assessments – how well they were able to apply and demonstrate knowledge in assessments.
- Real world and career applications.

Most students were happy to apply this question to whatever context was most relevant to them and their course.

4.3.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was largely well understood. However, there were a few issues with language and where students struggled to apply this question to their course. Issues with this question tended to stem from the type of course a participant had studied.

A few students (3) felt that the phrase 'theories and concepts' was not applicable to those on more creative courses.[74] While their courses tended to have significant practical elements, the lack of theory made them feel this question was not wholly applicable to them, leading to a few issues with selecting a response and requiring them to use a broadened definition of 'theories and concepts'.

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[74] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Theories and concepts (3)

> 'This is a little bit difficult for creative subjects because "theories and concepts", I guess there are a few, but it's not really got that sort of theoretical side to it. I suppose for us it's mainly looking at artists and designers, and there's inspiration in that way, and then applying it to work that we have. So, perhaps theories and concepts isn't quite the right wording for creative subjects.'
>
> **Arts, Full-time, Medium FEC (14)**

For a few students (3), the word 'apply' caused confusion.[75] They felt it was ambiguous about the type of application being focused on. Two of these students were on humanities courses and felt that the theories they had learnt were not applicable in the same way as those from more practical or STEM courses.

> 'I think "apply" is quite ambiguous because for a humanities student, if we're learning about ancient political philosophies, does apply mean doing something with those philosophies or does it mean working and using those philosophies as an example? Maybe for science students that would be clearer for them, but for students who study broader topics, it leaves a lot to be desired.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (16)**

4.3.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Some specific comments were made about the appropriateness of the scale.

A few students made comments on the lack of distinction between the response options. A couple of these participants felt unsure what the distinction was semantically between 'to some extent' and 'a great extent', which made it difficult for them to know how to answer.[76] Another participant felt that the scale needed an extreme, absolute option of 'always', because 'a great extent' was not strong enough.[77]

A couple of students found it difficult to evaluate the 'extent' to which something happened. While they were still able to answer the question, they found this concept somewhat difficult to comprehend.[78]

> 'I always find "to what extent" questions quite confusing; not confusing, but I don't think they're the best way to ask something, but I'm not sure how I'd ask it in a better way. I think it makes sense as a question.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (3)**

In line with this, one participant felt that a frequency scale would be better suited to this question because they equated the extent to which they were able to apply concepts to how often this happened.[79]

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[75] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Apply (3)
[76] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Scale_Distinction (2)
[77] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Scale_Absolute needed (1)
[78] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Scale_Extent (2)
[79] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Scale_Frequency better (1)

Another participant commented that they would prefer a numerical response scale for this question.[80]

4.3.1.4 Differences by participant group

Most of the variation in understanding this question stemmed from the subject students were studying, as listed above.

One Welsh participant felt that the translation of the question was too wordy, although this did not impact their ability to respond to the question.[81]

4.3.1.5 Recommendations

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider rewording the phrase 'theories and concepts' to help comprehension among those on creative courses.

4.3.2 Question 6: To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?

4.3.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, students considered how well modules on their course linked together and the extent to which concepts were connected and built-on to make a cohesive course design. Some also considered the extent to which assessments required them to bring together information on different topics.

4.3.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

There were very few issues with understanding this question.

One participant felt that the word 'topic' was not overly clear and could be clarified as 'modules', if that was the intent of the question, as this is a more commonly understood term among students.[82]

One other participant noted that it was difficult to average out their experience in this question. They felt that some modules very clearly linked together, while others did not.[83]

4.3.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale

The scale was largely felt to be appropriate. However, there were various issues cited in understanding the extent scale and the number of options presented in the scale:

- One participant felt the extent scale lacked internal consistency in wording, as the term 'extent' was not present in each option (as is the case in a frequency scale where 'often' appears in each response option), which made it somewhat more difficult to interpret the scale.[84]
- Another participant would prefer this question to use a frequency scale as they equated the 'extent' with how frequently this occurred.[85]

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[80] Code Q5_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer numerical scale (1)
[81] Code: Q5_Difficulties with language_Welsh_Too wordy (1)
[82] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Topics (1)
[83] Code: Q6_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (1)
[84] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_Internal consistency (1)
[85] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer frequency scale (1)

- Some (2) felt that the scale options were too similar or were unsure what the difference between each option was, finding it difficult to equate different 'extents'.[86]

A few participants commented on the length of the scale and suggested additional points should be added:
- A midpoint – one participant felt that the jump between 'hardly at all' and 'to some extent' was too great and there needed to be a neutral midpoint between them.[87] While this did not affect their own ability to answer the question, they felt this would make the scale more complete.
- More options – one participant felt there were not enough positive options to truly reflect their experience. They needed a point in between 'some extent' and a 'great extent'.[88]
- Adding an 'always' option – one participant felt there needed to be an absolute positive option.[89] While a 'great extent' could be used in its place, this would clarify cases where this always happened.

> 'I would probably pick between the top two, so between the great extent and between some extent. But obviously there is no option for that so maybe that would be good to have. I guess someone would have to pick what's closest because I don't think there is wide enough options maybe.'
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (2)**

4.3.2.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.3.2.5 Recommendations
MID PRIORITY:

- Consider using a 6-point scale for this question, including an absolute positive option.

4.3.3 Question 7: As part of your course, were you required to work with other students?

4.3.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered
This question was largely well understood, with students considering whether at any point on their course they were required to work with other students. This included:

- Group projects, whether assessed or not.
- Class discussions.
- Collaborating with students outside of lectures and seminars.

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[86] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_Distinction between options (2)
[87] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_Needs a midpoint (1)
[88] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (1)
[89] Code: Q6_Difficulties with language_Scale_Always (1)

4.3.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A few participants (3) were slightly unclear on what group work this referred to: only assessed group work or also more informal and unassessed interactions with other students.[90]

One participant found the term 'required' ambiguous in this question.[91] They were unsure whether this meant they were required to work with others as part of the course design (e.g. in group assessments), or whether this referred to the course being challenging and so requiring them to collaborate with other students outside of class to progress.

One participant was uncertain who 'other students' referred to – whether this meant other students on their course or any of their peers more broadly.[92]

One participant was unclear if they should be considering their whole degree when answering this question or only their most recent modules.[93]

4.3.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

The majority of students felt the simple yes/no response options worked well for this question. However, a few (4) felt that a frequency scale would capture more information.[94]

> 'Maybe a timeframe on this would be good, you could put like yes, or quite often. So, the same scale that you've used before, because just putting yes or no, you're still not quite sure how often we work with other students. Yes, could be all the time, or it could have been once, for five minutes. So, maybe just breakdown just to show how often that you would have been doing that.'
>
> **Arts, Full-time, Medium FEC (14)**

One participant felt that it would be useful to add an option to the scale saying 'this does not apply to me'.[95]

4.3.3.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.3.3.5 Recommendations

- No recommended changes to this question.

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[90] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_Group work (3)
[91] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_Required (1)
[92] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_Other students (1)
[93] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_When (1)
[94] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_Scale_Frequency better (4)
[95] Code: Q7_Difficulties with language_Scale_Add this does not apply to me option (1)

4.3.4 Question 8: When working with other students as part of your course, how helpful was this for your learning?

4.3.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

For this question, participants thought about how useful they found working with other students in terms of what they gained from these experiences. This included:

- Transferrable skills – including teamwork, interpersonal skills and other social benefits.
- Academic development – how well this improved their learning in terms of the impact on their grades, as well as how working with others helped them to understand course content and consolidate learning through the different perspectives of other students.

They were assessing the usefulness of these interactions regarding how positive or negative this outcome was in relation to the above points.

Where negative responses were given, this was typically because group work was not seen as helpful because of a reliance on other students for their assessment grade, or difficulties with students having different work ethics that could negatively impact their learning.

A few participants also commented on the impact of coronavirus, which made group work more difficult and so less helpful for their learning.

4.3.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was widely understood by participants. The only issue raised by one participant was that the question was too lengthy.[96] While they were still able to answer the question, they felt it could be made more concise.

4.3.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

The 'wellness' scale was felt to be appropriate for this question and no participants had any issues with or comments on this.

4.3.4.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.3.4.5 Recommendations

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider rephrasing the question to make it more concise – for example, it could be reworded to 'How helpful did you find working with other students on your course?'

4.3.5 Question 9: To what extent does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you've already learnt?

4.3.5.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Participants mainly thought about how their course had progressed from module to module and from year to year when answering this question. They were considering the module structure and the

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[96] Code: Q8_Difficulties answering_Quesion is too long (1)

extent to which there was a logical ordering to these, with continuity between modules where appropriate.

Some participants also thought about how the course had built on skills and knowledge that they had prior to starting their course.

4.3.5.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

One of the main issues cited with this question was it being too lengthy, requiring some students (7) to re-read it a few times to understand what it was asking of them.[97]

> 'To be honest I had to re-read it to myself a couple of times, it kind of felt like an essay question but I understood it after re-reading it a couple of times.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (8)**

Some (4) found the phrase 'already learnt' confusing as they were unclear whether this referred to learning prior to their degree, from across other modules, or within each module.[98]

> 'What does that mean, what I've already learnt, does that mean what I've learnt in my life skills or does that mean what I learnt from a previous degree? What does that actually mean?'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Medium HEI (28)**

Two students, both on Arts courses, found the terminology 'builds on' difficult to understand.[99] While they felt they had learnt and developed through this course, this phrase didn't make complete sense to them.

4.3.5.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants were directly asked if they felt this question would work better if it asked how well their course introduced subjects and skills, as opposed to the extent to which this happened. A large number (22) of students felt they would prefer a 'wellness' scale for this question, feeling this would be easier to understand, as would a simpler phrase than 'to what extent'.[100]

4.3.5.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.3.5.5 Recommendations
HIGH PRIORITY:

- Consider changing the question to ask 'how well' this had been done, as opposed to 'to what extent'.

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[97] Code: Q9_Difficulties answering_Sentence structure (7)
[98] Code: Q9_Difficulties with language_Already learnt
[99] Code: Q9_Difficulties with language_Building on (2)
[100] Code: Q9_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer wellness scale (22)

4.3.6 Question 10: To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?

4.3.6.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

The phrase 'independent study' was well understood in this question, with participants considering the following:

- Non-contact hours – any work they did outside of timetabled lectures, seminars or classroom settings.
- Resources – use of additional resources, whether self-sourced or provided by tutors, that they accessed outside of contact time, to build on learning.
- Assessments – time they spent working independently on their assessments.
- Going beyond course content – time spent on additional reading or research that they did independently, which went beyond the core course content.

The term 'directed study' was less well understood, but in the context of being contrasted against 'independent study', most assumed this to refer to teaching time, contact hours, lectures/seminars or any time when they had received direct guidance from staff.

When reading the phrase 'the right balance', most participants were comparing the amount of directed and independent study they had on their course and were assessing whether they were happy with the amount of both on their course, as opposed to whether there was an equal balance.

4.3.6.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

The most common issue with this question was with the phrase 'directed study'. Several participants (6) cited issues with understanding what this referred to.[101] In general, participants were able to come to an interpretation of the word because it contrasted with 'independent study' within the question, but they found the phrase on its own confusing, as it was not a term they commonly heard.

> 'When I read this question earlier, I was like what is directed and independent study? I can imagine, but for me it's not clear. I think directed means maybe in the classroom, and independent means self-study, but I would rephrase the question, especially with non-English first language speaking.'
> **Humanities, Full-time, Small FEC (45)**

Similarly, some participants (4) felt that the term 'independent study' could be clarified so that it was clear what was defined as independent or directed.[102]

A few participants (3) found it difficult to assess what the right balance should be that they were evaluating this against.[103] One of these participants explained that they only had experience of the one course and so had no benchmark to compare against.

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[101] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Directed (6)
[102] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Independent (4)
[103] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Balance (3)

4.3.6.3 Appropriateness of response scale

In this question, participants were presented with a 6-point version of the 'extent' scale. When asked their preference between a 6- and 4-point version of this scale, opinions were split:

- A large group (13) preferred a 6-point scale, stating that they liked the scope it allowed for nuances in their answers and allowed them to truly reflect their experience.[104]
- However, a slightly larger number (19) preferred a 4-point scale, finding this easier and quicker to understand, given that options were felt to overlap with each other in a 6-point version.[105]
- A few participants (3) felt that the extent scale was difficult to understand, especially for those for whom English was not their first language.[106]
- A couple of participants commented that they would like the scale to have a midpoint.[107]

Some participants felt that this question should not be asking about the balance of independent and directed study:

- One participant felt that the question should instead be asking what proportion of time was spent on independent and directed study.[108]
- Another felt the question should allow students to indicate in which way the balance was skewed.[109]

4.3.6.4 Differences by participant group

A couple of the Welsh participants felt that some of the scale options were not sufficiently distinct based on the current translation.[110] Particularly, they felt that the top two options meant very similar things based on the current translation. While neither suggested alternative options, both felt that the first option could be changed.

One participant on a creative course misinterpreted the term 'directed study' as meaning 'director-led' and viewed this in terms of an industry in which creatives are led by a director.[111]

4.3.6.5 Recommendations
MID PRIORITY:

- Consider replacing the phrase 'directed study' with a term such as 'staff-led' to clear up ambiguity regarding what this refers to.
- Consider changing the Welsh translation of the first option on the scale to make it more distinct from the following option.

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[104] Code: Extent scale_Prefer 6 point (13)
[105] Code: Extent scale_Prefer 4 point (19)
[106] Code: Q10_ Extent scale_Scale points_Extent (3)
[107] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Scale_Would like midpoint (2)
[108] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Scale_Proportions (1)
[109] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Direction of balance (1)
[110] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Scale_Welsh translation lacks distinction between options (2)
[111] Code: Q10_Difficulties with language_Director (1)

4.3.7 Question 11: To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas or concepts in depth?

4.3.7.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants were considering the range of learning opportunities in which they were able to explore ideas or concepts. These included:

- Direct teaching/lectures/seminars
- Independent work
- Group work
- Placements/real world experiences
- Additional reading and research
- Assessments.

In assessing the extent to which they were able to explore ideas or concepts in depth, they were considering factors such as:

- Depth – how in-depth topics were covered within teaching.
- Course structure – whether modules linked with each other or revisited content, or the extent to which they were able to tailor their module choices in order to explore specific areas in more depth.
- The pace of learning – whether this allowed for revisiting content or deeper exploration.
- Development of learning.
- Provision of additional resources – for example, additional reading.
- Personal interest – the extent to which they were engaged by the topic and were motivated to carry out additional independent work.
- Teaching techniques – how passionate lecturers were and the range of teaching methods used to explore concepts further.

4.3.7.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

For some participants (9), the phrase 'ideas and concepts' was felt to be very broad and they were unsure what exactly this referred to.[112] In line with this, some (9) specifically cited being unclear whether this was focused on in-class opportunities, independent learning or something else entirely.[113] Most made an assumption based on what most applied to their own experiences and were ultimately still able to answer the question, but were unsure whether this aligned with the intention of the question.

A few participants (4) found the term 'in-depth' unclear and difficult to assess, with one participant stating that this was also subjective to each student.[114]

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[112] Code: Q11_Difficulties with language_Ideas and concepts (9)
[113] Code: Q11_Difficulties answering_When (9)
[114] Code: Q11_Difficulties with language_In depth (4)

> 'I'm wondering, is the question asking me specifically, have we discussed topics on the curriculum, or had we just had the opportunity to talk to lecturers about things? The question is very vague. The words "ideas or concepts" are very vague.'
>
> **Arts, Part-time, Medium AP (22)**

4.3.7.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Most felt that the extent scale worked well for this question, but there were a few participants who felt that changes could be made. These changes included:

- **Using a frequency scale:** Two participants felt it would be more appropriate to ask how often they were given the opportunity to explore ideas and concepts in depth.[115]
- **Using a 'wellness' scale:** One participant felt it may be better to ask how well the course encouraged in-depth exploration of ideas and concepts.[116] It was felt this would help to overcome the issue in knowing whether the question should focus on the course itself or a student's own independent efforts.
- **Adding a midpoint**: One participant suggested that the scale could have a midpoint.[117]

4.3.7.4 Differences by participant group

Specific issues were cited by a few students (3) on creative courses regarding understanding and applying the question to their experiences.[118] The issue here was specifically with the term 'ideas and concepts' as they did not learn theories in the same way as other subject disciplines or 'explore' these as such. One of these students suggested that, to make this more applicable to those on creative or practical courses, it may help to change the wording to ask whether they were able to put these theories into practice, as opposed to exploring them.[119]

There did not appear to be any other strong differences across participant groups.

4.3.7.5 Recommendations

LOW PRIORITY:

- No recommended changes.

4.3.8   Learning opportunities question group

4.3.8.1 Overall findings

While this section has a larger number of questions than other question groups in the survey, most participants felt the questions worked well together.

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[115] Code: Q11_Diificulties with language_Scale_Prefer frequency (2)
[116] Code: Q11_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer a wellness scale (1)
[117] Code: Q11_Difficulties with language_Scale_Want a midpoint (1)
[118] Code: Q11_Difficulties answering_'Ideas and concepts' in creative courses (3)
[119] Code: Q11_Difficulties with language_Explore (1)

However, some (9) felt questions 7 and 8 (about working with other students) did not fit as well within this question bank.[120] They felt that questions 7 and 8 were asking about the process of learning while the others in the bank were more focused on the application of learning.

A couple of students also felt the ordering of questions in this section could be changed, to group together those related to learning (questions 5, 9 and 11) and those related to applying this learning (questions 6, 7, 8 and 10).[121]

4.3.8.2 Overlap in question group

Some participants felt that questions in this group overlapped with each other, specifically questions 5 and 6 (3)[122] and question 11 (1),[123] which were all felt to be asking about bringing together learning and applying it in different contexts.

One participant also felt that questions 7 and 8 could be merged into one question, with an option to say that they were not required to work with other students.[124]

4.3.8.3 Missing areas

A few participants (3) felt that this question group could focus more specifically on the opportunities to apply learning as part of their course, considering the wide range of opportunities that courses can offer.[125]

There were some specific issues here based on the type of course students were studying.

- A few students on creative courses (3) felt that questions in their current form did not allow for them to fully reflect the learning opportunities, as there was too much emphasis on theories.[126] They felt this section could better encompass the variety of different learning opportunities on offer.
- One student on a STEM course also felt that there could be specific mention of or a question related to lab work.[127]

A few participants also gave suggestions for additional questions for this group:

- Frequency of learning opportunities on offer (1).[128]
- Variety of modules available (1).[129]
- Opportunities for work experience/placements (2).[130]
- Support from staff (1).[131]

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[120] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Qs don't fit_7&8 (9)
[121] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Ordering_Question order_general (2)
[122] Code: QG_Learning Opportunities_Overlap_Q5&6 (3)
[123] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Overlap_5,6&11 (1)
[124] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Overlap_7&8 (1)
[125] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Application (3)
[126] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Creative subjects (3)
[127] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_STEM (1)
[128] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Frequency (1)
[129] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Module choices (1)
[130] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Placement (1)
[131] Code: QG Learning opportunities_Areas missing_Staff (1)

- Consider changing the order of questions in this section, first asking about the process of learning (questions 5, 9 and 11), followed by those questions focused more on the application of learning (questions 6, 7, 8 and 10).
- Consider moving questions 7 and 8 to elsewhere in the survey, or to the start or end of this question bank, so the flow of other questions in the group is not disrupted.

4.4 Question group: Assessment and feedback

- **Question 12: How often have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learnt?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 13: How often were you given marking criteria in advance?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 14: How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?** [Very clear / Fairly clear / Not very clear / Not at all clear / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 15: How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?** [Very fair / Somewhat fair / Not very fair / Not at all fair / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 16: How timely was your feedback?** [Very timely / Fairly timely / Not very timely / Not at all timely / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 17: How often has feedback helped you improve your learning?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]

Questions 12, 13, 14, 16 and 17 were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

Question 15 was tested in the scale-check interviews (n=10).

4.4.1   Question 12: How often have your assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learnt?

4.4.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, participants were considering the appropriateness of the assessments on their course. This included the extent to which assessments reflected core course content and accumulated what they had learnt from across lectures, seminars and independent study. Therefore, some gave negative responses if the assessments were felt to stray too far from this core content or did not allow them to demonstrate the range of what they had learnt.

> 'To me, this goes back to assignments and drawing in information from lectures, seminars and independent study into them. I would say fairly often as a response. There were some modules that I studied that had information I didn't need necessarily, so it was like, why am I learning this when I didn't need it for my assignments?'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (15)**

Students were also considering whether the assessment types used were appropriate. This included the variety of assessment methods used. Students were evaluating the extent to which assessments helped them to consolidate their learning and demonstrate a deep understanding, or whether they were simply an exercise in relaying information.

Some were thinking in particular about how well assessments challenged them or allowed them to go in-depth into a topic.

A few were also considering the feedback they received after assessments and the extent to which this had helped their learning

4.4.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

While most were happy with this question, some (6) felt that the term 'assessment' did not apply to their course.[132] The use of 'assessments' limited these people to thinking only about exams. As these students did not have formal exams on their course, they were unsure whether they should also be applying this question to other assignments or projects that they were assessed on.

- One participant cited difficulty in averaging out their experiences across assessments.[133] They felt they would have different responses for different types or formats of assessment (e.g. practical assessments, written assignments).

- A few participants (3) were unclear on the purpose of this question.[134] They felt that assessments, by their nature, were designed to assess what had been learnt and so the question felt redundant to them.

> 'I understand the question, but that is the idea of an assessment, so for me it's [...] a question that is not necessary.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Small FEC (45)**

4.4.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

There were several suggestions regarding this response scale:

- A couple of participants felt that the scale needed an 'always' option to allow them to fully reflect their experience and show that this had always been the case on their course.[135]
- Similarly, two felt that 'rarely' and 'never' should be separated out to make it clear which response actually had been given, with 'rarely' and 'never' being seen as two very different responses.[136]
- One participant felt that the response of 'this does not apply to me' should not be listed as it was unlikely that anyone would have no assessments.[137]

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[132] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Assessment (6)
[133] Code: Q12_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experience (1)
[134] Code: Q12_Difficulties answering_Concept of Q (3)
[135] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Scale_always (2)
[136] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Scale_never (2)
[137] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Scale_This does not apply to me irrelevant (1)

- One participant felt that, instead of using a frequency scale for this question, it could be rephrased to ask how well assessments allowed them to demonstrate their learning, as this may wield more useable data.[138]

4.4.1.4 Differences by participant group

Some arts or humanities students (6) mentioned difficulties with the term 'assessment', as detailed above.[139] Those on arts courses cited that they did not have end of year assessments or exams like other subjects, but instead were continually assessed on their skills. Those from humanities courses similarly struggled to apply this question to their course, stating that they were more likely to have large projects or assignments as opposed to assessments.

One Welsh interview participant felt that the translation was too wordy, although this did not impact their ability to respond to the question.[140]

4.4.1.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY:

- Consider using a 6-point scale in which there is an option for 'always', and 'rarely' and 'never' are split out.

LOW PRIORITY

- Consider adding a clarification line or brackets to explain what is being referred to by the term 'assessments' to help this apply to those on courses without formal exams.
- Consider changing from a frequency scale to asking about how 'well' assessments allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt.

4.4.2 Question 13: How often were you given marking criteria in advance?

4.4.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Most understood marking criteria in this question to refer to any guidance or documents they were given ahead of an assessment to explain what was expected from them, for example, mark schemes and grade groupings. When deciding on an answer, they were considering the consistency and timeliness of this information, across modules.

Some participants also considered instances where staff would go through these documents with them towards the start of a module.

A small number of participants interpreted 'marking criteria' differently, thinking that it referred to the explanations and feedback they received after an assignment, which justified why they had received a specific grade.

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[138] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Scale_prefer wellness scale (1)
[139] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Assessment (6)
[140] Code: Q12_Difficulties with language_Welsh translation too wordy (1)

4.4.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was largely well understood. However, some students (4) were unclear what was meant by 'marking criteria' in this question.[141] They were unsure how or if the term related to different forms of assessment; for example, whether this would include example essays or if this strictly referred to a set of marking criteria for exams.

A couple of participants felt that the word 'advance' was ambiguous and open to interpretation regarding how far in advance this was given.[142]

4.4.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale

The most common suggestion made by a large number of participants (9) was for the addition of an 'always' option, with 'very often' not giving participants the freedom to be able to truly reflect their experience.[143]

> 'I'd say very often, however, if I could change the question I'd say always because I always have. I've never not been given a marking criteria so I don't like the fact that there is not an 'always' for that question.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (16)**

One other participant felt that there could be more options within the scale, to allow better reflection of students' experiences across modules.[144]

4.4.2.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.4.2.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY:

- Consider changing to a 6-point scale with an option for 'always'.

4.4.3 Question 14: How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?

4.4.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, students were considering the clarity of marking criteria and how well they had understood this ahead of assessments. Some were also considering the clarity of staff communication and explanations of the criteria or how well they had responded to students' questions on this.

In evaluating this, students were considering the extent to which their understanding of the marking criteria lined up with their feedback and grades received on assessed work.

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[141] Code: Q13_Difficulties with language_Marking criteria (4)
[142] Code: Q13_Difficulties with language_Advance (2)
[143] Code: Q13_Difficulties with language_Scale_Always (9)
[144] Code: Q13_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (1)

4.4.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was largely well understood. However, as with question 13, a few (4) found the term 'marking criteria' confusing and were not certain what this referred to.[145]

4.4.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

The response scale was felt to be appropriate and to work well for the question, with no additional comments or difficulties cited by participants.

4.4.3.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.4.3.5 Recommendations
- No recommended changes.

4.4.4 Question 15: How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?

4.4.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When considering the 'fairness' of marking, students were evaluating this in terms of the perceived consistency across tutors/markers in their use of mark schemes. They were considering the extent to which marking was carried out objectively and accurately against the mark schemes or whether they felt that tutors were unfairly subjective.

Some were also considering whether there were clear efforts to avoid discrimination or bias in marking.

Some were also evaluating this fairness by comparing their grades to those of other students and the extent to which they could see the justification for the different grades given.

4.4.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

There were only a small number of difficulties with answering this question, with most students being clear on the intent and wording:

- One participant struggled to average out their experience when answering this question, with their experiences across different forms of assessment being highly varied.[146] They explained that, in particular, marking of presentations could be much more subjective than marking of written work. Consequently, they found it difficult to choose an answer.
- One participant disliked the word 'fair' in this question, because its meaning can be subjective and emotionally dependent.[147]

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[145] Code: Q14_Difficulties with language_Marking criteria (4)
[146] Code: Q15_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experience (1)
[147] Code: Q15_Difficulties answering_Fair (1)

> 'I don't know how I'd measure how fair something was because obviously if your friend has done very well and you haven't, and you flick through their essay to see what they have done differently to you, I don't know if your interpretation of why the marker has chosen specific grades will necessarily be as accurate. I think it will [be] clouded by not necessarily a personal agenda, but there will be some emotion involved.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (16)**

One participant, who was evaluating fairness by considering how consistent marking was across students, found this question difficult to answer as they were unaware of how other students had been marked.[148]

4.4.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants were asked whether they felt a frequency scale may be better suited to this question, asking how often marking and assessment had been fair on their course. Of the 10 interviewees, half (5) did feel that a frequency scale could work better and make it easier to average out their experiences.[149]

> 'I think maybe that's better in a way, I think the word fair might throw some people off because it might think, it's hard to average over all the different types, so it might be easier in someone's head to think of it as often or not often, you know what I mean?'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (47)**

Two participants also commented on the length of the response scale, feeling that there needed to be more options added to allow them to reflect the nuances of their experiences.[150]

4.4.4.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.4.4.5 Recommendations
HIGH PRIORITY:

- Consider changing to use of a frequency scale.

4.4.5 Question 16: How timely was your feedback?

4.4.5.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Participants were considering how quickly they had received feedback on their work, assessing the length of time between submission and feedback. However, there was variation in how students were assessing this timeliness, with students evaluating this in one of two ways:

- Based on personal expectations of what constituted 'timely'.

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[148] Code: Q15_Difficulties answering_Unaware of others grading (1)
[149] Code: Q15_Scale_Prefer frequency scale (5)
[150] Code: Q15_Difficulties with language_Scale_more options (2)

- Whether this was in line with the pre-defined timings on the course.

Two students misunderstood this question and thought it was asking about students giving feedback on their course, and whether this was asked for in a timely manner.

4.4.5.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

The reasons for difficulty included the following:

- One student found the word 'feedback' unclear, initially assuming this to mean the feedback students gave on their course, as opposed to feedback they received on their work.[151] Therefore, they suggested changing the wording to 'assessment feedback' for clarity.
- Some students (8) cited the word 'timely' as being difficult to understand.[152] They felt it was subjective, open to people's own interpretations of what was acceptable or not and so may not give useful information in the answers collected in the survey. Timely was also a term that some were less familiar with and so they felt that simpler wording could be used in this question for clarity, for example, asking if they received feedback 'on time' or if any feedback was delivered late.
- A few students (3) were unclear what feedback was being referred to in this question – whether this meant ongoing, formative feedback, or summative feedback received on formal assessments.[153] If the latter was the intended focus, they felt this could be clarified by stating 'assessment feedback' in the question.
- Two participants found this question difficult to answer as it required them to average out their experience across modules and assessments, in which they might have had very varied experiences in regard to the timeliness of feedback.[154]
- One student in particular found this difficult to answer as, during the coronavirus restrictions, the timeliness of feedback had been impacted, yet they felt it was unfair to mark down their institution for this.[155]

4.4.5.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Most students felt this scale was appropriate, but there were some suggested changes:

- Two participants commented that the scale could benefit from having more options, including one between 'very timely' and 'fairly timely' and between 'fairly timely' and 'not very timely'.[156]
- Conversely, one participant felt that the question was somewhat overcomplicated and did not need so many options, believing it to be unlikely anyone would ever select 'not at all timely'.[157]
- One participant commented on the type of scale used in this question and felt it could be better to ask in terms of frequency of feedback being delivered on time.[158]

4.4.5.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

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[151] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Feedback (1)
[152] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Timely (8)
[153] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Types of feedback (3)
[154] Code: Q16_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (2)
[155] Code: Q16_Difficulties answering_COVID (1)
[156] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Scale_more options (2)
[157] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Scale_fewer options (1)
[158] Code: Q16_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer frequency scale (1)

MID PRIORITY:

- Consider rewording the question to 'How often was your feedback delivered on time?' to avoid the ambiguity and subjectivity associated with the word 'timely'.

LOW PRIORITY

- Consider clarifying the wording by stating 'assessment feedback' in the question.

4.4.6 Question 17: How often has feedback helped you improve your learning?

4.4.6.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When answering this question, students were considering the amount and depth of feedback they had received. When evaluating whether this had helped to improve their learning, participants were considering whether they had received constructive feedback and the extent to which this had helped them to identify areas for improvement from one assessment to the next. Some were also specifically considering how clearly communicated their feedback was and how easy it was to understand.

4.4.6.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some participants (7) were unclear on the phrase 'improve my learning' in this question.[159] To them, the phrase implied the process of learning, whereas they felt the feedback they received was actually directed at improving their assignments, or other outputs they produced that demonstrated their learning.

> 'I don't know what improving my learning means. I'd interpret that question as improving the methods that I use to understand content. If I was to answer it like that I'd say rarely or never. However, if that question was asking how often has the feedback helped me to improve my grades I'd say very often. To me, lots of feedback is, if you would have spaced this differently to include the design, if you would've included a first name when giving this source, if you would have done your bibliography differently. So, it's not necessarily the content I'm learning, it's the work I'm producing.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (16)**

One participant commented that the word 'feedback' in the question made them only think of assignment feedback in the first instance, and not immediately think of oral, in-class feedback. They felt this could be clarified in the question.[160]

Two participants found it difficult to answer this question as they felt it was double-barrelled, asking about both frequency and quality of feedback.[161] They felt it may benefit from being split into two questions.

Some students (6) commented that their response to this question relied on whether they had personally chosen to take on board and use the feedback they had received, rather than objectively

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[159] Code: Q17_Difficulties with language_Improve your learning (7)
[160] Code: Q17_Difficulties with language_Types of feedback (1)
[161] Code: Q17_Difficulties with language_Double barrel (2)

assessing the quality of it.[162] These students sometimes gave negative responses of 'not very often' as they had personally not looked at or used the feedback, even though it may have been technically 'good' feedback.

4.4.6.3 Appropriateness of response scale

A few students (3) felt that this question would work better if it asked directly about the quality or usefulness of feedback, as opposed to the frequency of this.[163]

> 'I think the range may be a bit [...] how valuable is the feedback? How did it help you? Rather than how often the feedback helped you, that is a different take on it.' **[Would you change the scale then?]** 'Yes, more if it really helped, or if it was really valuable.'
>
> **Arts, Full-time, Small AP (23)**

4.4.6.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.4.6.5 Recommendations
MID PRIORITY:

- Consider changing the question to directly ask about the usefulness of feedback as opposed to the frequency of this.
- Consider changing the wording from 'improve your learning' to 'improve your work'.

4.4.7 Assessment and feedback question group

4.4.7.1 Overall findings

Participants were generally happy with this question group and felt that the questions were relevant and valuable.

Most also felt that the ordering worked well in this section. However, there were some suggestions to alter the ordering to improve flow. For this question group, there was a specific prompt during the interviews to check what participants thought about the order of the questions in the group.

- Some suggested that the section should first look at assessments and then move onto feedback, as this would be consistent with the chronology of the course. This included suggestions of asking questions 16 and 17 first (2),[164] swapping the order of 16 and 17 (1),[165] and moving question 14 to the end of the section (1).[166]
- One participant suggested swapping the order of questions 12 and 13, to ask about marking criteria first in the group, as that was what they received first in relation to assessments and feedback.[167]

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[162] Code: Q17_Difficulties answering_Personal use_ (6)
[163] Code: Q17_Difficulties with language_Scale_Usefulness (3)
[164] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Ordering_Q16&17 first (2)
[165] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Ordering_swap Q16&17 (1)
[166] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Ordering_Q14 last (1)
[167] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Swap Q12&13 (1)

4.4.7.2 Overlap in question group

There were no comments from participants regarding any questions overlapping with each other. Each question was felt to be distinct and worth inclusion.

4.4.7.3 Missing areas

Most felt that this question group worked well and covered all relevant areas of assessment and feedback.

There were only a few suggestions for additional questions. These included:

- Different types of assessment (2) – a question to ask about the range of assessments used and how engaging they were seen to be.[168]
- Grading explanation (1) – a question to ascertain how clearly mark schemes or grading criteria were explained to students.[169]
- Quality of feedback (1) – a specific question on the quality of feedback received.[170]
- Re-marking process (1) – a question exploring how fair marking was and the process of getting work re-marked.[171]

4.4.7.4 Recommendations

No recommended changes

4.5 Question group: Academic support

- **Question 18: How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?** [Very easy / Fairly easy / Not very easy / Not at all easy / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 19: How well have teaching staff supported your learning?** [Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 20: How often were you able to get good advice about study choices?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]

All questions in this group were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

4.5.1   Question 18: How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?

4.5.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

The majority of participants considered the different methods through which they could contact staff, such as emails, office hours, Microsoft Teams and phone calls. They were thinking about both the availability and ease of contact methods.

While most participants were considering contact with teaching staff, some also considered other support staff like study skills coordinators or support officers for students with learning disabilities.

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[168] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Areas missing_Different types of assessments (2)
[169] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Areas missing_Explaining grading (1)
[170] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Areas missing_Quality of feedback (1)
[171] Code: QG Assessment and feedback_Areas missing_Remarking (1)

In addition to the modes through which students could contact staff, several participants were also considering how responsive staff were. They were taking into account whether they could expect to get a response from staff and the timeliness of the response as well.

Participants also acknowledged that their experiences of contacting staff were likely to have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. They noted that the methods through which they could contact staff, the availability of staff and their responsiveness had all changed as a result of the pandemic. Some felt that the pandemic had made contact more difficult as it meant that students no longer had the option of going to staff offices. Others felt that it had made contact easier since it had increased online contact through platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom.

4.5.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A few participants (3) struggled to average their experience while responding to this question.[172] They struggled to average their experience across different members of staff, as some could be easier to contact than others. Participants also struggled to average their experiences of contacting staff before and after the pandemic.

A small number of participants (3) felt that the use of the word 'contact' within the question was unclear.[173] They were unsure what type of contact to consider when responding to the question. Reflecting the approaches to answering the question mentioned above, these participants also mentioned that there was a difference between ease of contacting staff and staff responsiveness, but they were unsure which of these they should consider. Subsequently, one participant suggested that this question would work better if it was split into two different questions, one asking about ease of contact and another asking about staff responsiveness.[174]

> 'For me, that is quite an ambiguous one, I could literally send them an email, but does that constitute as contacting if they take a few days to reply or set up a meeting? It is a bit ambiguous as to what contact actually means.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (6)**

There were some further issues with the clarity of the question, which were raised by one participant each:

- The use of 'easy' was felt to be confusing in the context of the question.[175] This student felt that ease of contact depended on a student's personality, with some being confident in approaching staff and others being more tentative. Hence, they felt it was subjective because what each student considered easy would be different.
- Another participant felt that the question was too ambiguous in relation to what type of support it was referencing.[176] They felt the question could be more specific regarding whether it was asking about support with course content, time management, stress, etc.

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[172] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _Challenge averaging experience (3)
[173] Code: Q18_Difficulties with language_Contact (3)
[174] Code: Q18_Difficulties with language_Splitting question (1)
[175] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _What 'easy' represents (1)
[176] Code: Q18_Difficulties with language_What support it relates to (1)

- One participant was unclear about who the word 'staff' referred to in this context.[177] They were unsure whether the question was asking about their lecturers, student services or both.

4.5.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants generally thought the response scale for this question was appropriate and easy to use.

There were a few isolated issues with the scale:

- One participant suggested that the option 'fairly easy' could be changed to 'easy'.[178]
- One participant felt that the scale could have more options, with a midpoint being particularly useful.[179] They felt the inclusion of a midpoint would enable them to work around the issue of averaging their experience across different staff members.
- Alternately, another participant felt that changing the question and scale to ask about frequency of contact instead of ease could also help to combat issues with averaging experiences.[180]
- Finally, one participant felt that a numerical scale would suit the question better.[181]

4.5.1.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.5.1.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes

4.5.2 Question 19: How well have teaching staff supported your learning?

4.5.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When responding to this question, participants were broadly considering how supportive, helpful or encouraging staff were. A range of experiences were considered within this, including:

- How staff respond to questions.
- How staff explain course content.
- Whether staff ensure that students understand course content.
- If there was open dialogue between students and staff.
- The feedback provided.
- Support for students with learning difficulties.
- How they help students cope with stress or provide other forms of emotional or mental wellbeing support.

4.5.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some participants (6) felt that the word 'supported' was too vague, leading to confusion about what exactly they should consider while answering the question.[182] They were unsure what counted as support and felt that it would be better to specify this within the question.

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[177] Code: Q18_Difficulties with language_Separating 'staff' (1)
[178] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _Different options suggested_Easy (1)
[179] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _Different options suggested_Add midpoint (1)
[180] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _Could be 'how often' (1)
[181] Code: Q18_Difficulties answering _1-5 scale may be better (1)
[182] Code: Q19_Difficulties with language_Support (6)

> 'I wouldn't say it was as confident an answer as before because I'm not 100 per cent sure on what specific instances I would need to reflect on [...] I think supported could just be a quick sentence at the end of a lecture saying "Look if you need any help, drop a message on this forum" or "Drop me an email" or something. But it could also be a specific one-to-one meeting.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (21)**

A few participants (3) had similar opinions about the use of 'learning' in this context.[183] They felt the word was quite broad and could cause confusion about what the scope of the question included. To them, 'learning' could mean anything from how they remember content, the learning styles they use or how well they perform in assessments. Therefore, they felt the areas to consider could be more clearly defined in the question.

4.5.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale
Participants generally thought the response scale for this question was appropriate and easy to use.

There were a few issues with the scale:

- A couple of participants felt that the scale should include a midpoint.[184] They suggested that the inclusion of a midpoint would be useful for participants who had different experiences with different staff members or students who had personally not required support, but knew that other students on their course had received support when needed.
- One participant suggested that the question and scale would function better as a frequency question, once again to take into account the varying experiences students can have with different members of staff.[185]

4.5.2.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.5.2.5 Recommendations
LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider reframing the question to ask about how helpful staff were, rather than how supportive, to avoid ambiguity about what to consider while answering the question. Note however that this was only recommended by one student.

4.5.3 Question 20: How often were you able to get good advice about study choices?

4.5.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered
This question was interpreted in a few different ways across participants. These included:

- **Prior to their course:** Some felt that the question was asking about advice they had received around course selection before starting university, through events like open days.

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[183] Code: Q19_Difficulties with language_Learning (3)
[184] Code: Q19_Difficulties with language_Scale_Add midpoint (2)
[185] Code: Q19_Scale _Frequency (1)

- **Beginning of their course:** Several participants considered advice available about what modules to choose and if they had been given support in selecting modules that interested them and worked coherently together.
- **During their course:** Many participants felt that the question referred to any advice they had received across their course. This included advice about extra reading material, study skills, time management and essay guidance.
- **Post-course:** Finally, a small number of participants were thinking about advice they had received regarding what they could do on completion of their course. They were considering advice about either career opportunities tied to their degree or pathways for future study.

4.5.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A large number of participants (29) struggled to understand what the phrase 'study choices' meant.[186] Some of them mentioned that 'study choices' could mean any of the things described above, which could be confusing given the breadth of areas comprising the student experience. Others were so unfamiliar with the phrase that they could not come to an interpretation, even on further prompting. If the aim of the question was to ask about advice relating to elective modules, it was suggested that 'module choices' would be more familiar to students and lead to less confusion.

> 'I have no idea what that means. I understand what how often means, I know what good advice means, but study choices doesn't make any sense to me. I guess maybe the study choices means the modules, you study on the modules. It could even mean studying abroad, the choice of where you study. I don't think that that has been written particularly well.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (16)**

Some participants (4) struggled to understand how to answer the question as they were not given choices within their course, for example, in terms of module selection or any issues encountered.[187] While this was closely tied to not fully understanding what 'study choices' meant, these participants specifically mentioned that their confusion may have stemmed from them not being given choices, which they felt they needed to make on their course.

> 'I don't know what study choices I've had throughout, it's kind of like this is your course content, here are your essays, do them, if you don't then you won't get a degree. I don't really know what choices I've had. I wouldn't know what to put for that at all.'
>
> **Creative, Full-time, Small AP (39)**

Others (2) experienced difficulties responding to the question, because they had not tried to get advice from staff.[188] While the option 'this does not apply to me' was available, they still struggled to respond to the question, because they knew that the opportunities to obtain advice were present, they simply had not accessed them.

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[186] Code: Q20_Difficulties with language_Study choice (29)
[187] Code: Q20_Difficulties answering_Didn't need any (4)
[188] Code: Q20_Difficulties answering_Opportunity/use (2)

One participant commented that they struggled averaging their experience while responding to this question.[189] As study choices could include a broad range of decisions, with different sources of advice, averaging experience across these different instances could be difficult.

Participants were directly asked if they felt that the additional text 'when you needed it' should be added to the end of the question. Many participants (22) felt that this would be a useful addition.[190] In particular, this text could address the confusion of participants who did not have any choices to make during their course or did not utilise opportunities to receive advice.

4.5.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

In line with previous comments, regarding the frequency scale, a couple of participants mentioned that the scale would work better if 'rarely' and 'never' were split into different options.[191]

A couple of participants disliked the use of frequencies in this question, suggesting that focusing on the quality of advice, rather than frequency, may be more beneficial.[192]

One participant felt that including an additional option on the scale would be useful.[193] Particularly, they felt having an option equating to 'most of the time' would be useful.

4.5.3.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.5.3.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY:

- Consider using the phrase 'module choices' instead of 'study choices', as it is better understood by students.
- Alternatively, consider providing examples of what 'study choices' could include, to give students some direction on what to think about.
- Consider adding the text 'when you needed it' to the end of the question, to avoid issues experienced by students who did not have choices to make during their course or who did not need/seek out advice.

4.5.4 Question group: Organisation and management

- **Question 21: How well organised is your course?** [Very well organised / Fairly well organised / Not very well organised / Not at all well organised / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 22: How clearly were any changes to the course communicated?** [Very clearly / Fairly clearly / Not very clearly / Not at all clearly / This does not apply to me]

Both questions in this group were tested in the scale-check interviews (n=10).

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[189] Code: Q20_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experience (1)
[190] Code: Q20_Difficulties with language_Add when I needed to (22)
[191] Code: Q20_Difficulties with language_Scale_Split rarely/never (2)
[192] Code: Q20_Difficulties with language_Quality/frequency (2)
[193] Code: Q20_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (1)

4.5.5   Question 21: How well organised is your course?

4.5.5.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

While answering this question, participants considered a variety of experiences. These included:

- Teaching structure – the structure of individual lessons, the structure of teaching across a module or the composition of modules in the course. Participants evaluated the extent to which they felt they flowed well.
- Time-keeping – the timeliness of everything on their course; for example, whether they were given resources or feedback on time.
- How issues were resolved – whether there were any issues on the course or if everything ran smoothly.
- Communication – whether students were kept informed of all necessary aspects of their course.
- Timetabling.

> 'To me that means, were classes running on schedule, the order of subjects makes sense, was the timetable skipping, i.e. no big gaps between different sessions and different modules? I would say mine was fairly well organised and that is because during the first couple of years when we were mostly on campus, there were days when we only had a one-hour tutorial, for example, in the whole day. So, it didn't make sense for people to be travelling in for one-hour sessions, whereas if they'd made the uni day fuller, we'd have more days off during the week.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Medium HEI (54)**

4.5.5.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

While this question was largely well understood, some participants (3) commented that the word 'organised' was vague and could include too many different aspects of the course.[194] It was also suggested that using the word 'organised' could lead to issues, as it is a subjective concept that people will compare against different standards. While this did not impact their ability to provide a response to this question, participants felt that several people could give the same response to this question for different reasons.

4.5.5.3 Appropriateness of response scale

A couple of participants felt that this question would benefit from having a longer scale.[195] Since organisation is a broad concept that can have many different interpretations, they felt having a more granular scale would be useful here.

Two participants suggested that this question would work better with a frequency scale, given how broadly organisation can be considered, as this would allow participants to average out their experiences.[196]

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[194] Code: Q21_Difficulties with language_Organisation (3)
[195] Code: Q21_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (2)
[196] Code: Q21_Difficulties with language_Scale _Prefer frequency scale (2)

> 'I would say something about frequency would be helpful, for example, my classes in my third and fourth year were really well organised, whereas first and second year could have used a bit of tweaking. So you could say, for the most part of my degree, for some of my degree, something like that.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Medium HEI (54)**

4.5.5.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.5.5.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY

- Consider using a 6-point scale.

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider changing this to a frequency question, to account for the breadth of the term 'organised' and the varying experiences students can have of organisation on their course.

4.5.6 Question 22: How clearly were any changes to the course communicated?

4.5.6.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

A majority of students considered the timing of communications when answering this question. They were contemplating whether the university kept them updated about changes, if information about changes was easy to access and if it was provided to them within a sufficient time to make the required adjustments.

Changes considered related to:

- Timetabling
- Lesson delivery (campus/online)
- The syllabus
- Assessment requirements
- Assessment dates/deadlines

4.5.6.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

While this question was well understood by most participants, a couple of participants felt that the use of 'clearly' in this context was ambiguous.[197] They commented that the term was undefined, suggesting that it would be easy to get confused between the clarity of communications and timeliness of receiving these.

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[197] Code: Q22_Difficulties with language_Clear (2)

> 'It doesn't really define what clearly means. So, it's a little bit challenging in that way to interpret what the question is asking. So I don't know if it means was the email clear enough, as in did it explain the changes well enough, or were they delivered to me in a timely manner. It's easy to make changes to your schedule according to those changes.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Medium HEI (54)**

4.5.6.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Overall, participants felt that the scale used within this question was appropriate and easy to use.

Participants were also prompted to check whether they felt the additional response option 'there were no changes' should be added to the scale. Most participants (8) who were asked this question felt that this would be a useful addition.[198]

4.5.6.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.5.6.5 Recommendations
LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider using the word 'effectively' instead of 'clearly' to better capture both clarity and timeliness of communications.
- Consider adding the option 'there were no changes' to the response scale.

4.6 Question group: Learning resources

- **Question 23: How often have you been able to access the learning resources (either digital or physical) that you need?** [Very often / Fairly often / Not very often / Rarely or never / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 24: How well have the physical and/or digital resources supported your learning?** [Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 25: How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?** [Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 26: How well have the library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?** [Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Rarely / Not at all well / This does not apply to me]

All questions in this group were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

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[198] Code: Q22_Add option_There were no changes on my course (8)

4.6.1 Question 23: How often have you been able to access the learning resources (either digital or physical) that you need?

4.6.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

For this question, students were largely considering the range of digital and physical resources they used, including:

- **Digital:** their university's online library, eBooks, PowerPoint lecture slides, learning management systems (e.g. Moodle, Blackboard), access to platforms containing lecture recordings, etc.
- **Physical:** books, journals, any physical equipment used, etc.

Fewer students were considering any physical spaces they had access to, such as the library, laboratories and studio space.

In general, here students were considering similar resources, with variation occurring only as a result of course differences. For example, students studying creative courses were more likely to consider studio spaces.

While answering this question, students were also considering their general ease of access to both physical and digital resources, including any issues they may have had, whether technical or availability related.

4.6.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was widely understood without issue. However, one student did have difficulty understanding the phrase 'learning resources', being unclear exactly what this referred to.[199]

4.6.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants found the scale to be appropriate with no issues stated.

4.6.1.4 Differences by participant group

One Welsh participant felt that the translation of the question was too wordy, but this did not impact their ability to respond to the question.[200]

4.6.1.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes.

4.6.2 Question 24: How well have the physical and/or digital resources supported your learning?

4.6.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

In general, participants were considering the same areas as in question 23, with students considering the digital and physical resources they used as part of their studies:

- **Digital:** Online library services, eBooks, learning management systems, PowerPoint lecture slides, access to lecture recordings, etc.

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[199] Code: Q23_Difficulties with language_Learning resources (1)
[200] Code: Q23_Difficulties with language_Welsh translation too wordy (1)

- **Physical resources:** Physical books, journals, lecturer created materials (e.g. handouts), subject-specific equipment, etc.

Once again, some students considered the physical spaces they utilised, including the library and studio spaces.

However, it is important to note that a few students mentioned they had only thought of physical spaces in this question because of specific interviewer prompting when discussing question 23, and may not have thought of them otherwise.

Some students were thinking of their ease of access to the required physical or digital resources, in a similar way to question 23. Where areas considered differed to question 23, it was in regard to overall support. Here some students were thinking about whether they felt they had everything they needed to complete their course effectively. A few students were thinking about how useful the resources they needed were for their learning. A few students were contemplating the quality of their learning resources.

4.6.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used
While this question was broadly understood, one student had difficulty answering the question because they had not used any physical resources during their studies.[201]

One other student also reported having difficulty understanding the word 'learning' in the context of the question, finding this to be ambiguous.[202]

4.6.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale
Participants found the scale to be appropriate with no issues stated.

4.6.2.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.6.2.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes.

4.6.3 Question 25: How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?
4.6.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered
The vast majority of students were considering IT resources for this question. These included:

- Computers
- Software
- IT support services

Many students took into account the quality of IT resources, in terms of how well they supported their learning. When considering IT facilities, some students were thinking about any IT-related physical

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[201] **Code:** Q24_Difficulties answering_Don't use them (1)
[202] **Code:** Q24_Difficulties with language_Learning (1)

spaces they had been using during their course, such as computer rooms, with a couple of participants thinking more broadly about physical spaces such as the library.

A few students were thinking about their ease of access to any IT resources they may have needed. One student was thinking more broadly about the digital resources they used, including online lectures, other videos and recordings. Finally, another student was considering how often they used IT resources when answering this question.

In general, most students understood this question without difficulty.

4.6.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used
A couple of students had difficulty answering this question because they had not used any IT resources.[203] It is important to note that the students who gave this response did not choose the 'This does not apply to me' option.

A couple of students had difficulties understanding what was meant by the phrase 'IT resources', and what specifically was covered by this. One of these students thought this was referring to WiFi services, such as Eduroam. The other student thought this was referring only to computers.[204]

4.6.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale
Participants found the scale appropriate, with no issues stated.

4.6.3.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.6.3.5 RECOMMENDATIONS
LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider including brackets to explain what is meant by 'IT resources', giving examples.

4.6.4 Question 26: How well have the library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?

4.6.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered
The majority of students considered the library resources listed in the question (books, online services and learning spaces) when answering. It is worth noting that many of these students commented on the brackets used in the question being beneficial to their answering. In addition, those who had not considered the library in previous questions did so here.

A few students were thinking about the quality of the library resources in terms of how well they supported their learning. Even fewer were considering the ease of access to library resources. Finally, just one student was thinking about how often they accessed library resources to support their learning.

In general, most students understood this question without issue.

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[203] **Code:** Q25_Difficulties answering_Don't use them (2)
[204] **Code:** Q25_Difficulties with language_IT resources (2)

4.6.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A few students (4) reported having difficulty in answering the question because they had not used all of the library resources.[205] While this was unclear, it did not inhibit anyone from answering the question.

One person had difficulty understanding what was meant by the phrase 'library resources'.[206] While they found the brackets helpful in the question, they contemplated whether people or staff were included as library resources. Another student had difficulty understanding exactly what was meant by the word 'supported' in this context. However, this did not prevent them from answering. They took 'supported' to mean what was helpful in terms of their learning.[207]

4.6.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants found the scale appropriate, with no issues stated.

4.6.4.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.6.4.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes.

4.6.5 Learning resources question group

4.6.5.1 Overlap in question group

A few students (5) remarked how they felt there was overlap between questions 24, 25 and 26 because there were similarities between 'physical and digital resources', 'IT resources' and 'library resources'.[208]

4.6.5.2 Missing areas

Several students (6) suggested splitting up the themes of physical resources, digital resources and physical spaces into three different questions.[209]

> 'I would take one question out, do one about physical and one about digital and then you get a deeper understanding of the two instead of rewording the question.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Large HEI (15)**

One student recommended an additional question addressing learning support services.[210]

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[205] Code: Q26_Difficulties answering_Have not used (4)
[206] Code: Q26_Difficulties with language_Library resources (1)
[207] Code: Q26_Difficulties with language_Supported (1)
[208] Code: QG Learning resources_Overlap _Q24&25 (5)
[209] Code: QG Learning resources_Areas missing_Separate themes (6)
[210] Code: QG Learning resources_Areas missing_Learning support (1)

> 'We had a learning support team where they help those more that need it [...] so, a question about that would be really helpful to ensure that you do get support outside of the lecturers giving you support, specific support for helping you to learn and write essays.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Small FEC (20)**

4.6.5.3 Recommendations
No recommended changes.

4.7 Question group: Student voice
- **Question 27: To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?** [To a great extent / to some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 28: To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?** [To a great extent / to some extent / Hardly at all / Not at all / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 29: How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?** [Very clear / Fairly clear / Not very clear / Not at all clear / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 30: How effectively does the Students' Union (Association or Guild) represent students' academic interests?** [Very effectively / Fairly effectively / Not very effectively / Not at all effectively / This does not apply to me]

All questions in this group were tested in scale-check interviews (n=10)

4.7.1 Question 27: To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?

4.7.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

While answering this question, participants were considering the different outlets available to express their opinions across their course. Some of the outlets mentioned by participants were:

- Feedback forms at the end of individual modules or their entire course.
- Student representatives who could raise issues on behalf of the student body.
- Opportunities to provide feedback informally, such as approaching lecturers after classes or during office hours.

Participants also considered how accessible and approachable staff were. They contemplated how easy it was to express opinions or suggestions to staff and how comfortable they were in doing so.

4.7.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A couple of participants felt that the phrase 'right opportunities' was too subjective, making it unclear what the question meant.[211] One of them suggested that 'right opportunities' could refer to the

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[211] Code: Q27_Difficulties with language_Right opporuntites (2)

frequency of opportunities or their timing. However, the question did not clearly indicate which of these students should be considering, making the question more difficult to answer.

One participant struggled to interpret 'feedback' within the context of this question.[212] They felt that it was difficult to understand what giving feedback on the course meant. This issue appeared to stem from the fact that the opportunities they had to give feedback on their course came towards the end of their course, meaning that they would not get to see the outcomes of or responses to their feedback.

> 'It's tough to understand what it means, to give feedback on your course, I guess in terms of the end of year survey that would be feedback, but it feels like those don't really have much impact. They might on later years, but not something that we're going to see. So it doesn't really feel like that.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (47)**

4.7.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Some participants (3) felt the scale of this question would benefit from having more points.[213] Since there could be numerous methods of providing feedback, the scale could have more options to reflect the breadth of areas to be considered while responding to this question. Two of these participants particularly thought that there was room to add an option between 'to some extent' and 'hardly at all'.

A few additional suggestions were made by separate participants:

- One participant felt that the option 'this does not apply to me' was irrelevant.[214] They felt that all students have the opportunity to give feedback on their course so the option was superfluous.
- One participant disliked the wording of the option 'hardly at all'.[215] They felt that it was not appropriate in a question asking about extent.
- One participant felt that the options 'to a great extent' and 'to some extent' were not sufficiently different from each other.[216]

4.7.1.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.7.1.5 Recommendations

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider removing the word 'right' from the question to reduce confusion about the meaning of the phrase 'right opportunities', either removing it entirely or replacing it with 'appropriate opportunities'.

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[212] Code: Q27_Difficulties answering_Feedback (1)
[213] Code: Q27_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (3)
[214] Code: Q27_Difficulties with language_Scale_This does not apply to me irrelevant (1)
[215] Code: Q27_Difficulties with language_Scale_Hardly at all/not at all (1)
[216] Code: Q27_Difficulties with language_Scale_Distinction between options (1)

4.7.2 Question 28: To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?

4.7.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

A majority of participants considered how receptive staff were to student feedback while answering this question. Participants were weighing up how open staff were to receiving feedback and the extent to which they took this feedback into account. Subsequently, they were equating 'value' to what actions were taken based on student feedback.

Some participants were also considering whether staff were felt to care about their students. They were considering whether teaching was just a job to staff members or if they cared about their students and genuinely listened to them.

4.7.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

There were a few isolated difficulties with this question:

- As participants were equating value to actions taken, one participant felt that the question would be difficult to respond to, as students would not always be able to see how feedback was acted on.[217]
- Another participant felt that students might struggle to average their experience across different members of staff while responding to this question.[218]
- One participant suggested that the question should specify what timeframe students should be considering.[219] They felt that the question should outline if students should think back to the entire duration of their course or to a specific time period.

4.7.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Some participants (4) felt that the scale of this question would benefit from having more points.[220] While there was no commonality in what or where they would like the additional options to be, generally it was felt that having more options would allow them to represent their experiences more accurately.

One of these participants felt that the scale should have an 'I don't know' option.[221] This was closely tied to the issue described earlier, wherein students did not always have the opportunity to view how staff responded to their feedback.

As was the case with the previous question, one participant felt that the option 'this does not apply to me' was superfluous.[222]

4.7.2.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.7.2.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY:

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[217] Code: Q28_Difficulties answering_Don't see changes (1)

[218] Code: Q28_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experiences (1)

[219] Code: Q28_Difficulties with language_Timeframe (1)

[220] Code: Q28_Difficulties with language_Scale _More options (4)

[221] Code: Q28_Difficulties with language_Scale _Add don't know option (1)

[222] Code: Q28_Difficulties with language_Scale _This does not apply to me irrelevant (1)

- Consider using a 6-point scale with this question.

- Consider adding the option 'I don't know/unsure' to the scale.

4.7.3 Question 29: How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?

4.7.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

This question was well understood by participants, with a majority of them considering the outcomes of their feedback. They were considering whether changes were made based on student feedback and if students were made aware of these changes.

> 'I guess this is more about actions, maybe 28 was more about being heard and reasonings as to why things are the way that they are, but action is we hear that you want this, here is how we can implement it, and come in with real solutions rather than just listening to it.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (46)**

4.7.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A couple of participants felt that this question could be difficult to answer, as students do not always have the opportunity to see how feedback is acted upon.[223] Since opportunities to provide feedback often come at the end of a module or course, any potential changes coming from student feedback would be implemented for subsequent cohorts. Thus, the students who provided the feedback would be unaware of the resulting changes. Additionally, as the question is asking about how staff respond to feedback overall, and not about individual experiences, students may not know how staff respond to other students' feedback.

4.7.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

A couple of participants felt that this question and scale should ask about frequency rather than clarity.[224] These participants found the use of clarity in this context confusing. They felt that, by asking about clarity, the question was focusing too much on how changes are communicated to students and not sufficiently on the actual response to feedback.

> 'It's not asking how often is it acted upon, it's asking how clear is it. So I feel like in my head it doesn't make much sense, because maybe like one time the feedback was acted upon and it was very clear, but maybe that was only one in 10 and nine times it wasn't acted upon.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (47)**

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[223] Code: Q29_Difficulties answering_Do not see changes themselves (2)
[224] Code: Q29_Difficulties with language_Scale _Prefer frequency scale (2)

> 'Well, I guess, why would it be how clear is it? Is how clear looking for even if it couldn't be acted on, how clear were the reasons why? Or is it how clear is it that the students' feedback on the course is acted on? How clear seems like a strange way to phrase it? How often was the feedback on the course acted on might be more appropriate.'
>
> **STEM, Full-time, Large HEI (46)**

One participant felt that the scale of this question should include an 'I don't know' option.[225] This option was thought to be necessary because of the issue described above, wherein students may not always be able to see the changes that result from their feedback.

4.7.3.4 Differences by participant group
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.7.3.5 Recommendations
MID PRIORITY

- Consider adding an 'I don't know/unsure' option to the scale.

LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider changing this to a frequency question, asking 'how often was students' feedback on the course acted on'.

4.7.4 Question 30: How effectively does the Students' Union (Association or Guild) represent students' academic interests?

4.7.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered
When answering this question, students considered a few factors, including:

- How the students' union advocates for students and how it raises concerns to the university.
- How effective it is at bringing about changes based on the opinions and needs of the student body.
- The student representatives on their course and how they carry out their role.

4.7.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used
A couple of participants struggled to respond to this question, as they had not interacted with the students' union.[226] They were aware that their university had a students' union, but beyond this they did not know what the union did or how effective it was at carrying out its responsibilities.

One participant was confused by the use of 'students' union' in this context.[227] To them, the students' union was mainly associated with clubs and social activities. Subsequently, connecting it to the representation of academic interests seemed confusing.

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[225] Code: Q29_Difficulties with language_Scale _Add don't know option (1)
[226] Code: Q30_Difficulties answering_Personal use (2)
[227] Code: Q30_Difficulties with language_Students union (1)

Another participant was uncertain about the use of the phrase 'academic interests'.[228] They did not understand what it meant, likely stemming from the lack of academic representation on their course. They commented that the union had not changed anything academically on their course, making it hard to understand the applicability of the question.

4.7.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

While testing this question, participants were prompted to check whether they would prefer a question asking 'how well does the students' union represent students' academic interests?', as opposed to the current question asking about effectiveness. Most participants that were asked this question (6) felt that it would be phrased better as a 'wellness' question.[229] They felt that 'well' was an easier word to understand than 'effective'. They also felt that 'effectiveness' relied too much on the outcome of the union's actions. Participants commented that, even if the union represented students well, the university might not be willing to make changes. Thus, they suggested it would be better to focus on the quality of the representation rather than the outcomes.

A few participants (3) felt that the scale for this question should include an 'I don't know' option.[230] As students often don't choose to interact or keep up to date with the union's activities, they felt the inclusion of this option would be necessary. While a 'this does not apply to me' option was included in the scale, this option did not appear to sufficiently cover the experiences of students who personally had decided not to engage with the union, despite their university having an active union.

One participant commented that the distinction between some of the options within the scale was unclear.[231] Particularly, they felt they would not be able to differentiate between 'very effectively' and 'fairly effectively'.

4.7.4.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.7.4.5 Recommendations

MID PRIORITY

- Consider changing the question to one asking about the quality of representation, such as 'How well does the students' union represent students' academic interests?'

LOW PRIORITY

- Consider adding an 'I don't know/unsure' option to the scale.

4.8 Question group: Mental wellbeing services at your university/college

- **Question 31: How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing services?** [Extremely well / Very well / Fairly well / Fairly badly / Very badly / Extremely badly / This does not apply to me]

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[228] Code: Q30_Difficulties with language_Academic interest (1)

[229] Code: Q30_Prefer well (6)

[230] Code: Q30_Difficulties with language_Scale _Unsure option (3)

[231] Code: Q30_Difficulties with language_Scale_Distinction between options (1)

- **Question 32: Have you personally accessed any mental wellbeing services from your university/college?** [Yes / No / Prefer not to say]
- **Question 33: How easy is it to access your university or college's mental wellbeing services?** [Very easy / Fairly easy / Not very easy / Not at all easy / This does not apply to me / Prefer not to say]
- **Question 34: My university/college's services to support my mental wellbeing were available when I needed them. If you have not accessed support services, please select 'Not applicable'** [Definitely agree / Mostly agree / Neither agree nor disagree / Mostly disagree / Definitely disagree / Not applicable]

All questions in this group were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

4.8.1 Question 31: How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing services?

4.8.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

The majority of students were considering the mode through which wellbeing services and support were shared with them, including:

- Emails
- Posters
- Course inductions

Many students were thinking about whether or not they were given any information about wellbeing services at all.

Fewer students were considering how much they personally knew about the services and if they knew how to access them. Some students were thinking about if they knew of the existence of mental wellbeing services at their university or college, and whether they were of good quality.

Finally, a few students considered how often the services had been communicated to them.

4.8.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A couple of students had difficulty in understanding the question because they felt it was too lengthy.[232] While they did not specify any improvements, they thought the question could be made more concise. However, notably, this did not inhibit any of the participants from answering the question.

One student had trouble understanding the phrase 'well communicated'.[233] While this did not prevent them from being able to answer, they had difficulty understanding whether the question was referring to before their course started or during their course.

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[232] Code: Q31_Difficulties with language_Wordy (2)
[233] Code: Q31_Difficulties with language_Well communicated (1)

4.8.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Most felt that the scale worked well for this question. However, a couple of students thought that the 6-point scale used was too long and could be shortened.[234]

One participant commented that they thought the answer option 'This does not apply to me' was irrelevant and should not be included.[235]

4.8.1.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.8.1.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

No recommended changes.

4.8.2 Question 32: Have you personally accessed any mental wellbeing services from your university/college?

4.8.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Participants were considering simply whether they had used mental wellbeing services at their university/college or not and largely found this question straightforward to answer.

4.8.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some students (5) had difficulty answering the question generally as a result of not knowing what was meant by 'mental wellbeing services'.[236] For example, whether this question referred to university, GP or NHS services or what the difference was between mental health services and mental health support.

One student mentioned taking issue with the word 'personally' in the question, stating that they felt it was too attacking and unnecessary.[237]

4.8.2.3 Appropriateness of response scale

Participants found the scale to be appropriate with no issues stated.

4.8.2.4 Differences by participant group

One Welsh participant felt that the first two scale options could be changed from 'Ie/Na' to 'Do/naddo'.[238] While the meaning of both translations is the same, the participant felt that the grammar of the current translation would be improved by making the suggested change.

4.8.2.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes.

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[234] Code: Q31_Difficulties with language_Scale_Fewer options (2)
[235] Code: Q31_Difficulties with language_Scale_This does not apply to me - irrelevant (1)
[236] Code: Q32_Difficulties with language_mental Wellbeing services (6)
[237] Code: Q32_Difficulties with language_Personally (1)
[238] Code: Q32_Difficulties with language_Scale_Alternate suggestion for Welsh translation (1)

4.8.3 Question 33: How easy is it to access your university or college's mental wellbeing services?

4.8.3.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

While answering this question, most participants considered the modes through which they could contact mental wellbeing services and how convenient they were. Some of the modes considered included:

- Emails
- Calls
- The online learning hub
- The university website

In addition to the ease of reaching out to services, some participants also considered how long it took for them to receive support once the services had been contacted. These participants were considering how responsive the services were and the length of waiting lists.

4.8.3.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

A couple of participants felt that the use of the word 'access' was ambiguous in this context.[239] These participants felt that it was unclear whether the question was asking about the ease of reaching out to the services or the ease of actually receiving support.

> 'What does "access" mean? Does it mean to get an appointment or to get actual help? To get in contact with them? It's a bit different. I know that it is easy to send them an email and say that I need help and they will respond to you, but it is sometimes hard to get an appointment because they are just booked.'
>
> **Humanities, Full-time, Medium HEI (31)**

One participant did not understand the meaning of 'mental wellbeing services'.[240] They were unsure what services this included and felt this needed to be clarified.

4.8.3.3 Appropriateness of response scale

A majority of participants felt that the scale of this question was appropriate and easy to use. One participant felt that the scale was unnecessarily long.[241] However, this did not impact their ability to provide a response for the question.

4.8.3.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

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[239] Code: Q33_Difficulties with language_Access (2)
[240] Code: Q33_Difficulties with language_Mental wellbeing services (1)
[241] Code: Q33_Difficulties with language_Scale_Too long (1)

- Consider adapting the question to avoid confusion about whether it is asking about the ease of contacting services or ease of receiving support.
- If the intention is to ask about the ease of receiving support, consider changing the question to 'How easy was it to receive support from your university/college's mental wellbeing services?'

4.8.4 Question 34: My university/college's services to support my mental wellbeing were available when I needed them

4.8.4.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

When responding to this question, participants were considering if they had ever needed mental wellbeing services and if they had subsequently tried to access them.

They were also weighing up whether the support was provided to them in a timely manner and if the services available were sufficient to support their needs.

4.8.4.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

This question was largely well understood by participants, with only one participant having any issues responding to the question. This participant did not understand the meaning of 'mental wellbeing services'.[242] They were unsure what services this included and felt this needed to be clarified.

4.8.4.3 Appropriateness of response scale

A majority of participants felt that the scale for this question was appropriate and easy to use. However, a couple of participants felt that the scale was unnecessarily long.[243] One of these participants suggested, since the question was covering a sensitive topic, it would be better to request as little information as possible.

4.8.4.4 Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.8.4.5 Recommendations

No recommended changes.

4.8.5 Mental wellbeing services question group

4.8.5.1 Overall findings

Overall, the questions within this group were well understood by participants, with only a few identified issues. A small number of participants struggled to understand what services to consider while responding to the questions and a few felt that the scales used for the questions were too long.

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[242] Code: Q34_Difficulties with language_Mental wellbeing service (1)
[243] Code: Q34_Difficulties with language_Scale_too long (2)

There were also a few specific difficulties answering each of the questions. However, none of these issues significantly impacted participants' ability to respond to the questions overall.

4.8.5.2 Overlap in question group

A few participants commented that there was some overlap between questions in this group.

- **Questions 33 and 34:** A couple of participants felt that both of these questions were assessing the ability to access services.[244]
- **Questions 32 and 34:** One participant felt that these both made students consider whether they had used services or not.[245]

4.8.5.3 Missing areas

A few participants felt that there could be additional questions added to the group:

- A couple of participants suggested that the group could include a question asking about the quality of services.[246] They commented that the questions in the group currently seem to focus too much on the accessibility of services, and not enough on whether the services actually helped students.
- One participant felt that the question group only covered services that students would need to actively seek out.[247] They felt the group could also include a question about the effectiveness of more passive forms of support the university might provide, such as email bulletins with mental wellbeing tips.
- Another participant felt that the group could include a question asking whether students felt comfortable accessing the mental wellbeing support services from their university/college.[248]

4.8.5.4 Recommendations

LOW PRIORITY

- Consider changing question 34 to ask about the quality of services rather than their availability.

4.9 Question group: Additional questions

- **Question 35: During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs?** [Very free / Fairly free / Not very free / Not at all free / This does not apply to me]
- **Question 36: How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you'll need for your future?** [Very well / Fairly well / Not very well / Not at all well / This does not apply to me]

Both questions in this group were tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

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[244] Code: QG Mental wellbeing services_Overlap_Q34 and 33 (2)

[245] Code: QG Mental wellbeing services_Overlap_Q34 and 32 (1)

[246] Code: QG Mental wellbeing services_Missing areas_Quality of resources (2)

[247] Code: QG Mental wellbeing services_More specific questions (1)

[248] Code: QG Mental wellbeing services_Misisng area_Comfort with accessing services (1)

4.9.1 Question 35: During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs?

4.9.1.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

This question was interpreted varyingly. Most students referred to how comfortable they felt contributing to discussions in their academic seminars or tutorials. They were considering this in terms of sharing their academic 'opinions and beliefs' in relation to their course. A few gave details on their teachers' attitudes and how this made them feel about speaking out in tutorials or how their own anxiety impacted their ability to do so.

Some addressed how they felt about expressing their personal beliefs around topics such as religion or politics, although fewer did so compared with those considering academic opinions.

Others considered if their teachers had asked them for feedback on their teaching methods.

4.9.1.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

There was some confusion over what was meant by 'ideas, opinions and beliefs', with students asking if it was referring to the course content or personal beliefs. Some students (6) said having an example or explanation of this in the question would have been beneficial.[249] Moreover, some students (6) found the phrase 'during your studies' ambiguous because it could relate to university specifically or their whole experience of studying more widely, e.g. within the city.[250]

One student had an issue with the phrase 'how free did you feel' and thought it would have been clearer to say 'have you been able'.[251]

Another student thought the question itself was not applicable within the survey because it was asking about the freedom of speech and the current state of affairs in society rather than being about their course directly.[252]

4.9.1.3 Appropriateness of response scale

There were no difficulties with the scale for this question.

4.9.1.4 Differences by participant group

A couple of Welsh interview participants felt the translated scale options were not distinct from each other.[253] Particularly, they felt that the first two options ('Eithaf rhydd' and 'Gweddol rydd') meant virtually the same thing.

One chemistry student thought the question was not relevant because, in the sciences, there are right and wrong answers and ideas, opinions and beliefs are not expressed. They felt the question was more applicable to and aimed at politics students.[254]

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[249] Code: Q35_Difficulties with language_Ideas opinions and beliefs (6)
[250] Code: Q35_Difficulties with language_Your studies (6)
[251] Code: Q35_Difficulties with language_How free (1)
[252] Code: Q35_Difficulties answering_Not applicable (1)
[253] Code: Q35_Difficulties with language_Scale_Welsh option distinction (2)
[254] Code: Q35_Areas considered_Academic (1)

One arts student said that they discussed ideas and opinions in class, but not beliefs, and was unsure how to answer the question as a whole.[255]

4.9.1.5 Recommendations

- Consider adding an explanation in brackets in the question to explain what is meant by 'ideas, opinions and beliefs'.
- Consider clarifying 'during your studies' to specify whether this is intended to consider the whole university experience or specifically that within tutorials/seminars/the course environment.
- Consider changing the Welsh translation of either the first or second option on the scale.

4.9.2 Question 36: How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you'll need for your future?

4.9.2.1 Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Most students discussed the skills that they felt they would need for future employment or study, while some were thinking about general life skills (e.g. financial literacy) and growing their understanding of society. Others talked about specific skills they had learnt, e.g. data processing, critical thinking, essay writing and working in groups.

Some referred to the course content specifically, rather than their whole university experience. There was some discussion of learning progress and how their skills had developed from before university.

4.9.2.2 Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some students (3) felt the question was too hard to answer at their stage in life because they were unsure what skills they would need.[256] Others (6) found 'skills you think you'll need in the future' difficult to understand because 'skills' and 'future' were quite vague and they felt it made the sentence too lengthy.[257]

A couple of students thought the question could be split into asking about knowledge and then either hard skills or soft skills.[258]

One geology student found the question difficult to answer because they were not intending to go into the same field of work as their course after graduating.[259]

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[255] Code: Q35_Difficulties answering_Not applicable (1)
[256] Code: Q36_Difficulties answering_Don't know (3)
[257] Code: Q36_Difficulties answering_Too wordy (6)
[258] Code: Q36_Difficulties with language_Split question (2)
[259] Code: Q36_Difficulties answering_Course not applicable (1)

One student thought the question would work better as an agreement statement, thinking this would be easier to answer than the current 'wellness' scale.[260] Apart from this, most students felt that the scale worked well for this question.

4.9.2.4   *Differences by participant group*
There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.9.2.5   *Recommendations*
LOW PRIORITY:

- Consider adding brackets to clarify what types of skills are in scope, e.g. hard skills, soft skills or both.

4.10   Question group: Summative questions

- **Question 37: How far do you agree with the following statement: overall, the quality of my course has been good?** [Definitely agree / Mostly agree / Neither agree nor disagree/ Mostly disagree / Definitely disagree / Not applicable.]
- **Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?** [Extremely good / Very good / Fairly good / Fairly poor / Very poor / Extremely poor / This does not apply to me]

Question 37 was tested in full cognitive interviews (n=50).

Question 38 was tested in both the full cognitive interviews and the scale-check interviews (n=60).

4.10.1 Question 37: How far do you agree with the following statement: overall, the quality of my course has been good?
The majority of students used this question to sum up their whole experience. Students discussed the overall quality of their course, including the teaching, learning experience and content. Others thought about the skillset they had gained to help them in the future. Students also discussed how the coronavirus pandemic had impacted their experience. A few students brought in how their personal preferences impacted their views on the course, e.g. if they had chosen the wrong subject.

4.10.1.1   *Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used*
This question was largely well understood, but some students (7) found it difficult to summarise their whole experience, especially because of the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on specific years of their course.[261]

Some (7) found the word 'good' problematic because they felt it wasn't positive enough if their course had exceeded their expectations.[262]

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[260] Code: Q36_Difficulties with language_Scale_Prefer agreement scale (1)
[261] Code: Q37_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experience (7)
[262] Code: Q37_Difficulties with language_Good (7)

Other students (5) felt the word 'quality' was too vague as this could refer to teaching, content or the wider experience of going to university.[263]

One student did not like the phrase 'how far do you agree' and would have preferred 'how much do you agree?' However, a reason for this preference was not specified.[264]

4.10.1.2   Appropriateness of response scale

One student thought the 'not applicable' option was irrelevant because everyone taking the survey would have enrolled on a course and should therefore be able to answer the question.[265]

4.10.1.3   Differences by participant group

One Welsh participant suggested that the text 'y credwch' could be removed from the end of each option as it was redundant. However, the inclusion of this text did not impact their ability to respond to the question.[266]

4.10.1.4   Recommendations
HIGH PRIORITY:

- Use question 38 for the summative question wording, instead of question 37.

4.10.2 Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?

4.10.2.1   Participant approach to answering the question and areas of the student experience considered

Students answered this question very similarly to question 37, summarising the quality of their course, including teaching, content and organisation, and how this lived up to their expectations and prepared them for their future career. In addition, some summarised the rest of the survey as a way of evaluating their whole university experience. Other students were thinking about the quality of their modules while one student based their answer on the level of difficultly. A couple of students mentioned the reputation of the course and the positive impact this would have on their future career.

When comparing the two summative questions in this group, there was a stronger preference (15) for this question over question 37.[267] Some of these students felt that question 38 was more open than question 37, which could be seen as a leading question with its use of the word 'good'.

4.10.2.2   Reasons for any difficulty answering and issues with language used

Some students (3) found the word 'quality' ambiguous, and were unsure if it was referring to their wider social experience or learning and content.[268]

Averaging the whole experience of the course was difficult for some students (2) because some aspects of their course were much better or worse than others.[269]

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[263] Code: Q37_Difficulties with language_Quality too vague (5)
[264] Code: Q37_Difficulties with language_How far (1)
[265] Code: Q37_Difficulties with language_Scale_Not applicable irrelevant (1)
[266] Code: Q37_Difficulties with language_Scale_Welsh Change to options (1)
[267] Code: QG Summative questions_Overlap_Preference for Q38 (15)
[268] Code: Q38_Difficulties with language_Quality too vague (3)
[269] Code: Q38_Difficulties answering_Challenge averaging experience (2)

One student struggled to answer because of the impact that the coronavirus pandemic had had on their course.[270]

4.10.2.3   Appropriateness of response scale

Most students felt this scale worked well. However, two students felt rating quality would be more precise with a numerical scale.[271]

Another student wanted an option between 'extremely good' and 'very good' because they had really enjoyed their course, but it wasn't perfect.[272]

4.10.2.4   Differences by participant group

There did not appear to be strong differences across participant groups.

4.10.2.5   Recommendations

HIGH PRIORITY:

- Use question 38 for the summative question wording, instead of question 37.

MID PRIORITY:

- Change to a 6-point scale to allow for more nuances in answers.

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[270] Code: Q38_Difficulties answering_COVID (1)
[271] Code: Q38_Difficulties with language_Scale_prefer numerical scale (1)
[272] Code: Q38_Difficulties with language_Scale_More options (1)

5. **<u>Conclusion</u>**

Participants largely felt confident in their ability to answer the survey questions, and found the item-specific questions and scales easy to comprehend. Most found it easy to move between different scales throughout the survey and felt it was logical to use a scale that was closely linked to the question.

While most of the questions tested within this research were relevant and understandable, the interviews did uncover questions where the wording could lead to confusion or disparity in interpretation if used on a wider scale. We have suggested the following recommendations, with their priority level also marked out below.

6. <u>**Recommendations**</u>

Question 1: How often are teaching staff good at explaining course content?

- Change from a frequency scale to instead asking how good staff are at explaining course content.

Question 2: How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?

- Consider changing the Welsh translation of engaging from 'ddeniadol' to 'diddorol'.

Question 9: To what extent does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you've already learnt?

- Consider changing the question to ask 'how well' this is done, as opposed to 'to what extent'.

Question 15: How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?

- Consider changing to a frequency scale.

Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?
- Use question 38 for the summative question wording, instead of question 37.

Response scales:
- Consider using 6-point scales instead of 4-point scales, especially for frequency scales, which should include options for 'always' and 'never'.

Specific questions where this was highlighted in interviews as beneficial include:

- Question 2: How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?
- Question 3: How often is the course intellectually stimulating?
- Question 4: How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?
- Question 6: To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?
- Question 12: How often have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learnt?
- Question 13: How often were you given marking criteria in advance?
- Question 21: How well organised is your course?
- Question 28: To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?
- Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?

Question wording:

Question 10: To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?

- Consider replacing the phrase 'directed study' with a term such as 'staff-led' to resolve ambiguity.
- Consider changing the Welsh translation of the first option on the scale to make it more distinct from the following option.

Question 16: How timely was your feedback?

- Consider rewording the question to 'how often was your feedback delivered on time?' to avoid the ambiguity and subjectivity associated with the word 'timely'.

Question 17: How often has feedback helped you improve your learning?

- Consider changing the question to directly ask about the usefulness of feedback as opposed to the frequency of this.
- Consider changing the wording from 'improve your learning' to 'improve your work'.

Question 20: How often were you able to get good advice about study choices?

- Consider using the phrase 'module choices' instead of 'study choices' as it is better understood by students.
- Consider adding the text 'when you needed it' to the end of the question to avoid issues experienced by students who did not have choices to make during their course or those who did not attempt to get any advice.

Question 29: How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?

- Consider adding an 'I don't know/unsure' option to the scale.

Question 30: How effectively does the Students' Union (Association or Guild) represent students' academic interests?

- Consider changing the question to one asking about the quality of representation, such as 'How well does the students' union represent students' academic interests?'

Question 33: How easy is it to access your university or college's mental wellbeing services?

- Consider adapting the question to avoid confusion about whether the question is asking about the ease of contacting services or ease of receiving support. If the intention is to ask about the ease of receiving support, consider changing the question to 'How easy was it to receive support from your university/college's mental wellbeing services?'

Question 35: During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs?

- Consider adding an explanation in brackets in the question to explain what is meant by 'ideas, opinions and beliefs'.
- Consider clarifying 'during your studies' to specify whether this is intended to consider the whole university experience or specifically that within tutorials/seminars/the course environment.
- Consider changing the Welsh translation of either the first or second option on the scale.

Question 38: Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course?

- Change to a 6-point scale to allow for more nuances in participants' answers.

Question 4: How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?

- Consider clarifying what the term 'best work' means within the context of the question.

Learning opportunities question group

- Consider changing the order of questions in this section, first asking about the process of learning (questions 5, 9 and 11), followed by those focused more on the application of learning (questions 6, 7, 8 and 10).
- Consider moving questions 7 and 8 to elsewhere in the survey, or to the start or end of this question bank so the flow of other questions in the group is not disrupted.

Question 5: To what extent have you had the chance to apply theories and concepts that you have learnt?

- Consider rewording the phrase 'theories and concepts' to help comprehension among those on creative courses.

Question 8: When working with other students as part of your course, how helpful was this for your learning?

- Consider rephrasing the question to make it more condensed; for example, it could be reworded to 'How helpful did you find working with other students on your course?'

Question 12: How often have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learnt?

- Consider adding a clarification line or brackets to explain what is referred to by the term 'assessments' to help this apply to those on courses without formal exams.
- Consider changing from a frequency scale to asking about how 'well' assessments allow students to demonstrate what they have learnt.

Question 16: How timely was your feedback?

- Consider clarifying the wording by stating 'assessment feedback' in the question.

Question 19: How well have teaching staff supported your learning?

- Consider reframing the question to ask about how helpful staff were, rather than how supportive, to avoid ambiguity about what to consider while answering the question. Note however that this was only recommended by one student.

Question 21: How well organised is your course?

- Consider changing this to a frequency question, to account for the breadth of the term 'organised' and the varying experiences students can have of organisation on their courses.

Question 22: How clearly were any changes to the course communicated?

- Consider using the word 'effectively' instead of 'clearly' to better capture both clarity and timeliness of communications.

- Consider adding the option 'there were no changes' to the response scale.

Question 25: How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?

- Consider including brackets to explain what is meant by 'IT resources', giving examples.

Question 27: To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?

- Consider removing the word 'right' from the question to reduce confusion about the meaning of the phrase 'right opportunities', either removing it entirely or replacing it with 'appropriate opportunities'.

Question 28: To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?

- Consider adding the option 'I don't know/unsure' to the scale.

Question 29: How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?

- Consider changing this to a frequency question, asking 'how often was students' feedback on the course acted on'.

Question 30: How effectively does the Students' Union (Association or Guild) represent students' academic interests?

- Consider adding an 'I don't know/unsure' option to the scale.

Question 36: How far do you agree with the following statement: Overall, the quality of my course has been good?

- Consider adding brackets to clarify what types of skills are in scope, e.g. hard skills, soft skills or both.

7. **Appendix**

7.1 Participant profiles

Subject	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Humanities	23	1
Creative Arts	16	2
STEM	11	7

Delivery mode	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Campus	27	4
Blended	20	6
Online	3	0

Mode of study	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Full-time	42	10
Part-time	8	0

Provider type	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Higher Education Institution	33	10
Alternative Provider	9	0
Further Education College	8	0

Nation	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
England	35	8
Scotland	7	1
Wales	7	1
Northern Ireland	1	0

Learner type	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Home	42	9
EU	5	1
International	3	0

Provider size	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Small	13	0
Medium	9	4
Large	28	6

Year of study	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
1st	5	1
2nd	17	2
3rd or final year	28	7

Age	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
19-21	25	3
22-25	10	6
26-35	6	0
36-45	4	1
46-60	4	0
60+	1	0

Gender	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Male (including trans-male)	22	7
Female (including trans-female)	27	3
Non-binary	1	0

Ethnicity	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
White	35	5
White – Scottish	1	1
Other White background	1	1
Black or Black British – Caribbean	1	0
Other Black or Black British background	2	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	2	1
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	1	1
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	1
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	3	0
Mixed White and Black African	2	0
Mixed White and Asian	1	0
Arab	1	0

Disability	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
No known disability	41	10
A specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia, dyspraxia or AD(H)D	4	0
A mental health condition, such as depression, schizophrenia or anxiety disorder	3	0
A long standing illness or health condition such as	2	0

cancer, HIV, diabetes, chronic heart disease, or epilepsy		

Continent of origin (international students)	Full cognitive interviews	Scale check interviews
Europe	5	1
Asia	2	0
America	1	0
N/A	1	0

7.2 Question set

TEACHING ON MY COURSE		Full cognitive test	Scale check only
1	**How often are teaching staff good at explaining course content?** • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
2	**How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?** • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
3	**How often is the course intellectually stimulating?** • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	N	Y
4	**How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?** • Always • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely • Never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
5	**To what extent have you had the chance to apply theories and concepts that you have learnt?** • To a great extent • To some extent • Hardly at all • Not at all • This does not apply to me	Y	N

6	To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics? - To a great extent - To some extent - Hardly at all - Not at all - This does not apply to me	N	Y
7	As part of your course, were you required to work with other students? - Yes - No	Y	N
8	When working with other students as part of your course, how helpful was this for your learning? - Very helpful - Fairly helpful - Not very helpful - Not at all helpful - This does not apply to me	Y	N
9	To what extent does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you've already learnt? - To a great extent - To some extent - Hardly at all - Not at all - This does not apply to me	Y	N
10	To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study? - To a very great extent - To a great extent - To a small extent - To a very small extent - Hardly at all - Not at all - This does not apply to me	Y	N
11	To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas or concepts in depth? - To a great extent - To some extent - Hardly at all - Not at all - This does not apply to me	Y	N
ASSESSMENT AND FEEDBACK		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
12	How often have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learnt? - Very often - Fairly often - Not very often - Rarely or never - This does not apply to me	Y	N
13	How often were you given marking criteria in advance? - Very often - Fairly often - Not very often - Rarely or never - This does not apply to me	Y	N

14	How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work? • Very clear • Fairly clear • Not very clear • Not at all clear • This does not apply to me	Y	N
15	How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course? • Very fair • Somewhat fair • Not very fair • Not at all fair • This does not apply to me	N	Y
16	How timely was your feedback? • Very timely • Fairly timely • Not very timely • Not at all timely • This does not apply to me	Y	Y
17	How often has feedback helped you improve your learning? • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
ACADEMIC SUPPORT		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
18	How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to? • Very easy • Fairly easy • Not very easy • Not at all easy • This does not apply to me	Y	N
19	How well have teaching staff supported your learning? • Very well • Fairly well • Not very well • Not at all well • This does not apply to me	Y	N
20	How often were you able to get good advice about study choices? • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
21	How well organised is your course? • Very well organised • Fairly well organised • Not very well organised • Not at all well organised • This does not apply to me	N	Y

		Full cognitive test	Scale check only
22	**How clearly were any changes to the course communicated?** • Very clearly • Fairly clearly • Not very clearly • Not at all clearly • This does not apply to me	N	Y
LEARNING RESOURCES		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
23	**How often have you been able to access the learning resources (either digital or physical) that you need?** • Very often • Fairly often • Not very often • Rarely or never • This does not apply to me	Y	N
24	**How well have the physical and/or digital resources supported your learning?** • Very well • Fairly well • Not very well • Not at all well • This does not apply to me	Y	N
25	**How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?** • Very well • Fairly well • Not very well • Not at all well • This does not apply to me	Y	N
26	**How well have the library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?** • Very well • Fairly well • Not very well • Not at all well • This does not apply to me	Y	N
STUDENT VOICE		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
27	**To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?** • To a great extent • To some extent • Hardly at all • Not at all • This does not apply to me	N	Y
28	**To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?** • To a great extent • To some extent • Hardly at all • Not at all • This does not apply to me	N	Y
29	**How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?** • Very clear • Fairly clear • Not very clear	N	Y

		Full cognitive test	Scale check only
	• Not at all clear • This does not apply to me		
30	**How effectively does the Students' Union (Association or Guild) represent students' academic interests?** • Very effectively • Fairly effectively • Not very effectively • Not at all effectively • This does not apply to me	N	Y
MENTAL WELLBEING SERVICES AT YOUR UNIVERSITY/COLLEGE		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
31	**How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?** • Extremely well • Very well • Fairly well • Fairly badly • Very badly • Extremely badly • This does not apply to me	Y	N
32	**Have you personally accessed any mental wellbeing services from your university/college?** *Please note that this information is confidential* • Yes • No • Prefer not to say	Y	N
33	**How easy is it to access your university or college's mental wellbeing services?** • Very easy • Fairly easy • Not very easy • Not at all easy • This does not apply to me • Prefer not to say	Y	N
34	**My university/college's services to support my mental wellbeing were available when I needed them** *If you have not accessed support services, please select 'Not applicable'* • Definitely agree • Mostly agree • Neither agree nor disagree • Mostly disagree • Definitely disagree • Not applicable	Y	N
ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
35	**During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions and beliefs?** • Very free • Fairly free • Not very free • Not at all free • This does not apply to me	Y	N

36	How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you'll need for your future? • Very well • Fairly well • Not very well • Not at all well • This does not apply to me	Y	N
SUMMATIVE QUESTIONS		**Full cognitive test**	**Scale check only**
37	How far do you agree with the following statement: Overall, the quality of my course has been good • Definitely agree • Mostly agree • Neither agree nor disagree • Mostly disagree • Definitely disagree • Not applicable.	Y	N
38	Overall, how would you rate the quality of your course? • Extremely good • Very good • Fairly good • Fairly poor • Very poor • Extremely poor • This does not apply to me	Y	Y