



STUDENT VOICES

EMEA 2019

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This report is based on research carried out between December 2017 and July 2018 by Cengage in collaboration with Shift Learning.

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Cengage (EMEA)
Cheriton House
North Way
Andover
Hampshire
SP10 5BE
United Kingdom

To find out more about this market research, please contact: emea.info@cengage.com

www.cengage.co.uk

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across the globe the last decade has seen a number of seismic shifts within the provision of higher education – the growing international demand for accessibility to higher education, the requirements of broadening inclusivity and new pressures caused by an ever-swelling global student population. Simultaneously many education systems have faced funding cuts, the reshaping of universities into more commercial enterprises and the tighter accountability that comes with that as a result. Thus, whilst the shape, size and character of HE institutions (HEI's) around the world continue to vary, there is increasingly a homogenisation in the challenges that they face.

Whilst the shape, size and character of HE institutions around the world continue to vary, there is increasingly a homogenisation in the challenges that they face.

Research, recently carried out by Cengage EMEA, a global education and technology company, has investigated some of the most prescient issues that HEI's and education content providers can work together to address: meeting student needs, enhancing the student experience, increasing student achievement, and ensuring students finish their education with the skills, tools and mental resources for a successful graduate career.

More importantly it gives voice to those that matter most – today's students. More specifically the research has been conducted to understand what students want to achieve on their course and degree, how they prefer to study and learn, what they think they need to do to achieve their goals, and their attitude towards digital resources. To date its focus has been on UK, European and South African undergraduates across a range of subjects, year groups, grade expectations and institution types.

The research finds, firstly, that the main motivation for doing an undergraduate degree varies between the regions, with UK students most likely to be studying for graduate prospects whereas EU students more often state that it is to pursue their interests and broaden their skills, whilst the South African students within the sample are largely currently in higher education to improve their financial prospects.

There is more agreement internationally over the aspects of their studies that students find difficult, with independent learning, writing elements, data analysis and critical thinking most often selected as elements that they find challenging. Overall, modules they find most challenging vary by subject area. Business and Economics students, for example, often find certain modules challenging due to the mathematical/statistical aspects and the amount of content. For others, subject specific modules are considered challenging due to the language and theoretical concepts.

When asked which employability skills they consider it most important that they learn whilst at university, most commonly stated are interpersonal skills, management and leadership skills, teamwork skills, communication skills and study skills. Pleasingly, most respondents feel that their institution does well in providing the opportunities to develop these essential employability attributes.

Students have overwhelmingly indicated a positive attitude towards digital resources and tools within their learning, and the majority state that they are always looking to try out something new. However, many also state that they are satisfied with the digital resources provided on their course, so, although they are keen to try out new digital tools and platforms, this does not necessarily mean that they are actively searching for them. Interestingly, although respondents indicate they are open to new digital tools, their current use varies depending on the type of resource. Those learning resources and tools with online reading and practice questions are used the most frequently, for example, whereas more interactive digital resources are used less so. The frequency of use of different learning resources also varies by subject and to a lesser degree by region, with the sample students in South Africa the most regular users of digital content. Employability resources are used fairly frequently too, particularly where they also benefit the students' current study needs.

The importance of digital resources is largely connected to frequency of use. Respondents report that the most important resources are 'test yourself questions', 'chapter summaries', 'assignment questions', 'online tutorials' and 'instant feedback for questions'. All of the resources students state they most commonly use are conducive to enabling independent learning

(test yourself questions, instant answer feedback, online tutorials etc.), which is in line with the higher number of students who suggest that independent learning is something that they have found challenging.

More generally, respondents feel that their course experience could be improved through more one-to-one guidance, more support on assignments and the provision of more digital resources, including a wider range of digital offerings by their institution and more guidance on where to find them and how to use them. This was regardless of whether students are paying tuition fees or not, and highlights an overall trend in the increasing demands and needs of students who are more frequently seeing themselves as higher education customers.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The expectations and needs of students are fast changing. In order for institutions and educational content providers to provide the very best in learning outcomes, enhance the student experience and better prepare them for life beyond higher education, it is vital that we keep our finger on the student pulse. That means ensuring that we not only provide younger generations with all the skills and knowledge required for a working life beyond university but also that we are planning forward and developing the educational content and support that will meet the requirements of students in the future.

For those working in higher education, the assumption is often that we know what students want and need better than the students do themselves. The main aim of this research was to throw those assumptions out the window and to provide comprehensive investigation into the real aspirations, needs and experiences of today's students – real student voices.

The research for Student Voices was carried out for Cengage by Shift Learning, a market research agency specialising in the education and learning sector. An in-depth e-Survey was produced that questioned attitudes and experiences to a number of core topics affecting students today, including the challenges of higher education study; their use of resources, particularly digital; their attitude towards employability skills; and their motivations for undergraduate study and overall opinions on their course and educational experience.

In the first phase, the survey was sent out to current undergraduate students (all years of study) based in the UK and EU (the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries). These were sent out through various channels:

UCAS Student Room Cint Panel Cengage Lists Shift Learning Lists

A second stage was also carried out within South Africa, with the survey sent to students in a private institution.

Cengage were interested in respondents studying the following subjects:

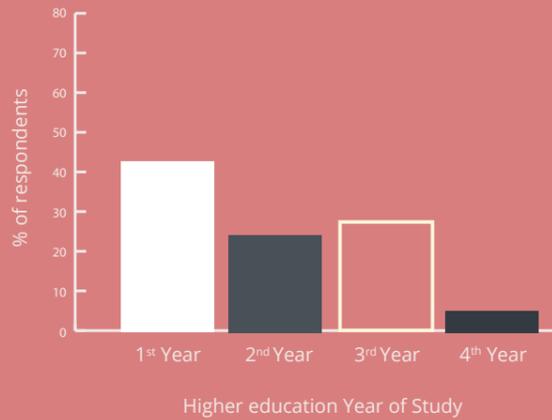
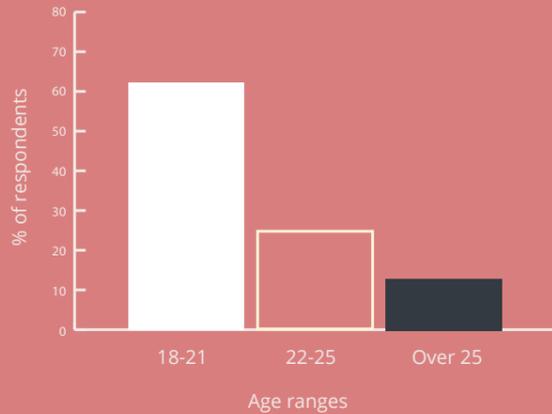
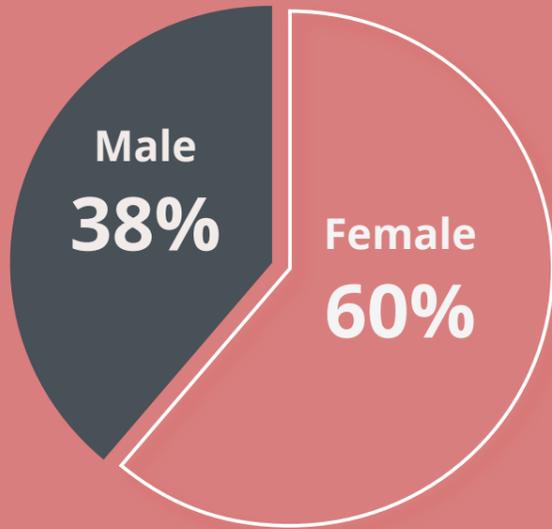
- Accounting
- Business
- Economics
- Finance
- Marketing
- Computer Science
- Mathematics
- Chemistry
- Physics
- Psychology

So, whilst the research does not investigate the complete student universe, it does provide a wide and varied insight into a broad range of student experience. After data cleansing the total number of responses across both phases was 772.

“772 unique
student voices”

PROFILE OF STUDENT RESPONSES

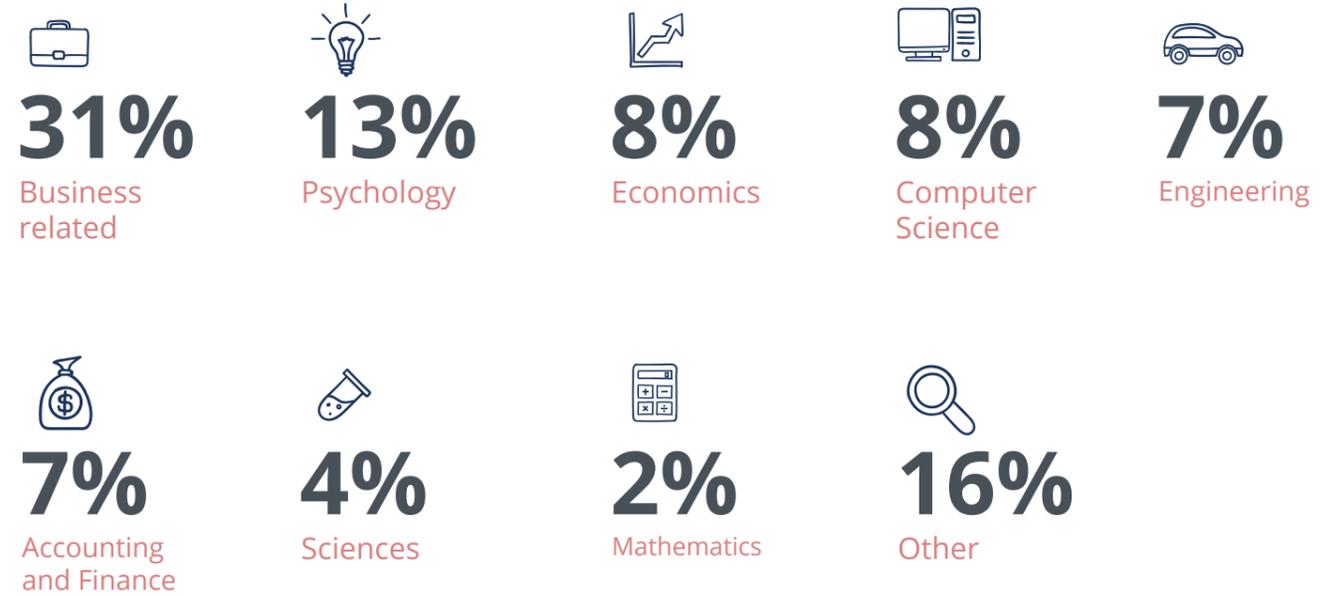
PROFILE OF STUDENT RESPONSES



A mixture of students was achieved in the sample in terms of age, gender, country of study and year of study. The majority of responses came from students classifying themselves as female, most were of aged 18-22, and almost half the responses came from students currently in their first year.

Students were screened to ensure they study in the UK, Scandinavia or the Netherlands as those were the target markets of interest. The Phase 2 survey was sent to current undergraduate students in a private South African higher education institution. 49% of respondents study in the UK, 27% in South Africa, with the remaining 24% studying in the rest of the EU.

Respondents were screened based on their subject of study with the aim of focusing on specific target subjects of interest. The highest percentage of student responses came from business-related subjects, which included Business, Management and Marketing. The science subjects targeted and combined in this case were Chemistry and Physics.

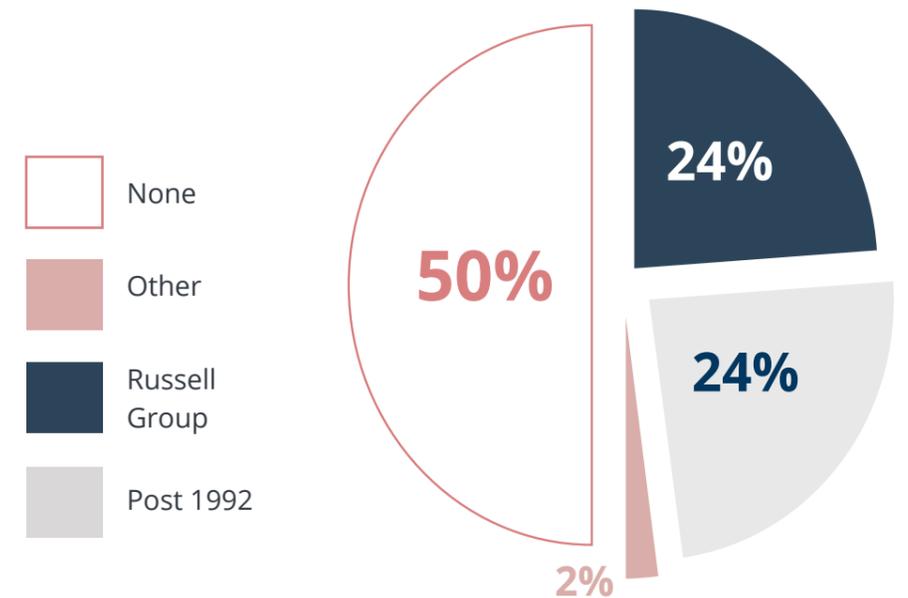


Students were asked what grades they were expecting to receive in their degree. This was then assigned a category based on individual country grading systems. As a result not only was a suitable mixture of subjects achieved in the sample but also a range of grade expectations, with the majority of respondents working towards a mid-level grade.



The research sample was pulled from a broad and diverse range of educational institutions. The respondents' institution QS rankings varied widely. UK respondents' universities fall into the following groups:

University grouping



CONTINUED...

TEF Rating

UK universities were also categorised by their TEF rating*. From this we can, again, see a broad range, with the majority of UK respondents going to TEF Silver-rated UK institutions, with a further 33% attending gold-rated HEIs.

The universities that UK students study at received the following TEF ratings in 2018.

- GOLD: 33%
- SILVER: 49%
- BRONZE: 7%
- No rating: 11%

QS Ranking

Categorising the institutions by their QS Rankings, we can see that whilst over 40% of respondents go to HEI's without a QS ranking, the remaining 59% cover a wide range of educational establishments, giving a richness to our student sample.

* N.b.: QS rankings as of Dec 2017. TEF ratings as of June 2018.

QS Ranking*			
QS Rankings	%	QS Rankings	%
1-50	5%	301-400	4%
51-100	5%	401-600	3%
101-150	4%	601-800	7%
151-200	5%	801-1000	2%
201-300	6%	No QS ranking	57%

Participation in the UK's TEF awards, measuring the delivery of teaching, learning and student outcomes, is currently voluntary.



STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATION

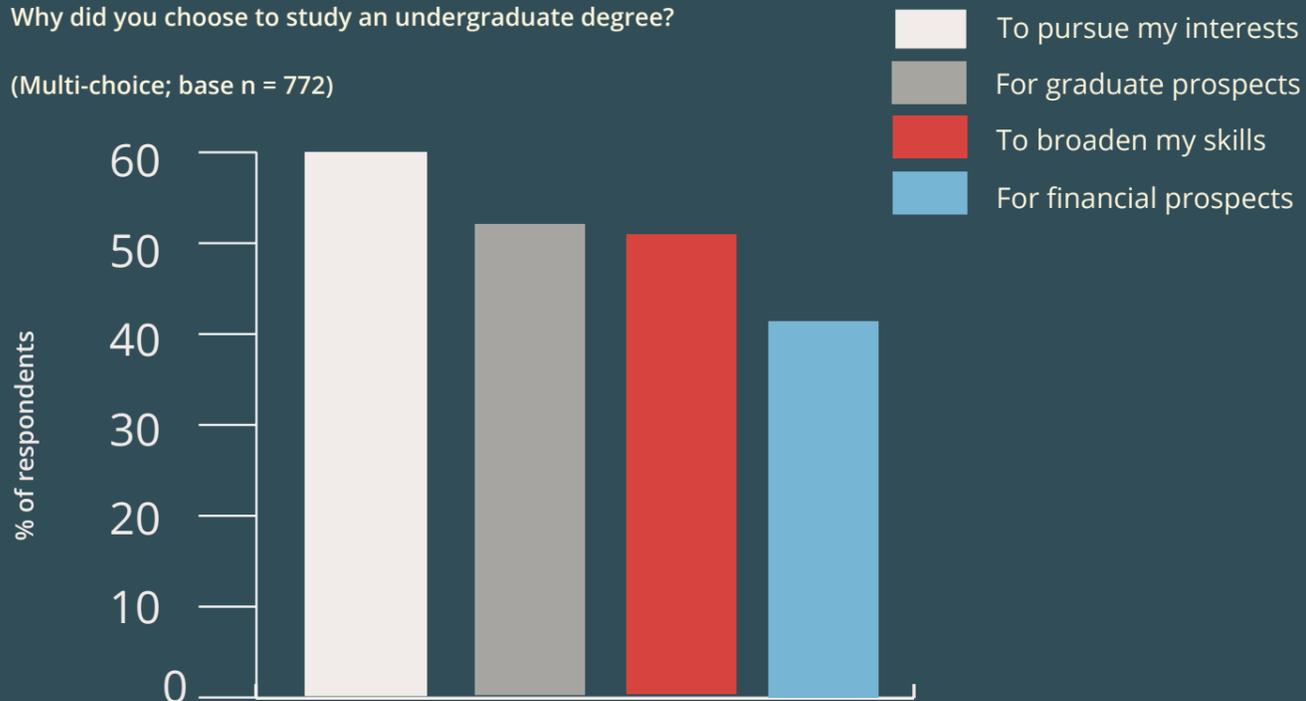
STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATION

As part of the research, students were asked about their motivations for entering higher education. This helps in understanding the students' perceived requirements of the qualification but also as a means of understanding their perceived satisfaction with the course, of the means of teaching and learning taking place, and the resources and support that is being given. There is some variation between regions as to the motivations for pursuing an undergraduate degree although most chose to study an undergraduate degree to choosing their interests, with their financial prospects post-degree being of lesser immediate concern.

60% of respondents state they have chosen to study an undergraduate degree to pursue their interests whilst only 41% chose to for financial prospects.

Why did you choose to study an undergraduate degree?

(Multi-choice; base n = 772)



Within these overall figures there are interesting variances between regions. European students are most likely to study to pursue their interests (54%), closely followed by a motivation of broadening their skills (51%). However, UK students are 20% more likely than their European counterparts to choose a degree for graduate prospects (63% compared to 43%). This is the UK's top reason for studying, followed by pursuing interests (61%), broadening skills (49%) and financial prospects (40%). The reasons for this discrepancy may include the impact of rising student fees in the UK forcing students to be taking their graduate subject choices with a longer career-plan in mind or the perceived belief in the increasing requirement of a degree for certain levels of job. South African respondents are most likely to want to study for financial prospects (53%).

Those studying Business-related degrees are significantly less likely to study in order to pursue their interests (50%). This could be due to the more vocational nature of the subject. Conversely, those studying sciences are significantly more likely to be studying to further pursue an interest (79%).

Other responses to the question include:

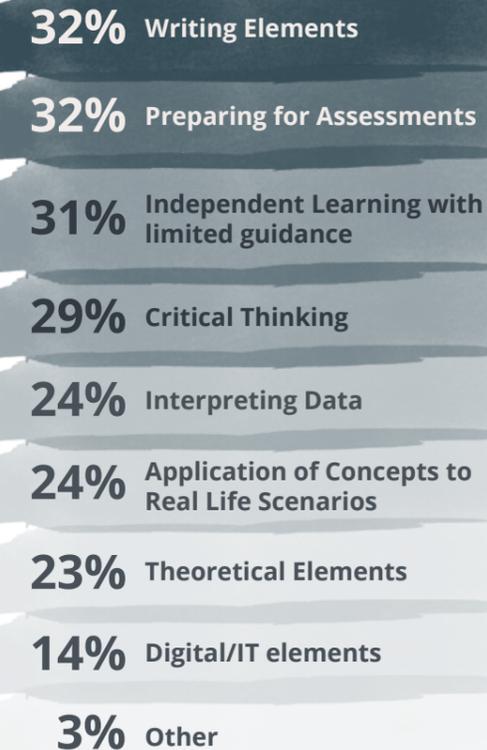
- Buying time while figuring out what they want to do
- Pressure from parents/schools
- For the university experience
- To move away from home.

Student Challenges

To understand how HEIs and educational content providers can better support student learning, students were asked to select from a list what elements of their undergraduate course they find or had found challenging. They could select as many as they liked. They were then asked what they thought were the most challenging from the options they had selected.

Overall, the most commonly selected element was 'writing', followed closely by 'independent learning'. The latter may be indicative of the fact that 43% of the sample are first year students, still making the transition from more guided school learning. By the third year students are more likely to state that they find 'data analysis' a challenge (39%), suggesting that by this point in their degree they are more used to independent study and, instead, may need more assistance with the more complex and academic elements taught in the latter stages of their course.

There are, however, differences between the subject areas. Respondents who are studying Accounting and



Finance are more likely to state that 'the application of concepts to real life scenarios' is a challenging element (46%).

Those studying Mathematics are more likely to state that 'theoretical elements' is a challenging element of their course (59%).

Furthermore, UK respondents struggle more than their EU counterparts with 'critical thinking' (38%) and 'writing elements' (35%), whereas EU struggle more than UK students when it comes to data analysis (34%).

South African students requested most help in 'preparing for assessments'.

STUDENT COURSE EXPERIENCE AND MOTIVATION

For each subject area, there are key top modules that respondents report as being difficult. Outlined below are some of the top modules that students from different subject areas reported challenging.

Accounting & Finance	Business	Management	Marketing
Financial Accounting Managerial-related Audit-related	Accounting Business Decision Making Business Ethics Economics-related Financial Accounting Organisational Behaviour and Analysis	Business Economics Business Law Economics Law Philosophy of Science Statistics	Business Economics Business Law Economics Philosophy of Science Statistics
Economics	Computer Science	Science*	Engineering
Macroeconomics Microeconomics Statistics	Mathematics-related Programming-related	Biochemistry Electromagnetism Mathematics-related Quantum Physics	Fluid Mechanics Mathematics-related Mechanical Engineering Thermodynamics
Mathematics	Psychology	<p>Notes: Due to low sample sizes, we have combined some subjects to create broader subject areas. The above only includes the subjects of interest for Cengage.</p> <p>Sample sizes for subject areas vary and these lists only include some of the most mentioned module titles.</p> <p>*Sciences = Physics and Chemistry</p>	
Algebra-related Calculus Programming/Modeling-related	Biology-related Cognitive Psychology Research Methods Statistics		

Respondents in their first year of undergraduate study are more likely to find Marketing (5%), and Organisational Behaviour/ Analysis (4%) difficult compared to respondents in other years of study. Whilst, come the third year, respondents are more likely to find Economics (16%), Philosophy/Theory of Science (10%), and Law (8%) difficult. When analysing all the responses, across multiple subjects and year groups we find that the range of modules that respondents particularly find challenging are those with mathematical and statistical elements to them, which points to more support being required within these areas of learning.

Students found the following elements to be the most challenging:

- Mathematical/statistical elements
- Amount of content/formulas to memorise
- Understanding theory



SPOTLIGHT ON EUROPE

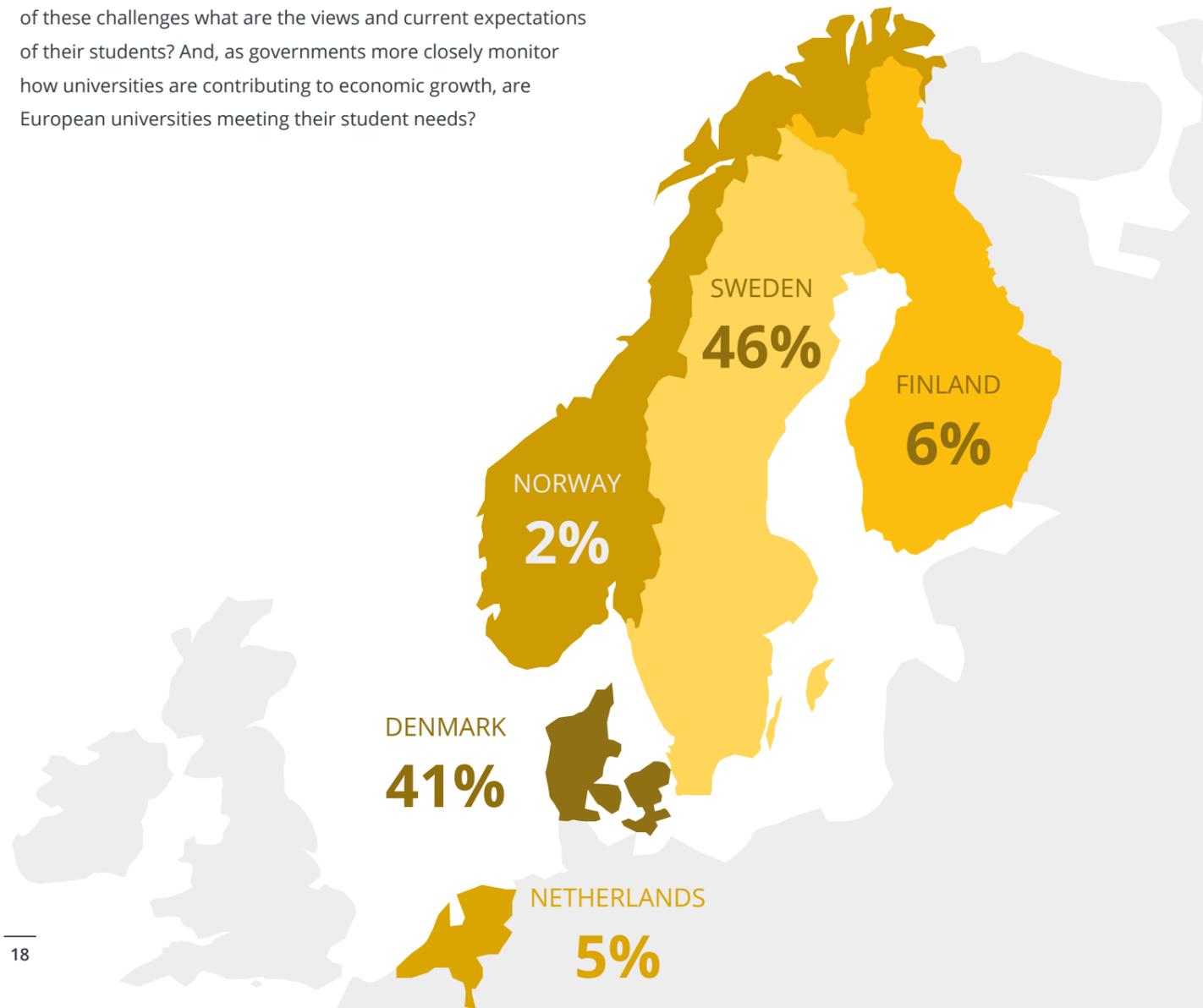
SPOTLIGHT ON EUROPE

Outside of the UK, the European strand of the research focused on the Netherlands and Nordic countries. Here, as elsewhere, higher education is currently in a state of flux. There is increased pressure on institutions as over the last twenty years the market has opened up, increasing student participation but also competition. A unique element in the Nordic model is the huge investment of public funds in higher education, with little or no funding expected from students. However, more recently government states have largely levelled out or even reduced its financial support, forcing universities to find new sources of revenues, monitor their use of resources more stringently, and seek ways of reducing their costs whilst maintaining the high global reputation that Nordic higher education receives. In light of these challenges what are the views and current expectations of their students? And, as governments more closely monitor how universities are contributing to economic growth, are European universities meeting their student needs?

The European Student Profile

The research focuses on the Netherlands and Scandinavian countries, with 184 European responses in total.

Institutions were classified as universities or Hogskolor (University Colleges) with the breakdown in the sample as follows:



Given that most students within the European sample pay no fees, it is not surprising that they most commonly state that they are studying to pursue their own interests (54%), with less than half (43%) claiming they are in higher education for graduate prospects. Across the whole sample, European students are least motivated by any financial prospects.

In terms of their subject disciplines, the majority are currently studying Marketing (34%), with 16% studying Economics, 11% studying Business, and the remaining spread evenly amongst the remaining subject areas of interest. Respondents are largely in their third year, with the rest split evenly between their first and second year of study.

Student Course Experience

The two elements of their course that European students most often claim they struggle with is data analysis (34%) and interpreting data (28%), which is understandable given the high percentage of Marketing, Economics and Business students within the respondents, and the fact that most are currently in their third year when typically undergraduate study becomes more analytical. A high level of concern also comes from the writing elements of their course (29%) as well as the challenge of independent learning and the application of concepts to real-life scenarios. When the responses are analysed more broadly, we can see that it is the modules with a mathematical or statistical element that European students feel they struggle with most and there is perhaps scope here to provide students taking these modules within the region with more academic and digital support.

Student View on Employability Skills

European students place less emphasis than UK students on the provision of employability skills that are not directly linked to their study, possibly because they have a lower expectation of acquiring their skills through their institution or because of their low or zero tuition fees. They do, however, believe that their institution is supporting them 'very well' (52%) in providing them with the necessary employability skills. Most critical to European students is the learning of teamwork, verbal communication, and management and leadership skills, although these results may be swayed by the high proportion of EU responses in subject areas more aligned with these skills. When grouped

together EU students consider interpersonal skills the most important employable asset that they should be learning at university.

Digital Resources: Student Experience and Perceptions

In terms of the provision of digital learning resources, European students use case studies, journal articles summaries or readings with questions the most regularly. These are generally used very frequently; while European students also use moderately frequently chapter summaries, test questions and end of chapter questions, as well as videos and animations to help them learn. Like their international counterparts they are least interested in any audio functions. The resources they use for skills development or employability skills are most likely to be resources that help them to develop soft skills, such as teamwork and interpersonal skills, with these mostly used every day or several times a week. Digital resources used less often (between once a week to once a month) are most likely to be resources that develop their careers skills (40%) such as organisation, leadership and communication skills.

When thinking about their course, European students on the whole strongly agree that digital resources are essential to them doing and also most strongly disagree that they only use digital resources that their course lecturers recommend. This suggests, as in other regions, that students see the importance of having digital resources available to them and are keen to seek out more; indeed more so than UK and South African students with 21% stating that they are keen for a wider digital offering and recommendations. 18% of European students also asked for more digital resources to satisfy them with their course, a higher percentage than within the other regions, suggesting that there is both the opportunity and need for more digital support. They were also, however, the region most happy with their overall course experience, with 16% stating that nothing more could be offered to improve their satisfaction with their course.

European students are the most happy with their overall course experience.

STUDENT VIEW ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

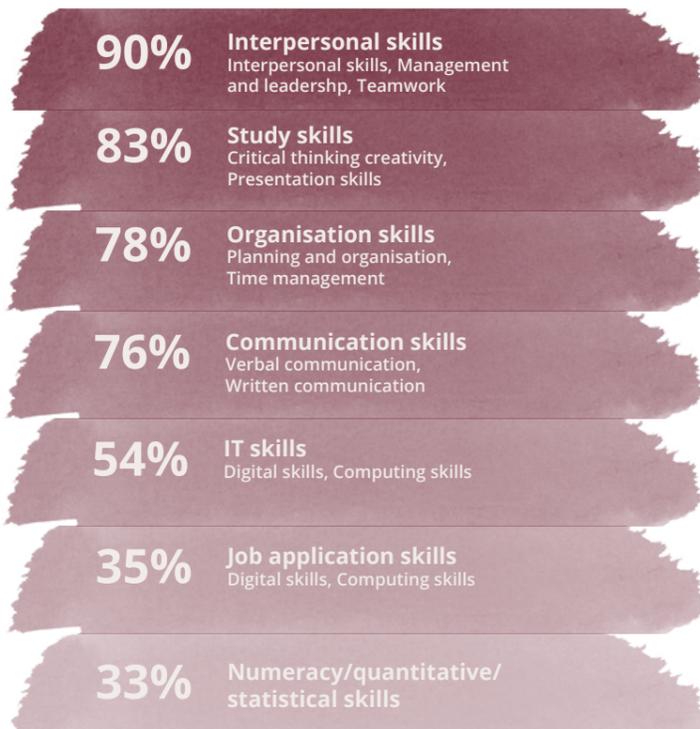


STUDENT VIEW ON EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

Over recent years there has been an increased drive within HEIs to provide students with more employability skills. This has particularly been the case in the UK where universities are measured by the percentage of graduates in employment or further study six months after graduating. As part of our survey students were asked their views on the employability skills their institution was providing them with.

When offered a choice of 15 skill sets, the most important employability skills respondents thought they needed to acquire were verbal communication, teamwork, and planning and organisation skills, whilst communication and study skills were considered more important than careers support.

These 15 skills can be grouped into 7 wider bands. From this it is clear that interpersonal skills and study skills are considered the key employability skill requirements they seek from their institution.



Further analysis shows that students tend to place most importance on employability skills with a direct relevance to skills relating to their current area of study and to their future career goals.

Students were then asked to select their single most important employability skill from the group of skills they had chosen in the previous question.

The employability skill students consider the most important is Critical Thinking (17%), followed by Verbal Communication (16%) and Management and Leadership skills (12%).

Subject Variations

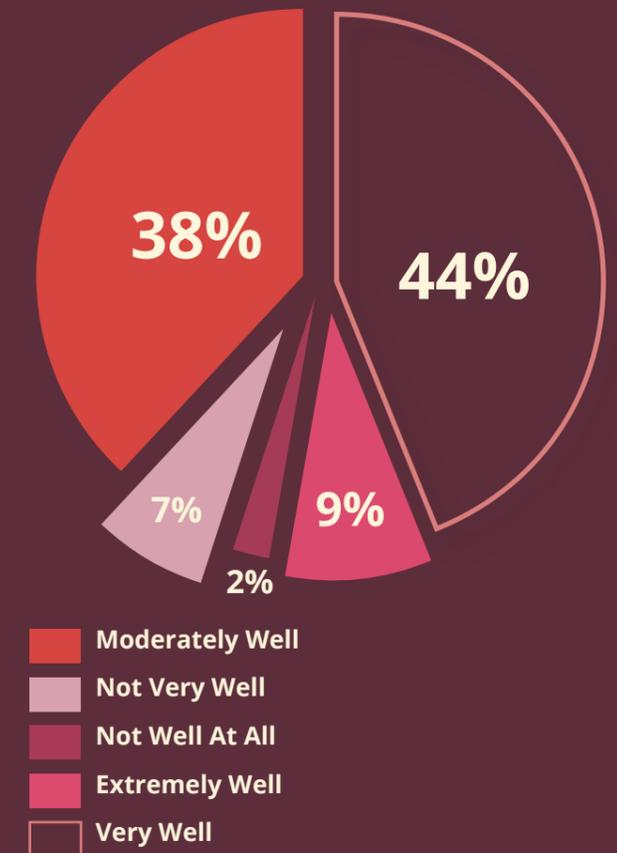
There were some inevitable variations between subjects. Unsurprisingly, Management students are more likely to consider management and leadership skills (18%) to be the most important skillsets needed for their future career. Computer Science students are more likely to consider computing skills the most important (26%), whilst for Accounting students it is numeracy and quantitative skills (13%). When given the opportunity to select any number of employability skills though, Psychology students are more likely to consider interpersonal skills (63%) as important to them, Marketing students consider digital skills important (9%) and 18% of Business students consider management and leadership skills as something that would be beneficial, something that a third of Science students consider unimportant.

considered in the UK. South African students are more likely to find study skills (93%), organisation skills (90%) and IT skills (62%) as important, compared to their UK and European counterparts.

Regardless of region, there is a high level of satisfaction in the provision of these skills. Over half (53%) of students, overall, think their institution provides them with employability skills 'very well' or 'extremely well' with only 9% giving a negative response. The students most likely to say that their institution was providing employability skills 'very well' were in Business-related subjects (53%), whilst those most likely to say that their institution 'does not do well at all' in providing employability skills were Science/Tech/Maths students. European students seem most pleased with the level of skills their university is providing them, with 52% stating they are provided 'very well'.

Over half of students think their institution does very or extremely well in providing them with opportunities to improve their employability skills

Thinking about the employability skills that you selected in the previous questions, how well would you say your institution does in providing you with these? (Base n = 772)



Regional Variations

UK students appear to place a stronger importance than EU students on the provision of employability skills, which are not directly linked to study. This may be because EU students have a lower expectation of acquiring these types of skills through their institution, or because higher UK tuition fees are making UK students more career-focused. This also links with the findings around the motivations for study of UK students, as outlined on page 14.

Although both UK and EU students think the wider groupings of interpersonal skills, communication skills and study skills are important, UK respondents are much more likely to place importance on employability-specific skills (such as organisation skills, job application skills and numeracy/quantitative/statistical skills) than EU respondents, whereas EU students considered that presentation skills and creativity has more value than is

DIGITAL RESOURCES: STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS

DIGITAL RESOURCES: STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND PERCEPTIONS

With the majority of new students starting in higher education being classified as 'digital natives' and the drive for greater efficiencies, more student engagement, and IT-related employability skills, institutions are facing increasing pressure to integrate a wider scope of digital resources into the learning environment. This might range from simple software tools or eBooks and electronic journals to fully integrated teaching, learning and assessment platforms that sit within their Learning Management System (LMS). But to what degree are students using these resources, what is their attitude towards them, which resources do they find most useful, and are they really in need of an ever-widening range of digital options?

Respondents mostly indicate a positive attitude towards digital resources and state that they are keen to try out new digital tools for their course

When shown a set of statements regarding their attitude to digital resources the majority of respondents indicate that they feel that digital resources are an essential part of their course and are open to trying out new tools. Respondents agree to a lesser extent that they only use digital resources that their lecturers recommend, which indicates that they would be open to trying other tools. They also agree, on the whole, that they are satisfied with the quality of resources provided on their course, although with some areas of improvement required.

79% of students agree that digital resources are essential as part of their course for them to achieve their learning goals.

Digital resources that provide students with some sort of guidance are more frequently used whereas 'innovative' digital learning resources are used less often.

As part of the research, respondents were presented with a range of digital learning resources and features, and were asked how frequently they make use of them in their undergraduate degree. Some of the more frequently used resources include digital resources that involve online reading or tests and questions. This includes case studies, journal article summaries with questions, end of chapter questions, assignment questions or practice questions. Taken as a whole these are all resources that provide reaffirmation of content learnt.

Some of the less frequently used resources include the more interactive digital resources. This includes audio function for readings, simulations, flashcards, interactive glossaries and eBooks with facilities to make notes. This may be because these resources are not as consistently available.

As expected there is some discrepancy between subjects. Business-related students are more likely to use case studies and chapter summaries whereas Psychology students are more likely to use referencing software and flashcards and think journal article summaries are important. Computer Science students more likely to use videos and animations, as well as online tutorials and walkthroughs; whilst Accounting and Finance students favour end-of-chapter questions and test yourself/practice questions.

Respondents were then asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 7, where 7 was most important, it is that digital learning resources contain these features. The importance of these features is largely connected to frequency of use, with some variations. The results show that digital resources that provide guidance, allow revision of content or a chance to gain feedback are considered the most important.

- 5.8 Test Yourself/practice questions
- 5.6 Chapter summaries
instant feedback for questions
- 5.5 Assignment questions that form part of final grade
- 5.1 Online tutorials and walkthrough video or written guides
Videos and Animations
End of chapter questions
- 5.0 Case studies
- 4.9 Journal article summaries or reading with questions
- 4.8 Referencing software
- 4.6 Ebook with facility to make notes
- 4.3 Interactive Glossary
- 4.1 Flashcards
Simulations
- 3.7 Audio Function for chapters and readings

CONTINUED...

Those resources with the lower gradings (audio function, simulations and flashcards) may be down to a reduced need or because these digital elements are not widely available.

Regional Differences

There are some regional differences. UK respondents are more likely to state that flashcards (31%) are very important, and that referencing software (20%) and assignment questions (30%) are extremely important. Whereas EU respondents favour chapter summaries (36%). In South Africa they are most likely to state that all digital resources are extremely important to them, suggesting an increased reliance on digital support for their studies within region.

A third of students use employability resources several times a week, while a further third use them weekly or monthly.

Digital Resource Usage

Digital resources connected to developing skills for personal development or employability are used across the board by students. IT, soft skills and career skills resources are more widely used, although close to a third of respondents said they use all the resources listed. Overall, those resources most regularly used were those that develop IT skills such as Microsoft Office, which 45% of students said they used 'very frequently'.

The students using the employment-related resources most regularly are students of business-related subjects who use resources to develop soft skills (43%) and career skills (39%) daily or several times a week, while Science, Maths and Technology students are less likely to use them. Business and Marketing students are particularly heavy users of any resources regardless of region, year group, or institution type.

Students would like wider digital offerings as well as more guidance on how to use and access them

An open question asked students what they thought could be done or offered to improve their satisfaction with the quality of digital resources provided by their institution for their course.

While respondents are largely satisfied with the resources they have access to at university, the responses here reveal some themes that have arisen more widely in the research. Students are looking for more guidance and information about the resources that are available and how to access and use them.

Similarly, accessibility appears to be key. With students generally happy with the level of resources they receive, any new resources need to be highly visible, e.g. through an institutional LMS and highlighted by their lecturers, and easy to use, remotely accessible and with minimal user restrictions. Consistency across course content and specificity to modules is also in demand by some students.

20% Giving wider digital offerings or recommendations

15% More guidance on how to use and find digital resources

11% Improved accessibility e.g. : No caps on usage, off campus access, easy to use

8% Access to more free digital resources

5% Higher quality and regularly updated resources

4% More interactive digital resources

1% Consistent resource provision across modules



SPOTLIGHT ON SOUTH AFRICA

The Higher education system in South Africa has had a tumultuous few years. It is still feeling the ramifications of the 2015 student revolt, which in itself was a reaction to what students regarded as the unfulfilled promises of higher education policies since 1997 – their rebellion fuelled most by the demand for free higher education. The process of reshaping the curriculum has been on-going since 2006, whilst the system continues to struggle with inclusivity issues and the challenges thrown up by increasingly large class sizes. Emerging technologies, though, and the increased use of digital resources has offered some solution to the latter issue and is more frequently driving institutions to invest in emerging technologies and digital resources to help relieve the pressure. Within this context it is hard, but more important than ever, that the student voice is heard.

The South African Student Profile

In Phase 2 of the research, the same student questionnaire used within the UK and Europe was sent to undergraduate students currently enrolled at Monash, a private education institution in South Africa. Analysis based on the results is therefore limited to this sole institution and not necessarily indicative of other institutions in the region, whilst comparisons made with the UK and European responses should be treated with caution for the same reason. However, this small snap-shot of the attitudes, perceptions and experiences of the students at Monash has produced some interesting findings.

In total 332 South African students completed the survey. After data cleansing, these totalled 209 valid responses. The majority are female (59%) and aged between 18-21 (60%) with a further 34% aged 22-25. The top 5 subjects they are currently studying are:

- Accounting (18%)
- Psychology (14%)
- Computer Science (12%)
- Business (11%)
- Economics (9%)

Within the sample there is an even spread between Years 1-3. At Monash the biggest motivation for their studies is financial prospects (53%), this reason being selected more often than UK and European students.

Student Course Experience

The element of their course that most of the South African

respondents find challenging is preparing for assessments (35%) and data analysis (31%), with a large percentage also expressing that they have felt challenged by independent learning and applying concepts to real-life scenarios (28% each). They are largely more confident than their UK and European counterparts with digital and IT elements. As seen in the other regions though, it is the modules with mathematical and statistical elements that they most commonly cite as difficult, with the highest percentage (15%) naming their Statistics module, and a further 11% naming Accounting.

Student View on Employability Skills

When it comes to employability skills the South African students are more likely to consider study skills (93%), organisation skills (90%), IT skills (62%), and job application skills (42%) as an important part of their learning, compared to UK and EU students. They are however, also more likely to state that their university provides them with these skills 'extremely well'.

The South African students 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with four out of five of the following statements:

Key:



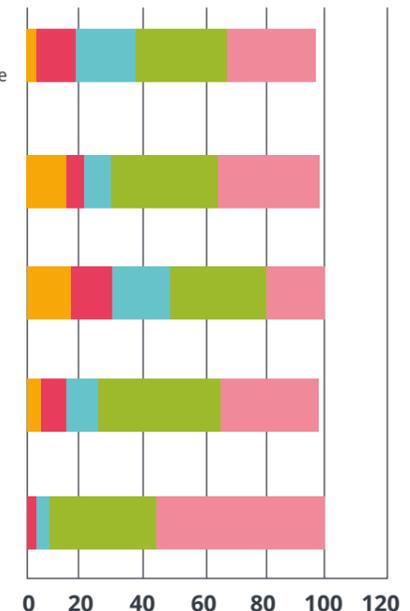
Digital resources are essential as part of my course for me to achieve my learning goals.

I am always looking to try out new digital tools for my course

I only use the digital resources my course lecturer recommends

I only use the digital resources that are provided free on my course

I am satisfied with the quality of the digital resources provided for my course



CONTINUED...

Interestingly, the only statement they waver on more or disagree with is the statement that they only use digital resources that have been recommended by their course lecturer. This suggests that they are actively seeking out other digital resources to support their learning, which in turn suggests a gap in provision that further investigation might be able to plug.

Digital Resources: Student Experience and Perceptions

The availability and use of digital resources is key to the student experience in South Africa. When provided with a range of digital resources that might be applicable to them, they are more likely to state that they are all extremely important, and expect these resources to be made available to them through the institution. They do, however, make good use of them with South African students, using them more frequently than students in the UK and Europe. These digital resources that are more likely to be used 'very frequently' are online tutorials and walkthrough videos or written guides (with 57% stating they used them 'very frequently'), videos and animations (54%), chapter summaries (50%) and test-yourself and practice questions (49%). A significant proportion (44%) state that they use resources that will improve their IT skills such as Microsoft Office every day. When asked what might improve their satisfaction with the digital resources provided, 19% said they wanted a wider range and 19% also said they wanted the resources to be more accessible (no caps on student usage, access off campus, etc.) This seems to be in line with the fact that many are seeking out resources beyond lecturer recommendations, and is reiterated when asked about their course generally.

The most commonly requested improvement (by 16% of respondents) is more digital resources, although this is a measure of only one institution and should not necessarily be seen as indicative of the opinion of all students in South Africa.

The most commonly requested improvement for their course is more digital resources.

IMPROVING THE COURSE EXPERIENCE

IMPROVING THE COURSE EXPERIENCE

In a market facing increasing competition between institutions and – in many regions – the rise of student fees, student satisfaction is paramount to the success of any education establishment. A final question asked respondents to think more generally about their course and the challenges they experienced and, within this context, to suggest what could be offered to improve their learning experience.

Note: This was a non-compulsory open question; Percentages in the table are included where n = 10 or more respondents included suggestions in this area.

“More support and guidance with their studies would be most welcomed by students.”

- 16%** More guidance or one to one sessions
- 12%** More digital resources
- 10%** More support and guidance with assignments
- 7%** Improved teaching
- 7%** Video tutorials
- 6%** More practical and interactive elements
- 4%** Real life scenarios
- 4%** Practice questions and answers

Here again, strong themes arise around support and guidance, in relation to resource provision; but also in increased support and feedback to help with understanding concepts, and with writing coursework and assignments during independent learning. This includes increased one-to-one tutor support and group work, as well as access to video tutorials, practice questions, and lectures and content offering practical, ‘real life’ scenarios to reinforce learning.

Other areas were suggested by 10 or fewer respondents, echoing these themes:

- Course specific support
- Improved facilities
- Employability support
- Support and guidance to make using digital resources easier
- Free resources
- More group work
- Revision/Time management software/support
- More print resources

With almost a third of students across all regions requesting more support and increasing workload and pressures on teaching staff, more guidance could be provided through digital applications particularly as those being regularly used provide some form of in-built student guidance tool.

CONCLUSIONS

What can be taken from this research? Anyone working in higher education knows that students are evolving. They are becoming more digitally aware, more focused on higher education as a step towards better graduate or financial prospects, and with that are making more demands on educational institutions.

With many going to university to ensure they leave more employable and in well-paid jobs, they want institutions to provide them with important employability skills. In many cases skills are less tangible and are, perhaps, harder to teach and learn (than, say, IT skills). Teaching staff should consider more interactive learning opportunities, more group work and use of real-life scenarios to enhance students' interpersonal skills, and perhaps there is scope for more emphasis to be put on employability skills more generally within education.

Institutions can provide more focus on the varying challenges that students have highlighted, with an awareness that these change over the duration of a student's learning. First year students should be provided with more support and guidance on independent learning, whilst final year students require more assistance on analysing data and thinking critically. Across the year groups, students have stated that they find writing difficult and more support could be given on improving confidence and these skills. The modules they struggle with most and need more support with vary. For some subjects it is those with a mathematical element and more time and resources could be employed in helping to ease this. For other subjects it is the language and terminology used or the theoretical concepts that they struggle with. This could be why they value opportunities to test themselves with practice questions – to ensure they have grasped what they need to in order to do well.

As a result, it is not surprising that those resources utilised the most are those that students can use to test themselves. These online tools and practice opportunities ease them into becoming

more confident with independent learning. Many of the resources most widely used ensure efficiency with their time and are results-driven. For example, they value being able to check their knowledge and get immediate feedback on what they know, and for key information to be whittled down for them. In short, they are looking for the most efficient ways of learning. As expected, the more they use a resource the more value it has to them, which is why it is important that institutions fully integrate any resources they have invested in into their courses. Students are generally happy with the resources being provided but would readily welcome more. However, these need to be presented clearly to students, made easily accessible and advocated by teaching staff. Students also require guidance on how to use the resource and get the most of it. As across their overall university experience, students would like more one-to-one guidance and support and this throws up a challenge for time-poor teaching staff. It may be that digital solutions can provide a partial answer – either by directly providing the sort of guidance that students are looking for within the LMS, or to help ease the strain of other teaching requirements such as automatic grading, freeing up more time for one-to-one student interaction.

One thing is for certain. The demands and needs of students are rising and complex. For institutions to be sure they providing solutions, meeting student expectations and improving the learning experience, providing opportunities for the student voice to be heard requires an on-going process. Only in doing this do institutions stand a chance of providing their students with the very best that education can offer – today, tomorrow and beyond.

If you would like your institution to be involved in our on-going Student Voices research, contact your Cengage Learning Consultant or visit cengage.co.uk/student-voices



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Cengage Learning (EMEA) Ltd
Registered Office: Cheriton House, North Way, Andover, Hampshire,
SP10 5BE
Registered in England and Wales: Number: 903535 –
VAT number: GB198923209

www.cengage.co.uk



9780418289334