2020/2021 HeppSY Partnership Report

heppSY

OfS Uni Connect Programme

Foreword

This year's partnership report outlines the main findings from the latest wave of the national survey, carried out in HeppSY partner schools and college across October, November and December 2020.

With over 4,000 responses, it provides the partnership with important insights into young people's perceptions, attitudes and knowledge of higher education in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. Further, it offers the region the most extensive overview of how Covid-19 has directly impacted young people's educational ambitions and decision making to date. We hope this is of interest and use to a wide variety of stakeholders across South Yorkshire.

The outcomes and recommendations made will further develop the work of HeppSY as we come to the end of Phase 2, and launch our Phase 3 offer with partners in September.

We would like to thank all our school and college partners for the continued support in administering the survey, especially during this difficult period. We hope the findings offer partners useful insights that will support both their work on curriculum, and with HeppSY as we move towards Phase 3 of the programme.

Professor Brendan Stone
University of Sheffield Deputy Vice-President for Education, and HeppSY chair
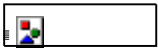
Executive summary

Introduction

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the national Uni Connect programme (UCP), funded by the Office for Students (OfS), to help school and college students aged 13-19 across South Yorkshire who are most at risk of missing out on higher education (HE). HeppSY is working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

This report reviews the outcomes from Wave 3 of the Uni Connect survey. The survey was completed by students in Years 9–13 and Level 3 Years 1 and 2[1], online and in HeppSY schools and colleges during October to January of 2020/2021, and forms part of the national evaluation being conducted by CFE research. Overall, 4,421 complete student responses across 43 schools/colleges were included in the final dataset.

The responses were collected during the global coronavirus pandemic, and therefore reflect the changing attitudes of school and college students whose learning was severely disrupted due to school and college closures and intermittent home learning. Students who were the most impacted by the pandemic may have been less likely to complete the survey, possibly contributing to the lower response rates compared to surveys that were completed in prior academic years (HeppSY 2018, HeppSY 2019 and HeppSY 2020). For example, the Wave 2 survey received 2.8 times more complete responses. Direct comparisons with previous waves of the CFE survey may therefore be less robust.

The main aims and objectives of the report are as follows:

- To outline the attitudes of young people in South Yorkshire towards HE and its potential benefits.

- To make evidence-based recommendations that support HeppSY in appropriately targeting provision for the next academic year.

- To inform and influence outreach activity planning by partnership members including local universities and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

- To provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HE expectations and home learning experiences of school and college students in South Yorkshire.

The outcomes reported here provide an indication of how young people in HeppSY partner schools and colleges across South Yorkshire conceptualise HE, and their potential place within it. Crucially, we can use the insights generated to highlight existing gaps and tailor subsequent provision, ensuring students are supported in the most appropriate and impactful way possible.

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1   In general, Year 12 and 13 refers to students completing their A-Levels and Level 3 Year 1 and 2 refers to students completing Level 3 courses other than A-Levels, such as BTEC and NVQ vocational qualifications. Students' year groups were self-reported, and not verified through any objective measure.

Findings and recommendations

The key findings of the research are detailed below, split by substantive section.

Likelihood of applying to HE at age 18/19

- 69% of students from UCP postcodes and 75% of students from non-UCP postcodes reported that they were likely to apply to HE at age 18/19.

- Year 11 students were less likely than Year 9 students to intend to apply to HE, and Year 12 students were more likely to intend to apply to HE compared to Level 3 Year 1 students.

- Female students were more likely than male students to intend to apply to HE, and students with gender Other were most likely to be unsure about their HE intentions.

- 90% of Black students (96% of Black females and 86% of Black males), said that they were likely to apply to HE.

- White male students were the least likely demographic to aspire to apply to HE, with 62% of White male students reporting that they were likely to apply.

- 45% of A-Level students said that they would most like to study away from home at university or other HE institution after they had finished their current studies, compared to 27% of Level 3 students.

- Students who are studying Level 3 courses were over 3 times more likely than A-Level students to want to get a full-time job when they have finished their current studies. This was primarily driven by Level 3 students from UCP postcodes, who were almost twice as likely as Level 3 students from non-UCP postcodes to intend to get a full-time job next.

HE knowledge and perceived benefits

- Aggregated across year groups, 1 in 3 students said that they knew nothing about how to apply to HE and the financial support available.

- Aggregated across year groups, 1 in 4 students said that they knew nothing about where to find information about applying to HE, the costs of study and the options about where to live whilst studying.

- In general, students in younger year groups were more likely to report that that they knew nothing about HE topics compared to students in older year groups.

- Female students were more likely than male students to report strong levels of HE knowledge, and students with gender Other were the most likely to report that they knew nothing.

- Black students reported the highest levels of HE knowledge, and Mixed Ethnicity and Other Minority Ethnicity students reported the lowest levels.

- There was little difference between the HE knowledge levels of students from UCP postcodes and non-UCP postcodes.

- Students were primarily positive about the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding its career benefits, with 83% of students saying that HE would enable them to get a better job.

- Students with a disability were less likely than students without a disability to see the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding whether HE would improve their social life.

- Students with gender Other were less likely than female and male students to see the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding whether HE will give them valuable life skills.

- Students' primary motivation to go to HE was to get a well-paid job, which was selected by two thirds of students who were likely to apply to HE.

- The main reason students suggested they may not apply to HE was due to uncertainty surrounding their grades, which was selected by 1 in 4 students who were unlikely or uncertain if they would apply to HE.

- Only 3% of students who were unlikely or uncertain about whether they would apply to HE said that this was because they had been put off going to HE due to COVID. Only 1% of students who were likely to apply to HE said that this was because it would be too difficult to get a job due to COVID.

Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

- Few students had a negative perception of their social and academic fit within HE.

- There was a large amount of neutral or uncertain responses surrounding students' sense of social and academic fit within HE. Students were most unsure about whether HE is "for people like me".

- Students› sense of belonging and fit within HE tended to increase in older year groups.

- Black students had the strongest perception of their social and academic fit within HE compared to all other ethnic groups.

- Students with gender Other, students with a disability and students from UCP-postcodes had generally lower perceptions of their sense of belonging and fit within HE, particularly surrounding the statement "I would fit in well with others".

Self-efficacy

- There was little difference between the self-efficacy scores of different year groups, genders, ethnicities, disability and UCP-status.

- Although the differences between groups were small, there was substantial variation within groups.

- Average self-efficacy scores have not changed since the 2019/2020 academic year for all year groups.

COVID-19 impact

- 27% of students said that their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19, and 10% of students said that their decision about whether to apply to HE at age 18/19 had been impacted by COVID-19.

- Older students were more likely to report that their future decisions had been influenced by COVID-19, with half of Year 13 students and 48% of Level 3 Year 2 students reporting that their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19.

- There were high levels of uncertainty from all year groups surrounding whether students' future decisions and HE decisions had been impacted by COVID-19.

- The decisions of female and Asian students were more likely to have been influenced by COVID-19 than other demographics.

- 27% of students reported experiencing 3 or more challenges when home-learning due to COVID-19. This rose to 33% of students in Year 13.

- 37% of students said that limited contact with a tutor and/or subject teacher had made it more difficult from them to continue learning at home, which was the most reported challenge.

- Female students and students with a disability were more likely to report that their home learning had been impacted by challenges. There was little difference between the challenges faced by UCP students and non-UCP students.

- Asian, Black and Mixed ethnicity female students were the most likely to have experienced three or more challenges, with 1 in 3 students from these groups having experienced 3 or more challenges.

Recommendations for practice

Based on the conclusions drawn in this report, the following recommendations are made with regards to Phase 3 of the UCP and future practice:
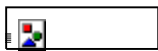
- Level 3 college students were less likely than A-Level students to want to attend HE after their course, particularly to study away from home. Level 3 college students were more likely than A-Level students to intend to get a full time-job after their course. Therefore, interventions should focus on reaching a greater proportion of Level 3 college students.

- White male students were the group who were least likely to intend to apply to HE, so targeted interventions for this group may be appropriate.

- The most common reason that students stated they were unlikely to apply to study HE was due to uncertainty surrounding the grades they would get. Interventions should focus on building academic confidence to help students to realise their academic potential.

Getting a well-paid job was the primary motivation for the majority of students who plan on applying to HE. Therefore, it is important that the latest information about the expected financial return from HE study is provided impartially, including how this varies based on factors such as course studied and type of university attended.

- Gaps in students' knowledge and experiences are associated with their year group. Therefore, activities should be offered on a tiered basis to address year-group specific requirements.

- Activities should focus on ensuring all students can develop a sense of social fit and belonging in HE. Targeted interventions for students who identify as non-binary gender, students with a disability and students from UCP-postcodes that focus on social relationship-building in a HE setting may be appropriate for these students.

- Activities should address the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students' future decisions.

- Follow-up work should be carried out with older learners to support with the impact of COVID-19.

Full report

Introduction

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This report reviews the outcomes from Wave 3 of the Uni Connect survey. The survey was completed by students in Years 9–13 and Level 3 Years 1 and 2[2], online and in HeppSY schools and colleges during October to January of 2020/2021, and forms part of the national evaluation being conducted by CFE research. Overall, 4,421 complete student responses across 43 schools/colleges were included in the final dataset.

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Aims and objectives

The main aims and objectives of this report are as follows:

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Report structure

Each section of this report will address a substantive section of the survey, as follows:

- Likelihood of applying to HE at age 18 or 19

- HE knowledge and perceived benefits

- Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

- Self-efficacy

- COVID-19 impact

The four core strands of HeppSY programme activity (HE knowledge, careers knowledge, attainment, and confidence and resilience) are broadly covered across the first four sections of this report. The outcomes of the report will support the development of the HeppSY programme offer within each of the strands and the progression framework.

The final section of the report will cover the impact of COVID-19 on students' HE expectations and home learning experience. The outcomes of this section will provide a snapshot of how school and college students in the South Yorkshire region have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be of interest to stakeholders across the region.
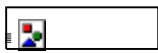
# Likelihood of applying to HE at age 18/19

School students in Years 9–12 and Level 3 Year 1 college students were asked how likely they were to apply to HE at age 18 or 19. Responses were given on a six-point ordered scale from "definitely won't apply" to "definitely will apply", with an additional "don't know" option available.

In general, students' expectations of applying to HE was high, with 72% of students reporting that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or that they "definitely will apply". This is a slight increase of 2 percentage points compared to the Wave 2 survey (HeppSY, 2020). Students from non-UCP postcodes had higher HE expectations than students from UCP postcodes, with 75% of students from non-UCP postcodes reporting that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or that they "definitely will apply", compared to 69% of students from UCP postcodes.

Responses followed similar trends to the Wave 2 survey, such as a decreased likelihood of applying to HE for older secondary school students; 76% of Year 9 pupils reported that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or that they "definitely will apply", compared to 67% of Year 11 students (Figure 1). There were some small differences compared to the Wave 2 survey, most notably that the proportion of Year 11 students who responded that they were "very likely" to apply or that they "definitely will apply" increased by 7 percentage points, suggesting a slight increase in HE aspirations within this age group.

Year 12 students had the strongest HE aspirations, with 84% of Year 12 students reporting that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or that they "definitely will apply", compared to 68% of Level 3 Year 1 students. This included 35% of Year 12 students and 19% of Level 3 Year 1 students who reported that they would definitely apply. Although there was little difference between the responses from Year 12 students compared to the Wave 2 survey, the proportion of Level 3 Year 1 students who said they were "very likely" to apply or that they "definitely will apply" fell by 9 percentage points, with the largest increases in this year group being in the "fairly likely" and "don't know" responses, suggesting some increased uncertainty for this group.

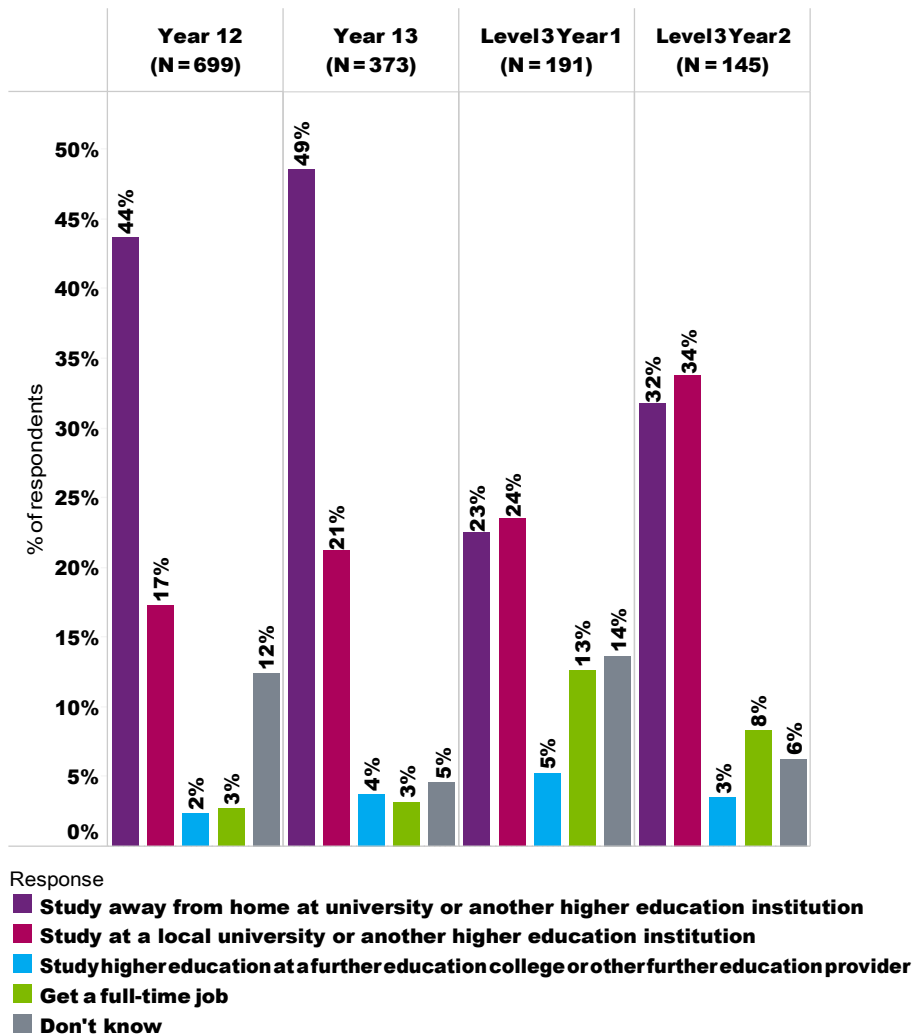**Figure 1.** *How likely are you to apply to HE at age 18 or 19? (Split by year group.)*
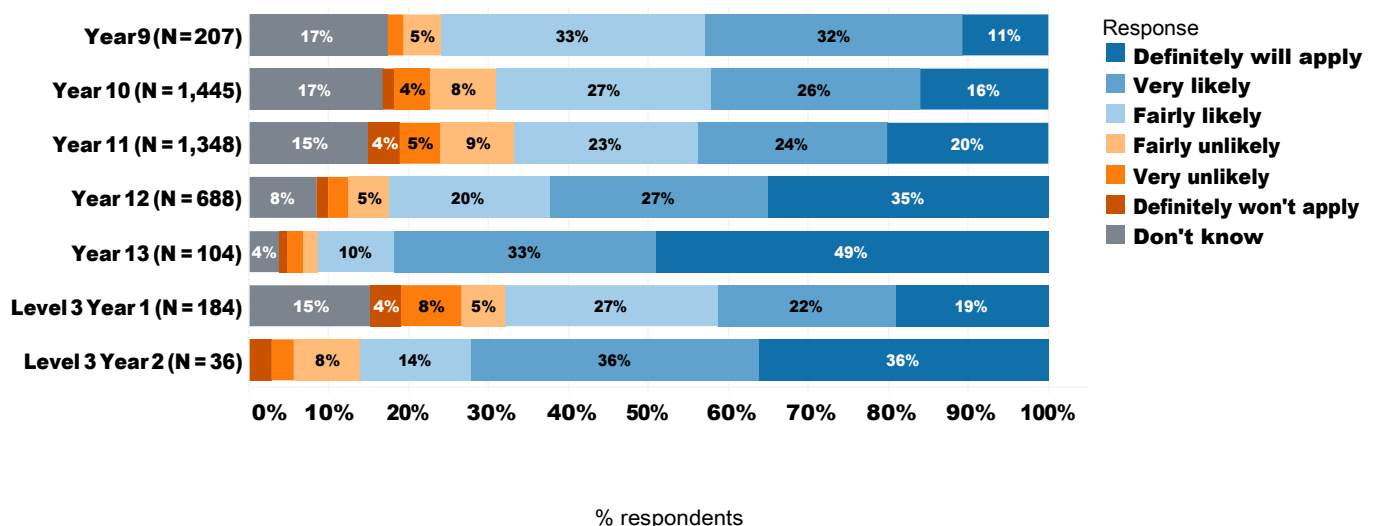
Future plans

Post-16 students were asked about what they would most like to do next after they have finished their current studies (Figure 2). The most common aspiration for Year 12 and Year 13 students was to "study away from home at university or another HE institution", with 45% of Year 12 and Year 13 students selecting this option. The second most common response was to "study at a local university or other HE institution", which was selected by 19% of Year 12 and Year 13 students. Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students also most commonly reported these aims, but the proportion of students who selected each response was more balanced. A-Level students were 1.4 times more likely than Level 3 students to say that they would most like to study some form of higher education, either at a HE institution away from home or locally, or at a FE college.

Compared to the Wave 2 survey, there was an increase of 2–7 percentage points in the proportion of students who said they would most like to "study away from home at a university or other HE institution" for each year group. It is possible that this is due to the increased amount of time students have spent studying at home this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to some students considering options away from home. The largest increases were for Level 3 Year 2 and Year 12 students, which increased by 23% and 18%, respectively. This was coupled with a slight decrease in the proportion Level 3 Year 2 and Year 12 students who said they would most like to "study HE at a FE college or other FE provider", "study at a local university" or "get a full-time job".

Level 3 students were 3.7 times more likely than A-level students to say that they would most like to "get a full-time job" next. Compared to the Wave 2 survey, there was an increase of 4 percentage points in the proportion of Level 3 Year 1 students who selected this response. This was primarily driven by UCP students studying Level 3 courses, who were 1.7 times more likely than non-UCP students in these year groups to say that they most wanted to "get a full-time job" next. However, there was no difference between the proportion of A-level students from UCP and non-UCP postcodes who selected this response.

Figure 2. *When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? (Split by year group.)* [3]
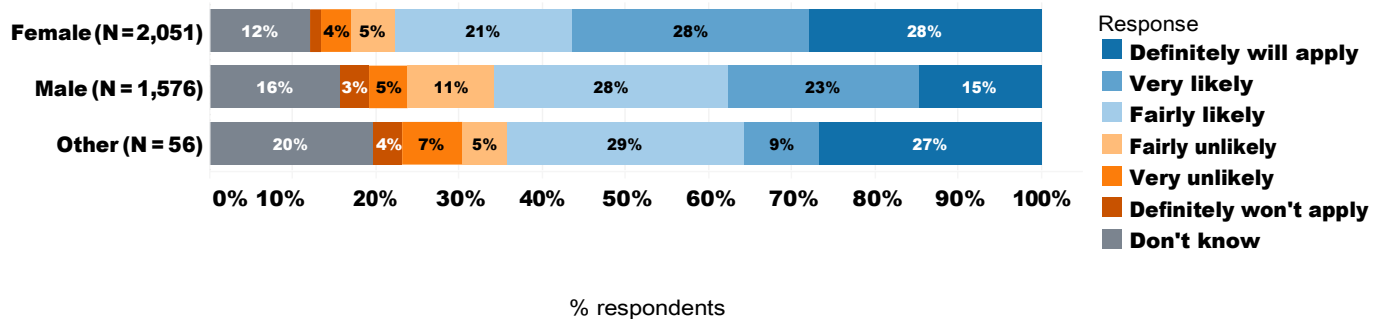

Response
- ■ **Study away from home at university or another higher education institution**
- ■ **Study at a local university or another higher education institution**
- ■ **Study higher education at a further education college or other further education provider**
- ■ **Get a full-time job**
- ■ **Don't know**

Gender

Students who identified as female (N = 2,051) had stronger intentions to apply to HE than male students (N = 1,576), with 77% of female students saying they are "fairly likely", "very likely" or "definitely will apply" compared to 66% of male students (Figure 3). Students who identified as gender Other (N = 56) were 1.4 times more likely than the average to be unsure about their HE intentions. Students with gender Other were as likely as female students to say they "definitely will apply", and 1.2 times more likely than male students.

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3   Figure does not contain the complete list of responses.
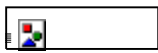
Figure 3. *How likely are you to apply to HE at age 18 or 19? (Split by gender.)*

To "study away from home at univeristy or other HE institution" was the most common aspiration for both female (N = 881) and male (N = 457) students, with 45% of female students and 35% of male students selecting this response (Figure 4). The second most common aspiration from female and male students was to "study at a local university or other HE institution", with 22% of female students and 21% of male students selecting this response.

Figure 4. *When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? (Split by gender.)* [4]
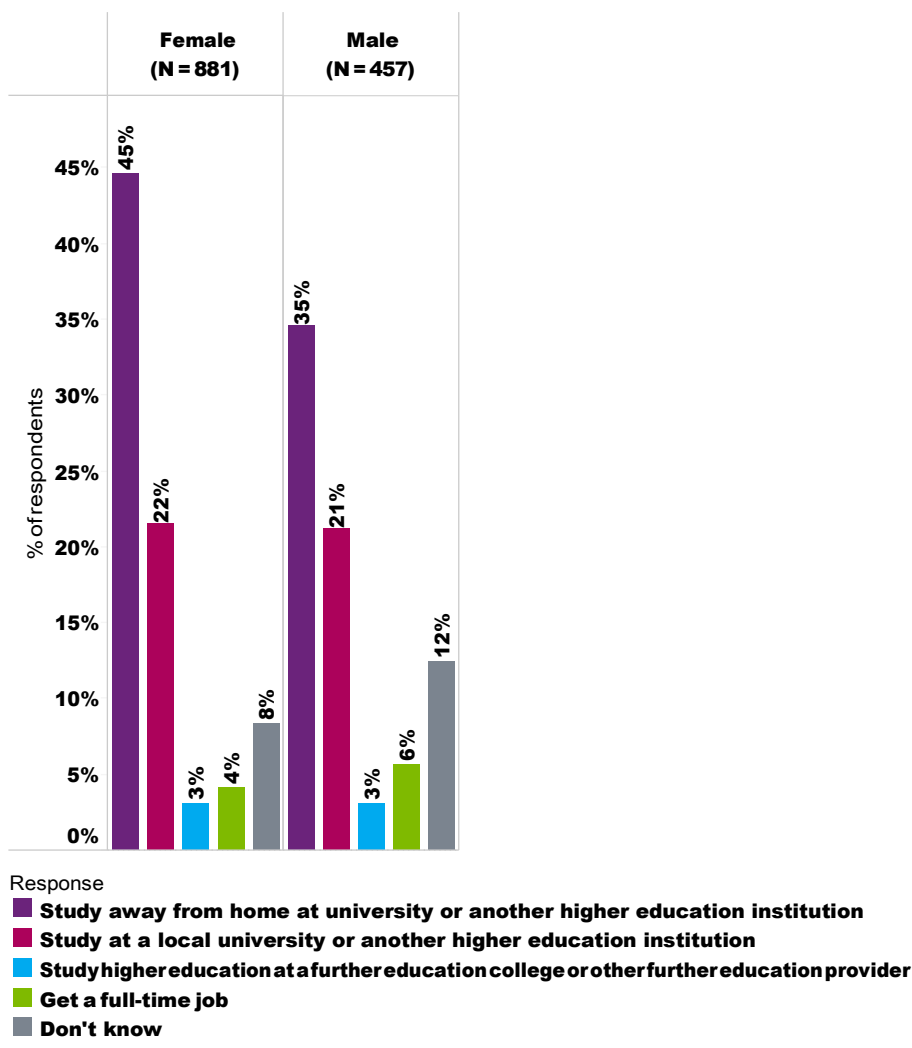
4   Only female and male genders are shown, due to small sample size of other genders.

Ethnicity

A high proportion of Black students reported that they intend to apply to HE, with 90% saying that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or "definitely will apply". This was 10 percentage points more likely than any other ethnic group and 1.25 times greater than the average (Figure 5) and represents an increase of 9 percentage points for this demographic compared to the Wave 2 survey. Only 4% of Black females (N = 50) did not fall into this category, along with 14% of Black males (N = 48), which were the two ethnicities most likely to apply to HE for both genders. Compared to the Wave 2 survey, there was also an increase of 6 percentage points in the proportion of Other Minority Ethnicity students who were "fairly likely", "very likely" or "definitely will apply."

White students (N = 3,072) had the lowest aspiration to apply to HE, with 71% of White students saying that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or "definitely will apply". White male students were the least likely demographic to have HE aspirations, with 62% of White male students (N = 1,228) reporting that they were "fairly likely", "very likely" or "definitely will apply", compared to 76% of White female students (N = 1,615).

The observed differences in self-reported likelihood of applying to HE between ethnicities may partially be due to the differing mix of year groups within the survey sample. For example, 41% of Black students sampled were in post-16 year groups, compared to 16% of Other minority ethnicity students. However, the positive aspirations of Black and Asian students observed here is consistent with the 2020 HE entry rates for England, with Black students 1.5 times more likely to enter HE at age 18 than White students, and Asian students 1.6 times more likely (UCAS, 2020).

Figure 5. *How likely are you to apply to HE at age 18 or 19? (Split by ethnicity.)*
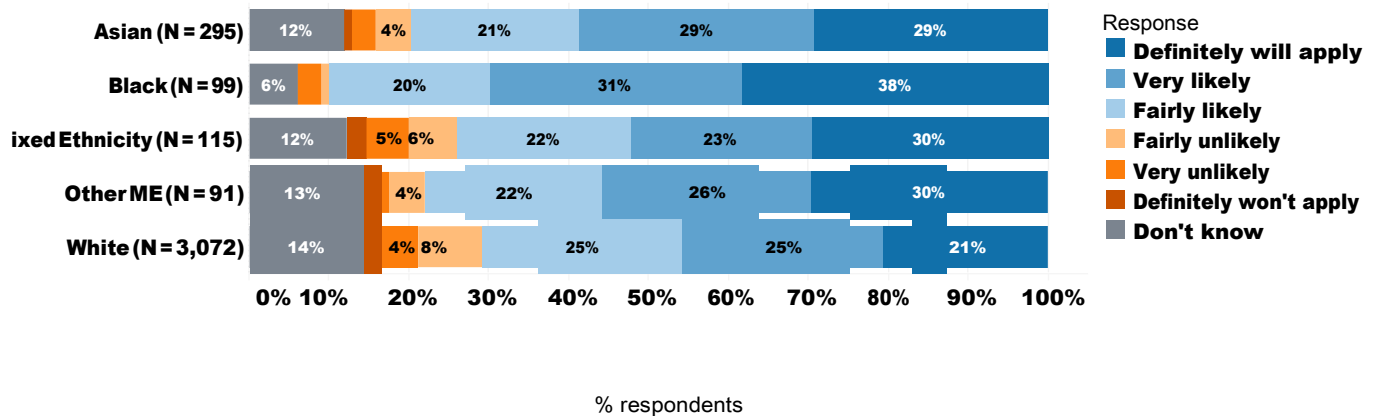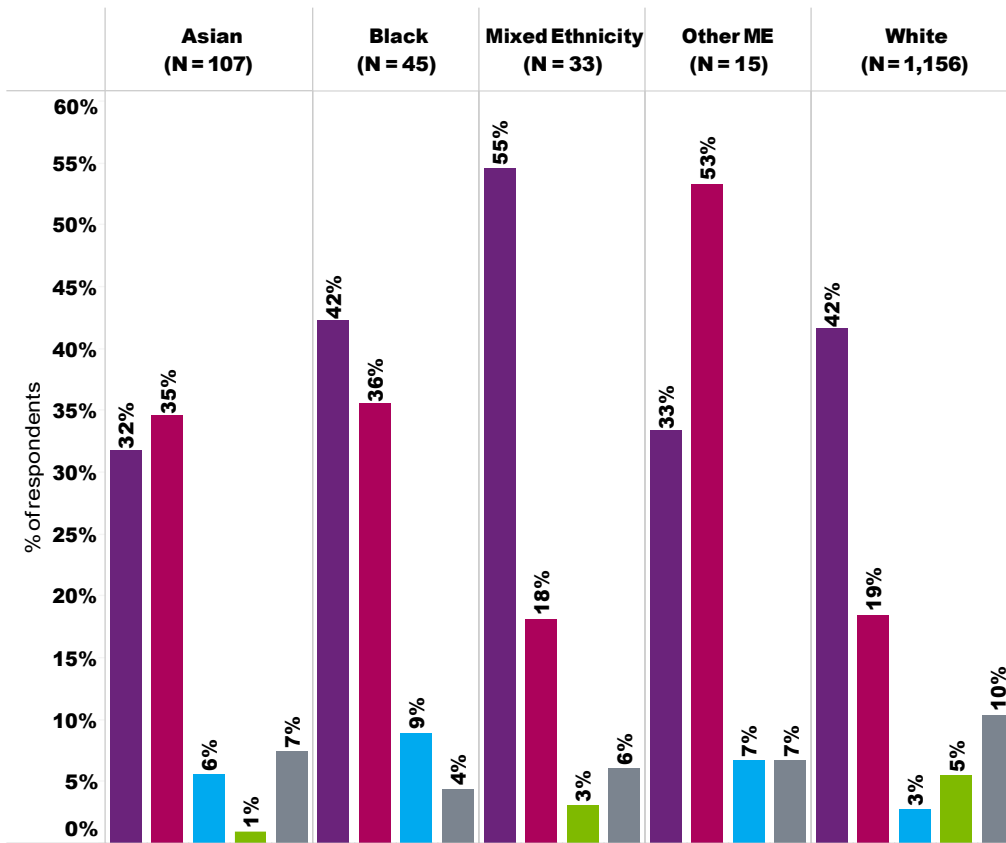

% respondents

Figure 6. *When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? (Split by ethnicity.)*
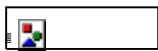

Response
- ■ **Study away from home at university or another higher education institution**
- ■ **Study at a local university or another higher education institution**
- ■ **Study higher education at a further education college or other further education provider**
- ■ **Get a full-time job**
- ■ **Don't know**

Although the sample sizes for many of the ethnic groups were very small, the most common aim for all ethnic groups was to "study at a local university or another HE institution" or to "study away from home at university or another HE institution" (Figure 6). Black, Asian and Other Minority Ethnicity students were more likely to plan to study at a local HE institution than White and Mixed Ethnicity students. White, Black and Mixed Ethnicity students were more likely than Asian and Other Minority Ethnicity students to want to study at a HE institution away from home. White students were most likely to be unsure about what they would most like to do next, with 10% of White students selecting the response "don't know", which was 1.6 times higher than any other ethnic group. This was primarily driven by White male students from UCP postcodes, with 16% of White male students from UCP postcodes selecting this response, compared to 10% of White male students from non-UCP postcodes and 9% of White female students from both UCP and non-UCP postcodes.

Section summary

This section has reviewed responses relating to likelihood of applying to HE. The key findings are:

- 69% of students from UCP postcodes and 75% of students from non-UCP postcodes reported that they were likely to apply to HE at age 18/19.

- Year 11 students were less likely than Year 9 students to intend to apply to HE, and Year 12 students were more likely to intend to apply to HE compared to Level 3 Year 1 students.

- Female students were more likely than male students to intend to apply to HE, and students with gender Other were most likely to be unsure about their HE intentions.

- 90% of Black students (96% of Black females and 86% of Black males), said that they were likely to apply to HE.

- White male students were the least likely demographic to aspire to apply to HE, with 62% of White male students reporting that they were likely to apply.

- 45% of A-Level students said that they would most like to study away from home at university or other HE institution after they had finished their current studies, compared to 27% of Level 3 students.

- Students who are studying Level 3 courses were over 3 times more likely than A-Level students to want to get a full-time job when they have finished their current studies. This was primarily driven by Level 3 students from UCP postcodes, who were almost twice as likely as Level 3 students from non-UCP postcodes to intend to get a full-time job next.

HE knowledge and perceived benefits

Students were asked to report how much they knew about various aspects of HE on a three-point scale, including "nothing", "a little", and "a lot". These statements included "the subjects that I could study"; "the type of course I could take"; "how to apply to study HE"; "where to find information about applying"; "the qualifications and grades needed to get into HE". The majority of students (56%) reported that they knew "a little" about the HE knowledge topics, and fewer students reported that they knew "a lot" (24%) or "nothing" (20%) (Figure 7). Overall, the proportion of students who responded that they knew "a lot" about each HE knowledge statement had increased by an average of 1.5 percentage points compared to the Wave 2 survey (HeppSY, 2020), and the proportion of students who knew "nothing" decreased by an average of 1.8 percentage points.

Students were most likely to say that they knew "nothing" about how to apply to study HE and where to find information about applying. The proportion of students who reported that they knew "nothing" about the HE knowledge statements was correlated with year group, with younger students being more likely to report that they knew "nothing" than older students. In general, students in Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2 were the most likely to report that they knew "a lot" about the HE knowledge statements compared to younger students.

Female students were 2-7 percentage points more likely to report that they knew "a lot" compared to male students, who were more likely to report that they knew "a little". Students with gender Other were up to 2.3 times more likely than male or female students to report that they knew "nothing", with the largest differences surrounding the subjects they could study and the type of course they could take.

Black students were the most likely ethnic group to say that they knew "a lot" about all of the HE knowledge statements, particularly surrounding the qualifications and grades they would need to get into HE, with 48% of Black students saying they knew "a lot" about this topic, which was 9 percentage points higher than any other ethnic group. Mixed Ethnicity and Other Minority Ethnicity students were the most likely groups to report they knew "nothing" about any of the HE statements.

There was little difference between the HE knowledge of students from UCP postcodes and those from non-UCP postcodes.

Students with a disability were slightly more likely than students without a disability to report that they knew "nothing" about the HE knowledge statements, with disabled students being almost 1.4 times more likely to say they knew "nothing" about the subjects they could study, which was the biggest difference between these groups.

Figure 7. *How much do you know about the following things about HE?*
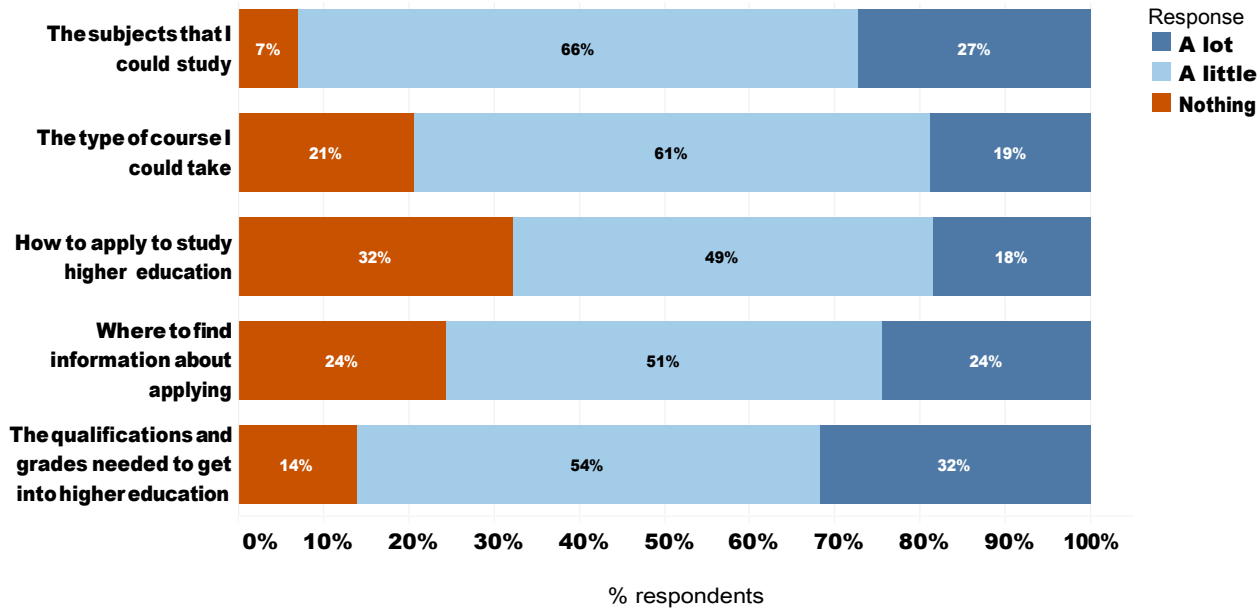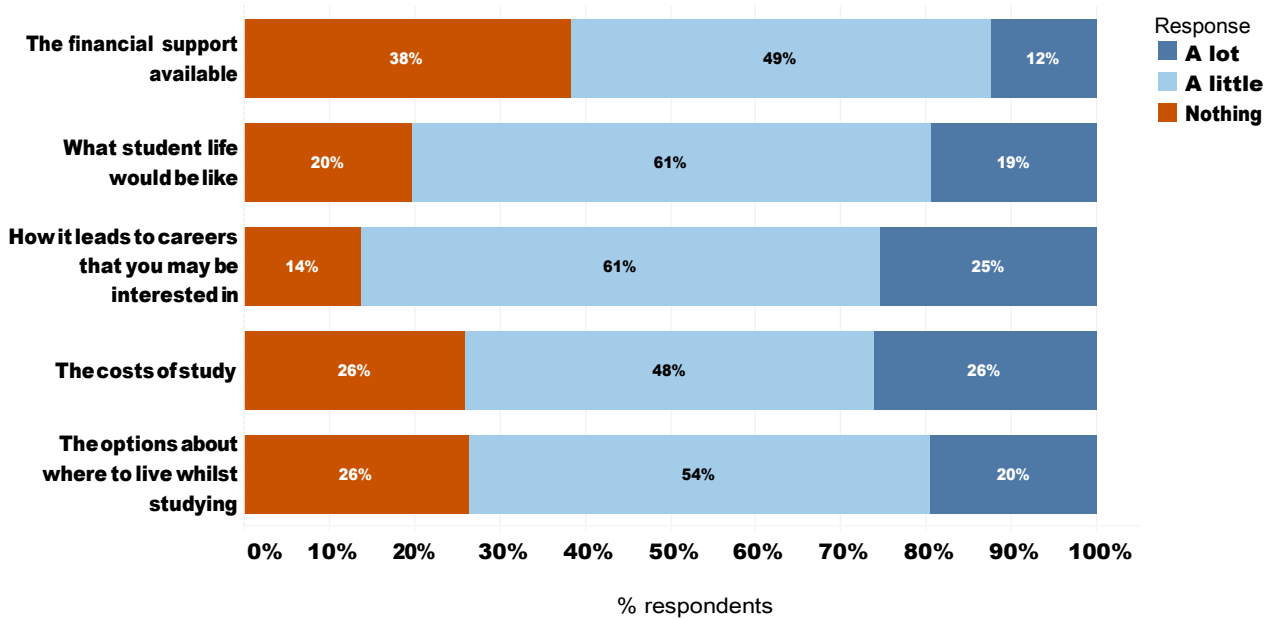

HE knowledge: student life

Students were also asked to report how much they knew about student life, including the financial support available; what student life would be like; how it leads to careers that you may be interested in; the costs of study; the options about where to live whilst studying. HE knowledge trends relating to student life were similar to the Wave 2 survey, with the majority of students saying that they knew "a little" about the HE knowledge topics, and fewer students saying that they knew "a lot" or "nothing" (Figure 8). Over a third of respondents reported knowing "nothing" about the financial support available for HE study, and a quarter said they knew "nothing" about the costs of study, or where to live while studying.

In general, students in Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2 tended to report more commonly that they knew "a lot" about the HE knowledge statements compared to younger students. Female students were 0.5–4 percentage points more likely to report that they knew "a lot" compared to male students, with the largest difference being that female students were 1.3 times more likely to say they knew "a lot" about options about where to live whilst studying. Students with gender Other were the least likely to say that they knew "a lot" and 1.2 times more likely to say that they knew "nothing" compared to the average.

Black students were the most likely ethnic group to say they knew "a lot" about all of the statements, particularly surrounding how it leads to careers they may be interested in, with the number of Black students saying they knew "a lot" about this statement over 1.6 times greater than average. Students of mixed or other ethnicity were the most likely groups to say they knew "nothing", with Mixed Ethnicity students being 1.4 times more likely than average to say they knew "nothing" about the options to live when studying.

There were no substantial differences between responses from students from UCP postcodes and students from non-UCP postcodes, or between students with a disability and without a disability.

Figure 8. *How much do you know about the following things about HE (student life)?*


HE knowledge: HE benefits

Students were asked how much they agreed with six statements relating to the benefits of HE: it will broaden my horizons; it will challenge me intellectually; it will give me valuable life skills; it will improve my social life; it will enable me to earn more; it will enable me to get a better job. Responses were given on a five-point ordered scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with a "don't know" option also available (Figure 9).

In general, students had favourable perceptions of the benefits of HE, with between 68% and 82% students either saying they "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements. This was consistent with the Wave 2 survey responses. Students felt most positively that HE could "enable me to get a better job", with 43% of students saying they "agree" and 39% of students saying the "strongly agree" with this statement. Less than 6% of students said that they "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with any of the statements. Neutral and "don't know" responses were more common, particularly for the statements surrounding "it will broaden my horizons" and "it will improve my social life", with 26% of students saying they either "don't know" or "neither agree nor disagree" with both statements.

Figure 9. *How much do you agree with the following statements about HE?*
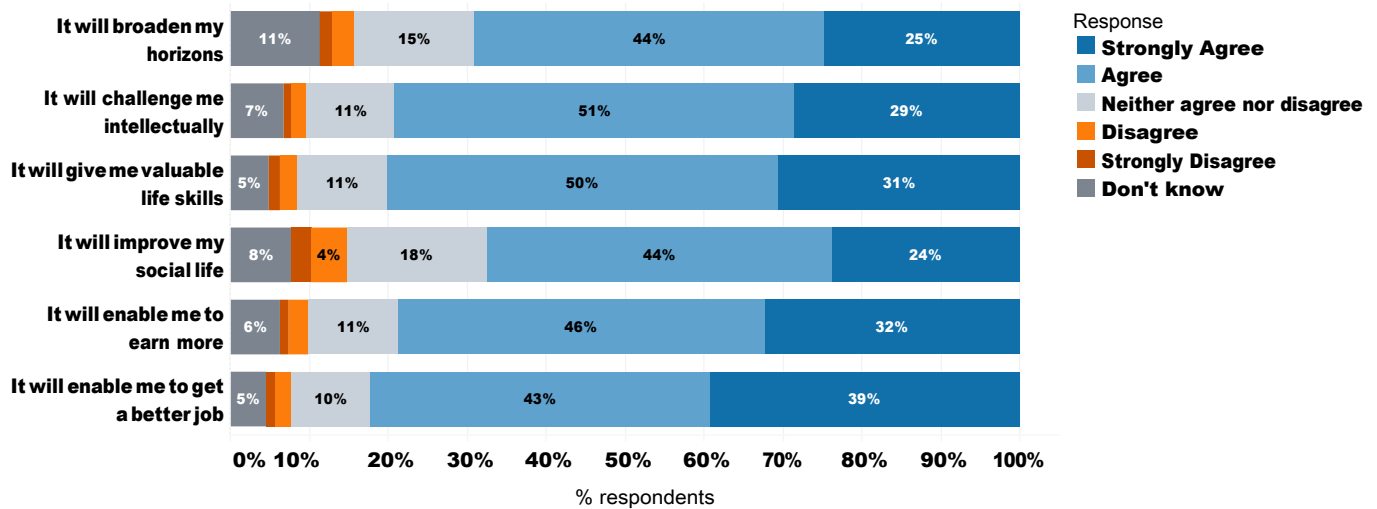
Female students were slightly more likely than male students to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements surrounding the benefits of HE. Students with gender Other were 1.4–2.8 times more likely than the average to say they "don't know" or "neither agree nor disagree", with the largest difference being for the statement "it will give me valuable life skills".

There was little difference between the responses of students from different ethnic groups. Other Minority Ethnicity students were slightly less likely to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements, and Black and Asian students were slightly more likely to respond positively.

Students without a disability were up to 1.3 times more likely to respond positively to the HE benefits statements compared to students with a disability. This was particularly notable for the statement "it will enable me to improve my social life", where 58% of students with a disability reported that they "agree" or "strongly agree" compared to 72% of students without a disability.

Students from non-UCP postcodes were up slightly more likely to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements compared to students from UCP postcodes. The largest disparity was for the statement "it will broaden my horizons", for which 66% of students from UCP postcodes responded positively compared to 73% of students from non-UCP postcodes.

Reasons to go or not to go

Students in Years 9–12 and Level 3 Year 1 who said that they were likely to apply to HE (N = 3,017) (Section 1, Likelihood of Applying to HE at age 18/19) were asked to select "the main reason you want to go to higher education" (Figure 10). The most likely response for all year groups was "to enable me to get a well-paid job", which was selected by 66% of all students. 70% of male students selected this response, compared to 64% if female students. The second most common response was "I enjoy learning", which was selected by 15% of all students, including 17% of female students and 12% of male students. 6% of students selected the response Other, followed by less than 5% of students selecting all other responses. This is consistent with the responses to the Wave 2 survey.

Only 1% of students who said they were likely to apply to HE said it was because "it will be too hard to get a job due to COVID", compared to 5% of students who said that COVID had influenced them to be "now more likely" to apply to HE (Section 5, COVID-19 impact). The students who selected this response were more likely to be in Years 10 and 11.

Figure 10. What is the main reason you want to go to higher education? [5]
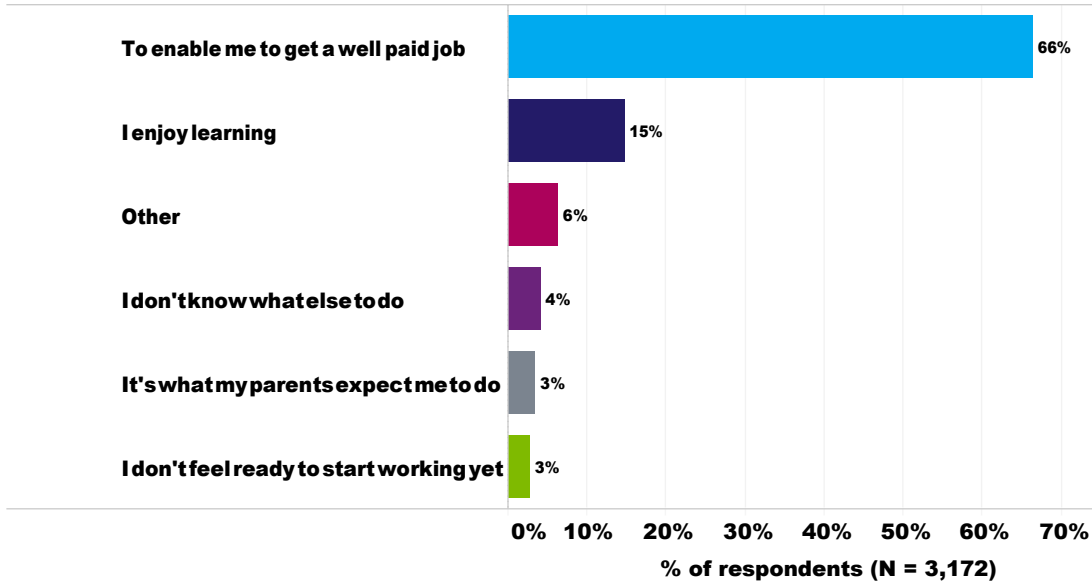
Response
- To enable me to get a well paid job
- I enjoy learning
- Other
- I don't know what else to do
- It's what my parents expect me to do
- I don't feel ready to start working yet

Students in Years 9–12 and Level 3 Year 1 who said that they were unlikely to apply to HE, or did not know whether they would apply to HE (N = 1,868) (Section 1, Likelihood of Applying to HE at age 18/19), were asked to select "the main reason you might not want to go to higher education" (Figure 11). The most common response was "it depends on the grades I get", which was selected by 25% of students. This was primarily driven by female students, of which 31% selected this option compared to 19% of male students. White students were the least likely to select this option, with 24% of White students selecting this response, compared to an average of 37% for all other ethnicities.

The second most common responses were "I want to work and earn money" and "I am still undecided", which were each selected by 15% of students. The response "I want to work and earn money" had decreased by 7 percentage points compared to the Wave 2 survey, where it was the most common response.

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5   Figure does not contain the complete list of responses.

Only 3% of students said that "COVID has put me off" going to HE, compared to 5% of students who said that COVID had influenced them to be "now less likely" to apply to HE (Section 5, COVID-19 impact). Post-16 students were most likely to select this response, particularly students in Year 12.

Figure 11. *What is the main reason you might not want to go to higher education?* [6]
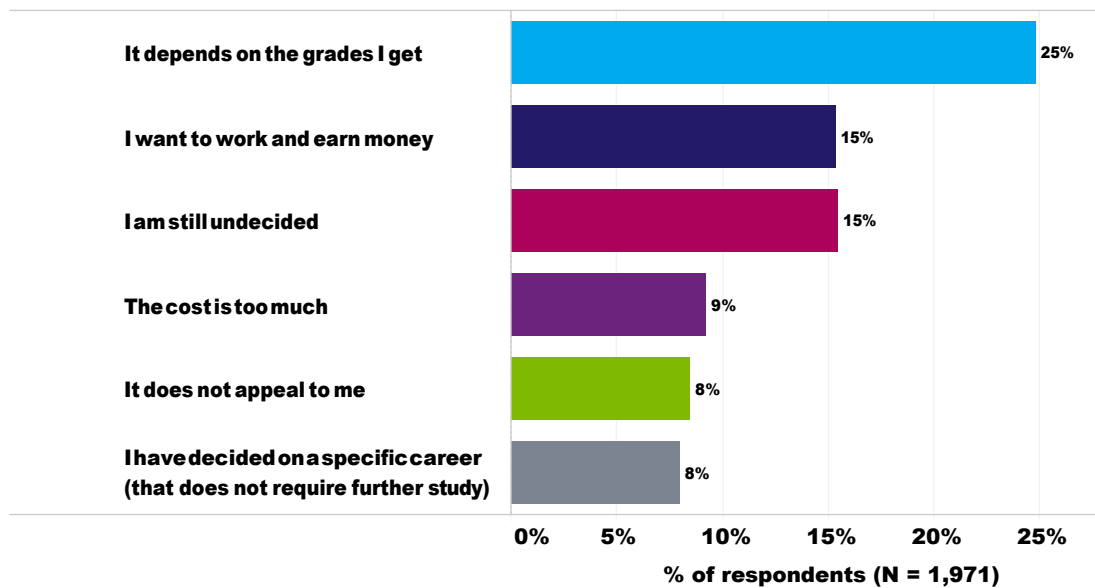
Response
- It depends on the grades I get
- I want to work and earn money
- I am still undecided
- The cost is too much
- It does not appeal to me
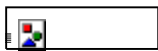- I have decided on a specific career (that does not require further study)

Section summary

This section has reviewed responses relating to HE knowledge and the perceived benefits of HE. The key findings are:
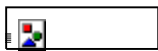
- Aggregated across year groups, 1 in 3 students said that they knew nothing about how to apply to HE and the financial support available.

- Aggregated across year groups, 1 in 4 students said that they knew nothing about where to find information about applying to HE, the costs of study and the options about where to live whilst studying.

- In general, students in younger year groups were more likely to report that that they knew "nothing" about HE topics compared to students in older year groups.

- Female students were more likely than male students to report strong levels of HE knowledge, and students with gender Other were the most likely to report that they knew "nothing".

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6   Figure does not contain the complete list of responses.

- Black students reported the highest levels of HE knowledge, and Mixed Ethnicity and Other Minority Ethnicity students reported the lowest levels.

- There was little difference between the HE knowledge levels of students from UCP postcodes and non-UCP postcodes.

- Students were primarily positive about the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding its career benefits, with 83% of students saying that HE would enable them to get a better job.

- Students with a disability were less likely than students without a disability to see the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding whether HE would improve their social life.

- Students with gender Other were less likely than female and male students to see the benefits of HE, particularly surrounding whether HE will give them valuable life skills.

- Students' primary motivation to go to HE was to get a well-paid job, which was selected by two thirds of students who were likely to apply to HE.

- The main reason students suggested they may not apply to HE was due to uncertainty surrounding their grades, which was selected by 1 in 4 students who were unlikely or uncertain if they would apply to HE.

- Only 3% of students who were unlikely or uncertain about whether they would apply to HE said that this was because they had been put off going to HE due to COVID. Only 1% of students who were likely to apply to HE said that this was because it would be too difficult to get a job due to COVID.
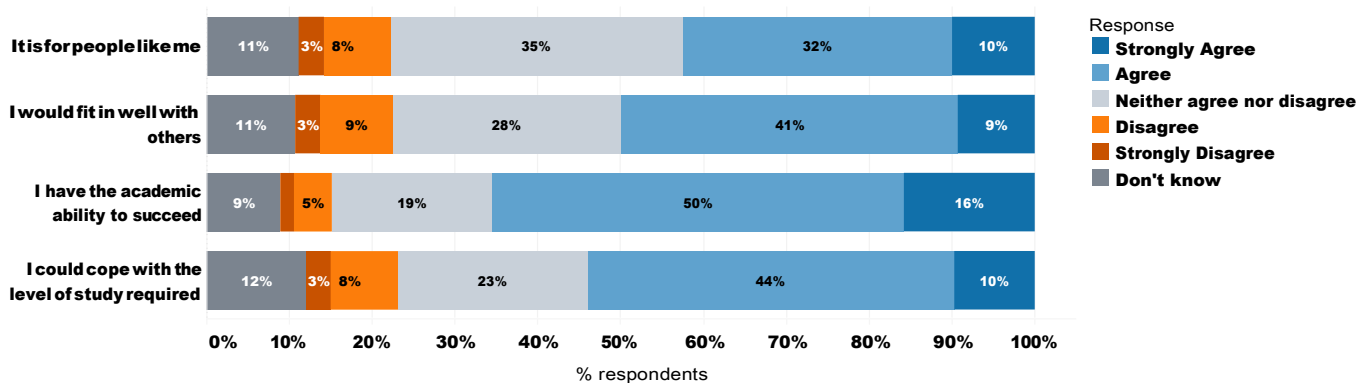
Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

School students in Years 9–12 and Level 3 Year 1 college students were asked to rate their agreement with four statements relating to their perceived academic and social fit within HE; "it is for people like me", "I would fit in well with others", I have the academic ability to succeed" and "I could cope with the level of study required". Responses were given on a five-point ordered scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", with an additional "don't know" option available.

Responses were generally positive (Figure 12), including a low proportion of "disagree" and "strongly disagree" responses to all statements (range 7% - 12%). General trends were similar to the Wave 2 survey (HeppSY, 2020), including a large proportion of neutral "neither agree nor disagree" and "don't know" responses across all questions (range 28% - 46%). Students were most unsure about whether HE is "for people like me". Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students were 1.4x more likely to report a neutral or uncertain response to this statement, compared to Year 12 and Year 13 students.

Students were more likely to believe in their academic ability than their ability to cope with the level of study required, with 66% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they have the academic ability to succeed, compared to 54% who agreed or strongly agreed that they have the ability to cope with the level of study required.

Figure 12. How much do you agree with the following statements about Higher Education?


Year Group

In general, student's perceived sense of belonging and fit followed similar trends to the Wave 2 survey, tending to increase as students progressed to older year groups, and was overall higher for post-16 students in Year 12 and Year 13 compared to Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 college students. The most notable difference compared to the Wave 2 survey was that Level 3 Year 2 students were slightly more confident in their ability to cope with the level of study required, with the proportion of Level 3 Year 2 students who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement having increased by 8 percentage points to 65%.

Gender

The differences between perceived sense of belonging and fit for male and female students were small (Figure 13). However, students with gender Other (N = 59) were 1.3 – 2.3 times less likely to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements, suggesting that these students have lower belief in their academic and social fit within HE. The largest difference was for the statement "I would fit in well with other", with 22% of students with gender Other selecting this option compared to 50% of all students.

Figure 13. How much do you agree with the following statements about Higher Education? (Split by gender.)
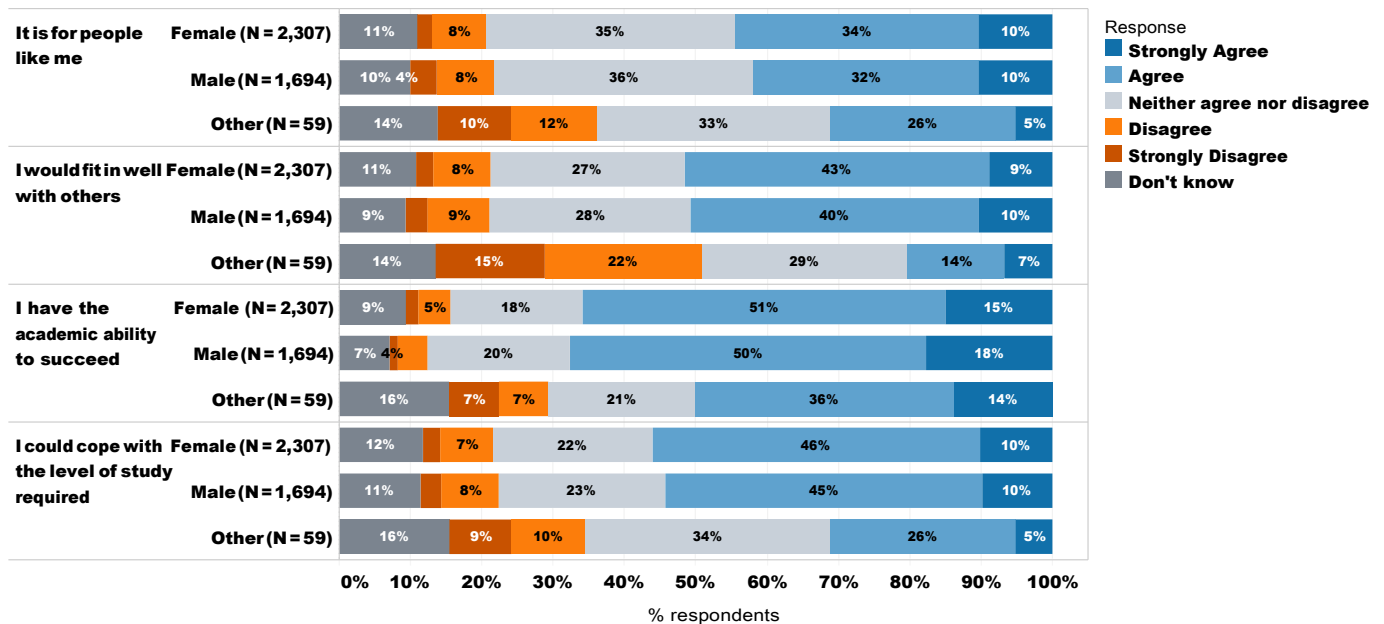

Ethnicity

Black students tended to have the strongest sense of belonging and fit compared to other ethnic groups; particularly for the statements "I would fit in with others", and "I have the academic ability to succeed" (Figure 14). This is consistent with the Wave 2 survey analysis. However, as highlighted in external research, this does not result in high retention of Black students at universities, as 10.9% of Black students drop out of university after one year of study, compared to 8.1% for the whole student population (Office for Students, 2020).

Responses from Asian students were slightly less positive than observed during the Wave 2 survey, bringing this group more in line with White, Mixed Ethnicity and Other Minority Ethnicity students. This was most notable for the statement "I would fit in well with others", as the proportion of Asian students who reported that they "agree" or "strongly agree" with this statement decreased by 11 percentage points to 49%.

Figure 14. *How much do you agree with the following statements about Higher Education? (Split by ethnicity.)*
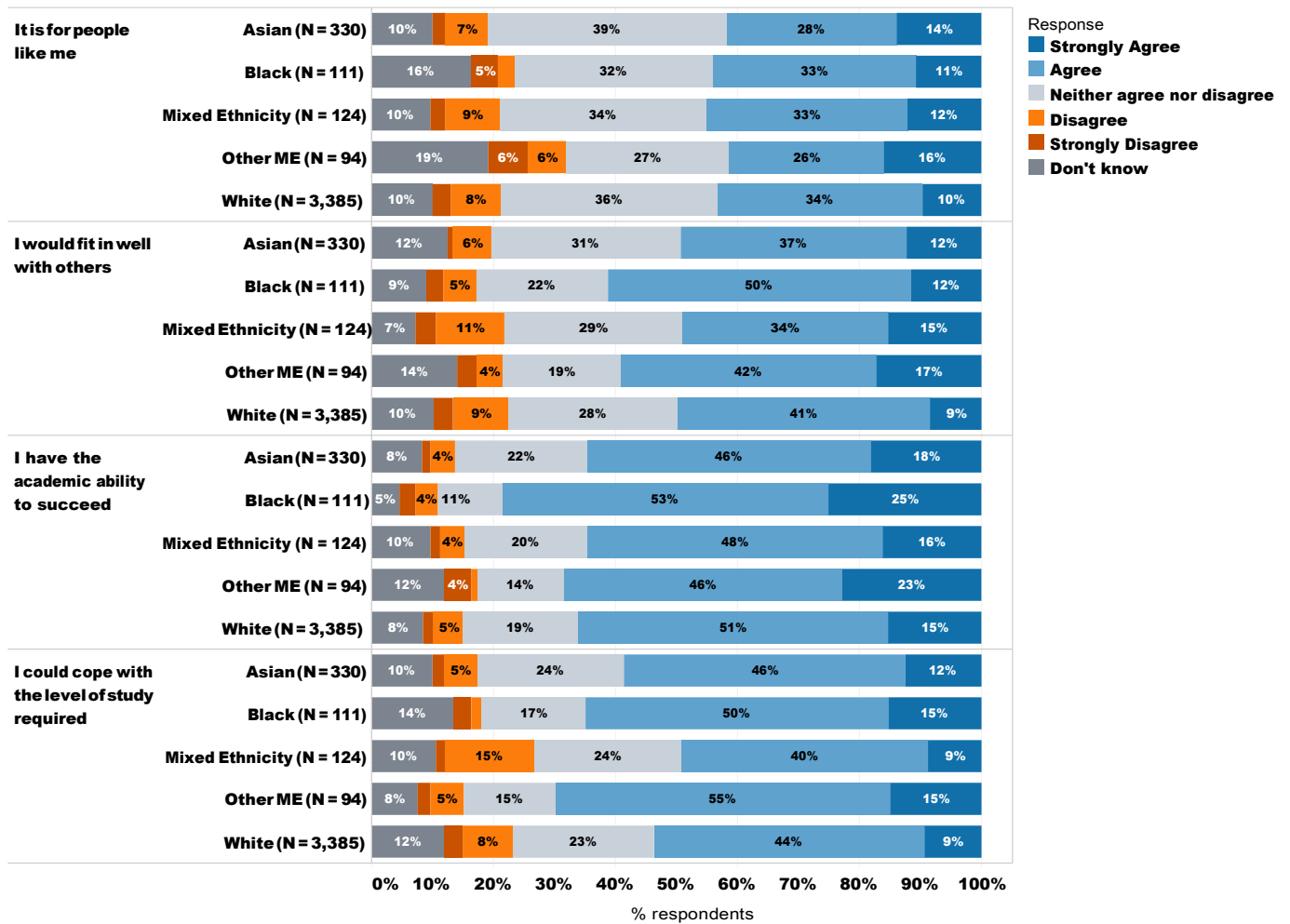
Disability

Students who have a disability (N = 576) were 1.2–1.6 times less likely to "agree" or "strongly agree" with the statements surrounding their perceived sense of belonging and fit in HE compared to students without a disability (N = 2,986) (Figure 15). The largest difference was in response to the statement "I would fit in well with others", where 35% of students with a disability responded positively, compared to 56% of students without a disability.

Figure 15. *How much do you agree with the following statements about Higher Education? (Split by disability status.)*
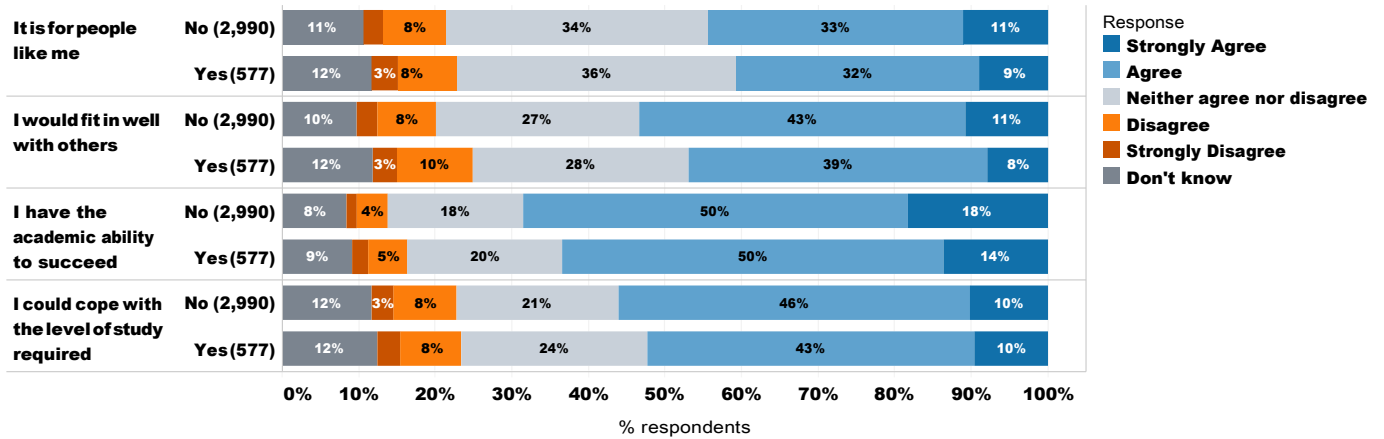
UCP students

UCP students (N =2,008) had a slightly reduced perceived fit for each question (range 3-7 percentage points) compared to non-UCP students (N= 2,245), with the largest difference in response to the statement "I would fit in well with others" (Figure 16).
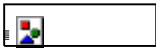
Figure 16. *How much do you agree with the following statements about Higher Education? (Split by UCP status.)*
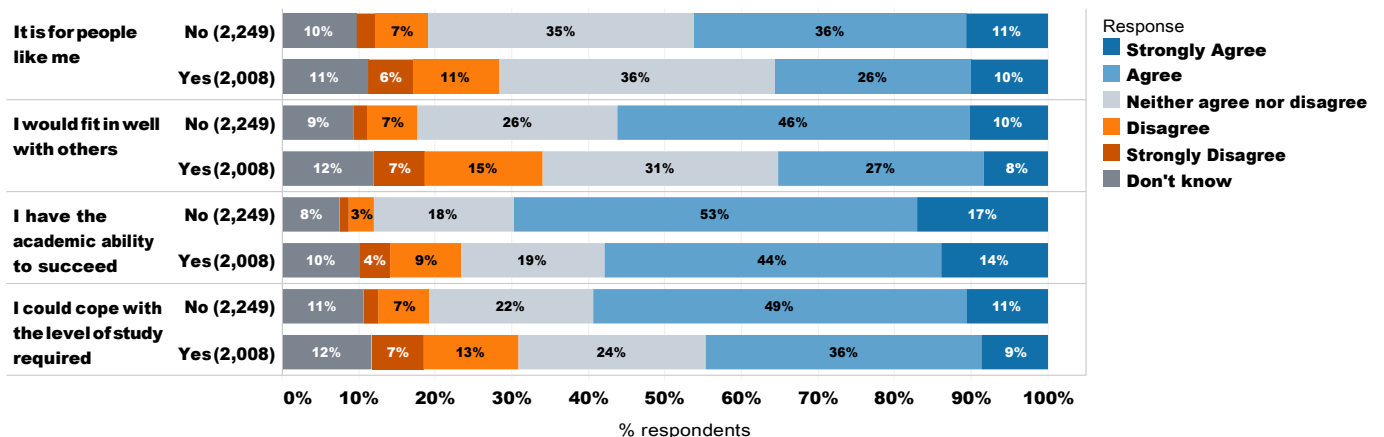
Section summary

This section has reviewed responses relating to sense of belonging and fit within a HE environment. The key findings are:

- Few students had a negative perception of their social and academic fit within HE.

- There was a large amount of neutral or uncertain responses surrounding students' sense of social and academic fit within HE. Students were most unsure about whether HE is "for people like me".

- Students' sense of belonging and fit within HE tended to increase in older year groups.

- Black students had the strongest perception of their social and academic fit within HE compared to all other ethnic groups.

- Students with gender Other, students with a disability and students from UCP-postcodes had generally lower perceptions of their sense of belonging and fit within HE, particularly surrounding the statement "I would fit in well with others".
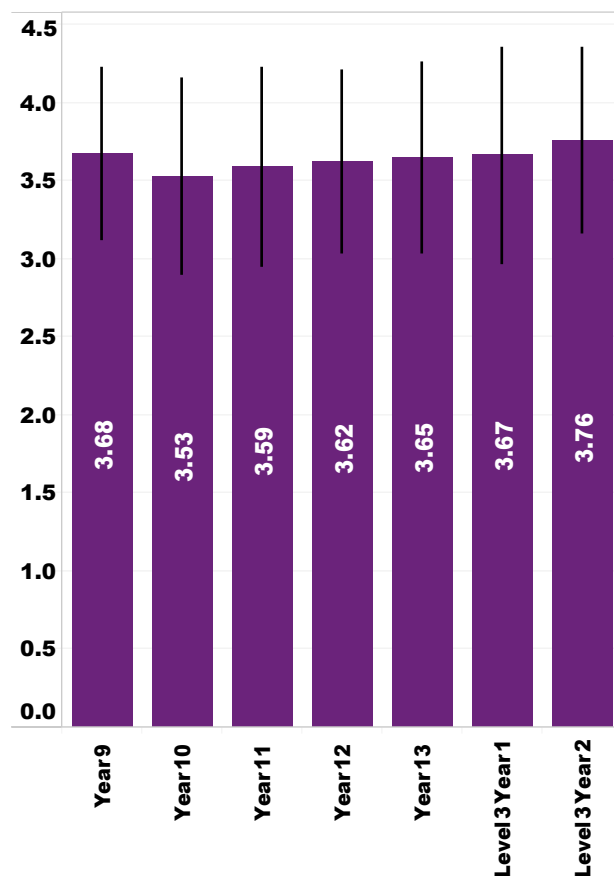
Self-efficacy

General self-efficacy refers to the belief in one's own capacity to effectively deal with a variety of challenging demands (Luszcynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005). General self-efficacy was measured in this survey as in the Wave 2 survey (HeppSY 2020), using items adapted from the generalised self-efficacy scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The scale consisted of six questions; I can overcome any study difficulties; I can manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough; it is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals; I am confident that I could deal with unexpected events; I can solve most problems if I use the necessary effort; when I have a problem, I can usually find several solutions. A single average self-efficacy score was computed by calculating the mean response across all six questions for each respondent.

Students responded to each item on a five-point ordered scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Self-efficacy scores were similar between year groups, ranging from 3.53 for Year 10 students to 3.76 for Level 3 Year 2 students (Figure 17). Compared to the Wave 2 survey, the average (mean) self-efficacy score for each year group did not differ overall. The largest difference was for Year 12 and Year 13 students, whose self-efficacy scores had decreased by 2 percentage points each. This suggests that, between the 2019/2020 and the 2020/2021 academic year, students' belief in their own ability to deal with challenges and accomplish their goals has not substantially changed.

**Figure 17.** *Average self-efficacy scores (Split by year group.)*

Male students had slightly higher mean self-efficacy scores (mean = 3.65, N = 1,662) compared to female students (mean = 3.58, N = 2,264). Students with gender Other had slightly lower self-efficacy scores (mean = 3.18, N = 57). There was also little difference between self-efficacy scores for different ethnic groups, which ranged between 3.59 for Mixed Ethnicity students to 3.75 for Black students.

Students with a disability reported a slightly lower mean self-efficacy score (3.39) compared to students without a disability (3.66), and students from UCP postcodes also had slightly lower average self-efficacy scores (3.57) compared to non-UCP students (3.62).

Section summary

This section has reviewed responses relating to students' self-efficacy. The key findings are:

- There was little difference between the self-efficacy scores of different year groups, genders, ethnicities, disability and UCP-status.

- Although the differences between groups were small, there was substantial variation within groups.

- Average self-efficacy scores have not changed since the 2019/2020 academic year for all year groups.
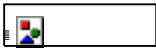
COVID-19 impact

The 2020/21 CFE survey included several questions relating to COVID-19, and the impact of the pandemic on students' studies and future plans.

Impact of COVID-19 on higher education and future decisions

Students were asked whether COVID-19 has "influenced your decision about what to do next?". Overall, 27% of students said that their decision about what to do next had been impacted by COVID-19 either "a great deal" (3%) or "to some extent" (24%). Students who said they most wanted to take a gap year after their current studies were most likely to say that their decision had been impacted by COVID-19, with 50% of students who wanted to take a gap year saying their decision had been impacted either "a great deal" or "to some extent" by COVID-19. Students who wanted to study HE at a FE college or other FE provider were the most likely to say that their decision had been impacted "not at all" by COVID-19, with 60% of these students selecting this option.

There was a correlation between how much students' decisions were likely to be influenced by COVID-19 and their year group (Figure 18), with students in older year groups being more likely to state that their decision had been influenced by COVID-19 either "to some extent" or "a great deal". Half of Year 13 students, and 48% of Level 3 Year 2 students, said that their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19, compared to 19% of Year 9 students. Many students, particularly in younger year groups, were not sure whether their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19, with 19% of pre-16 students saying that they were "not sure" if their decisions had been influenced by COVID-19, compared to 15% of post-16 students.

Female students were 1.4 times more likely than male students to say that they decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19. When split by ethnicity, 34% of Asian students reported that their decision had been influenced by COVID-19, compared to 27% of White students, 21% of Mixed Ethnicity and Other Minority Ethnicity students, and 20% of Black students. Smaller differences were observed between disabled and non-disabled students, and between students from UCP and non-UCP postcodes. Disabled students were 1.1 times more likely to report that their decision had been influenced by COVID-19, and students from non-UCP postcodes were 1.2 times more likely to have been influenced than students from UCP postcodes.

Figure 18. *Has COVID-19 influenced your decision about what to do next? (Split by year group.)*
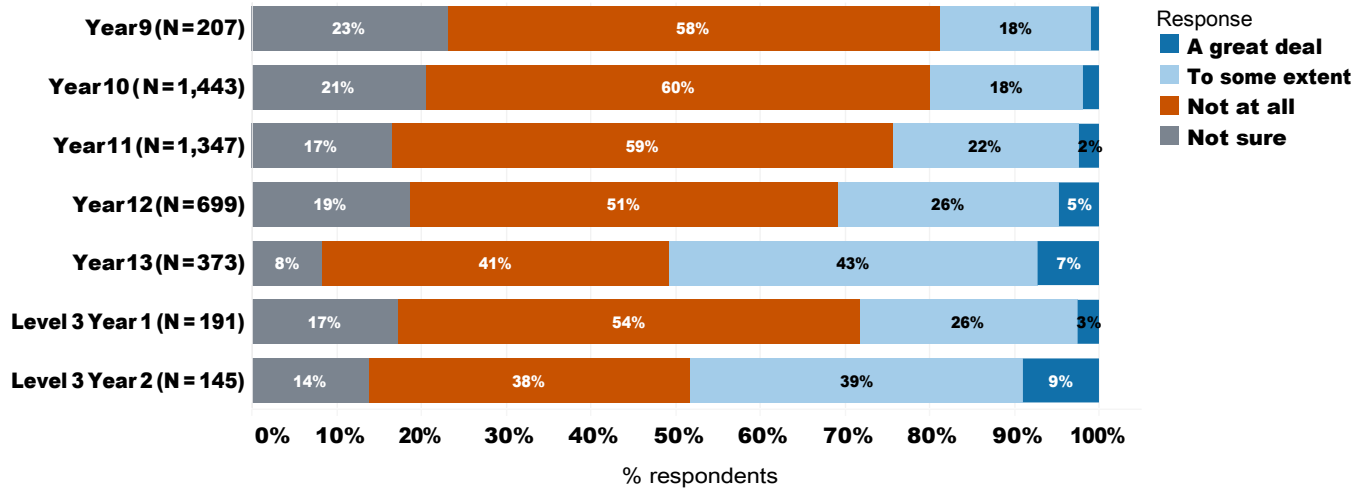
Students were also asked if COVID-19 had "affected your decision about whether or not to apply to HE at age 18 or 19". In total, 61% of students in Year 9–12 and Level 3 Year 1 said that their decision had not been influenced by COVID-19, and that they were "just as likely as before" to apply (Figure 19). Additionally, 28% of students said that they were "not sure" whether their decision had been influenced by COVID-19. The final 10% of students was equally split between the 5% of students who were "now more likely" and the 5% of students who were "now less likely" to apply to HE.

Figure 19. *Has COVID-19 affected your decision about whether or not to apply to HE at age 18 or 19? (Split by year group.)*
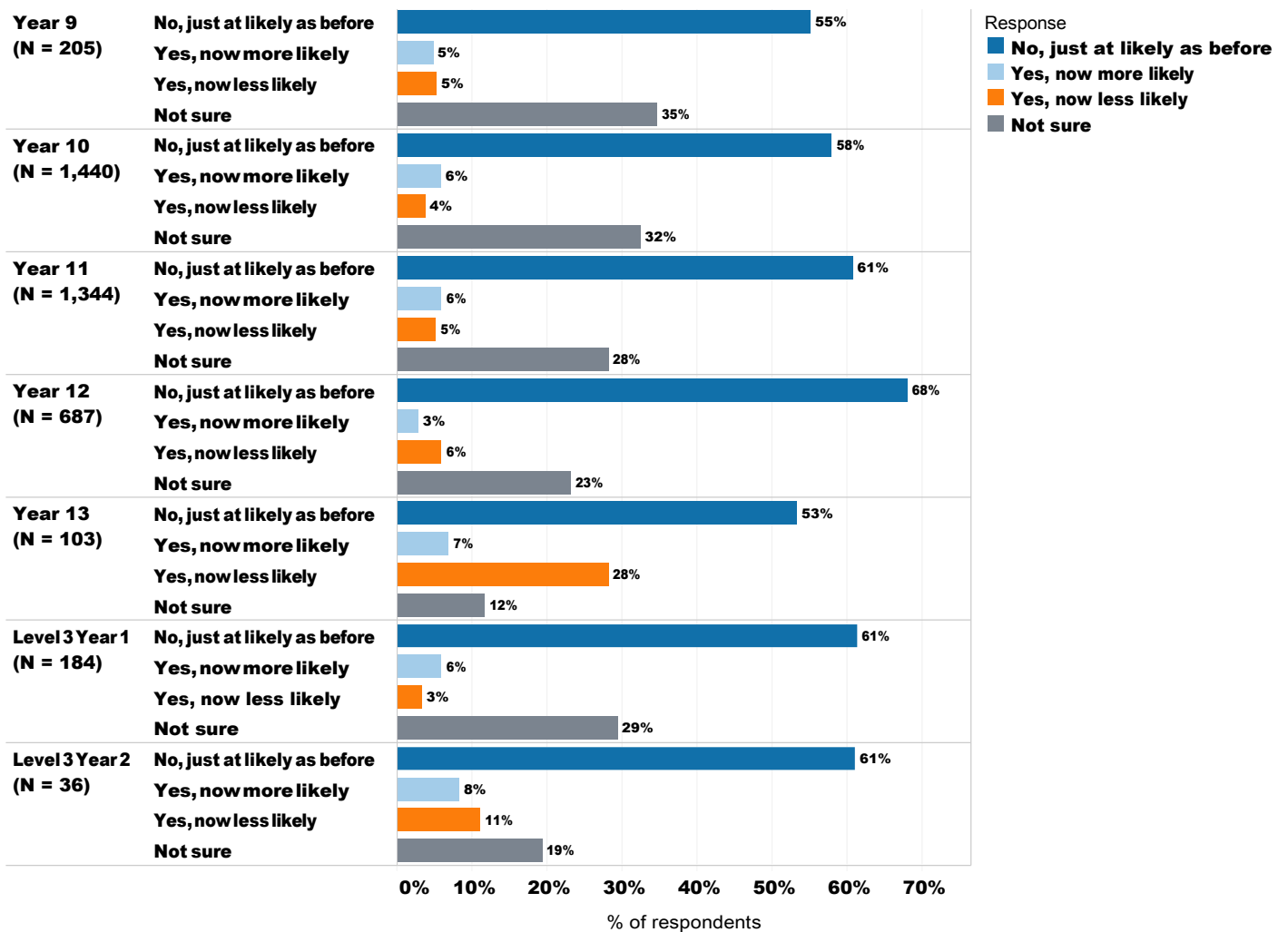
COVID-19 impact statements

Students who reported that they had studied from home between March and July 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown (N = 4,258) were asked to respond to seven Likert statements surrounding challenges they may have experienced during home working (Figure 20). These statements were: limited contact with tutor and/or subject teachers; parent/carer unable to help with school/college work; lack of a quiet space to study; being asked to help out with other family members, such as brothers or sisters; lack of computer for school/college work; lack of other equipment you would usually have in school/college to help you learn; poor or no Wi-Fi at home.

Figure 20. *Did any of the following make it more difficult for you to continue learning at home?*
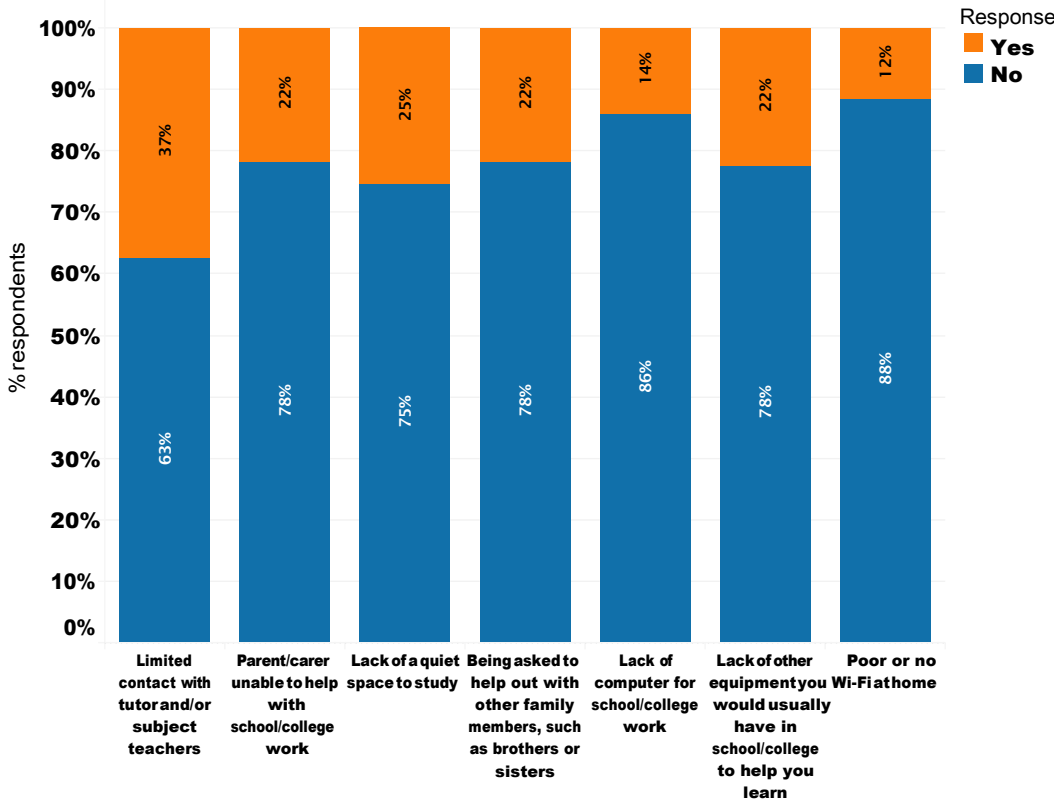
The most commonly reported challenge to students' home learning was limited contact with a tutor and/or subject teachers, which was experienced by 37% of respondents. Students were least likely to report that their home learning was made difficult due to lack of a computer or poor/no wi-fi at home, which was reported by 12% of students. This is consistent with the digital access challenges experienced by students who were home learning across the UK, such as digital poverty. For example, a survey carried out by Ofcom between Jan – March 2020 found that 9% of households containing children did not have home access to a laptop, desktop PC or tablet (Ofcom, 2020). This is even more pronounced for children from disadvantaged households; in April 2020 a Sutton Trust survey of over 7,000 teachers found that 15% of teachers in the most deprived schools reported more than a third of their students learning from home would not have adequate access to an electronic device for learning, compared to only 2% in the most affluent state schools (Sutton Trust, 2020).

In general, students in Year 13 were most likely to report that their home learning had been impacted, followed by Level 3 Year 2 students and Year 11 students. Students from these year groups were also more likely to have experienced 3 or more of the home learning challenges, with 27% of all students reporting experiencing 3 or more challenges, ranging from 18% of Year 9 students to 33% of Year 13 students (Figure 21).

Figure 21. *Number of home-learning difficulties experienced by students (Split by year group.)*
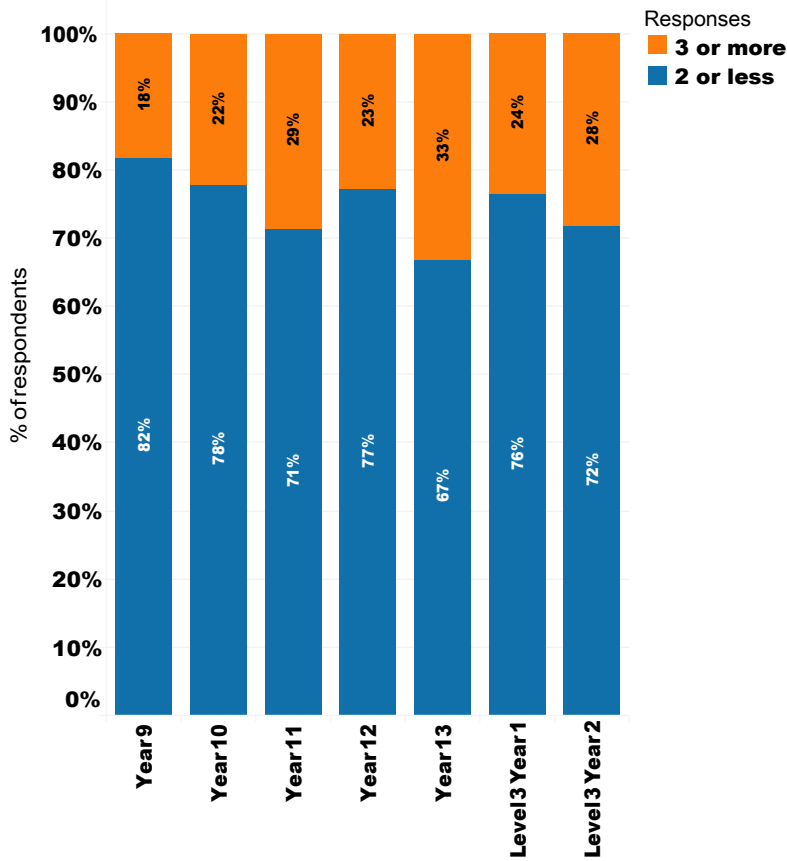

Gender

Students who identified as female (N = 2,245) were 1.4 times more likely to have experienced 3 or more challenges than males (N = 1,610) (Figure 22). Female students were more likely to report experiencing all challenges compared to male students, with the exception of computer and Wi-Fi challenges, which were reported equally by males and females.

Although there was a smaller response size for students who identified as Other gender (N = 55), the most common challenge faced by these students was the lack of a quite space to study, which was reported by 35% of these students, compared to 25% on average. Only 25% of Other gender students were impacted by limited contact with a tutor and/or subject teacher, compared to a 37% average for all students.

Figure 22. *Did any of the following make it more difficult for you to continue learning at home? (Split by gender.)* [7]
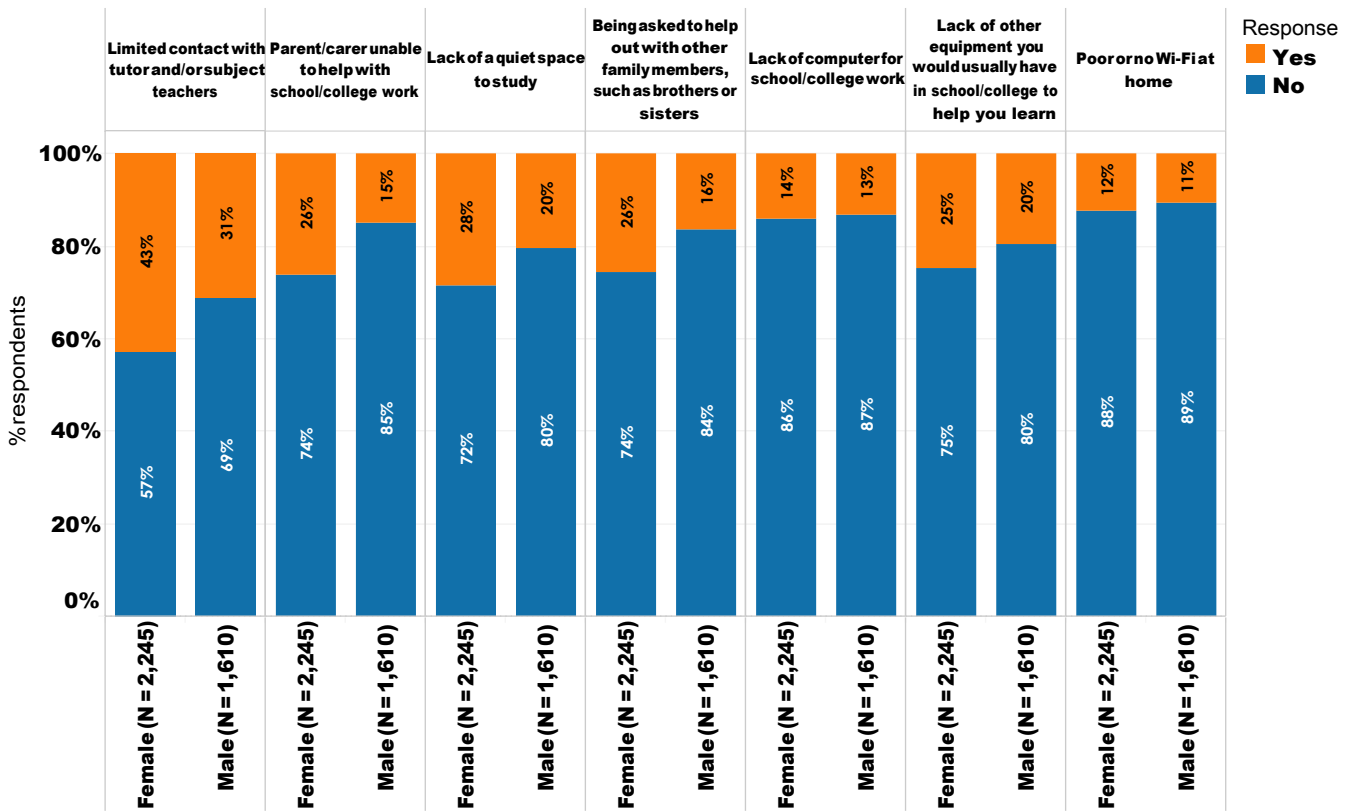
Ethnicity

White and Mixed Ethinicty female students were more likely than other groups to say that their parent/carer was unable to help with school/college work, with 27% of White and Mixed Ethnicity females reporting this challenge compared to an average of 22%. Asian female students were 13 percentage points most likely to report being asked to help out with other family members compared to an average of 22% for all students. Mixed Ethnicity male students more likely to experience challenges due to being asked to help out with other family members than male students from other ethnic groups, with 24% of Mixed Ethnicity males reporting this challenge compared to 16% of all male students. Black students were 1.5 times more likely than the average to report experiencing poor Wi-Fi as an issue, and 1.2 times more likely to report lack of other equipment as a problem.

The number of challenges experienced by male students did not vary greatly depending on ethnicity, however, over a third of Asian, Black and Mixed ethnicity female students experienced three or more issues, compared to 19% of male students.

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7   Only female and male genders are shown, due to small sample size of other genders.

UCP learners

Only small differences between the frequency of challenges reported by students from UCP postcodes and non-UCP postcodes were observed. Students from UCP postcodes were 1.3 times more likely to report having a lack of computer for school or college work, and 1.2 times less likely than students from non-UCP postcodes to have report challenges due to limited contact with tutors and/or subject teachers. There was no difference between the proportion of UCP learners who reported 3 or more challenges compared to non-UCP learners.

Disability

The most commonly reported challenge for students with a disability was limited contact time with tutor and/or subject teachers, which was experienced by 43% of students with a disability compared to 37% of students without a disability. Students with a disability were 1.2 – 1.8 times more likely to have experienced challenges than students without a disability, with the biggest difference being poor or no Wi-Fi at home, which was experienced by 18% of studetns with a disability compared to 10% of students without a disability. Students with a disability were also 1.4 times more likely to report experiencing 3 or more challenges than students without a disability.

Section summary

This section has reviewed responses surrounding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' studies and future plans. The key findings are:
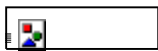
- 27% of students said that their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19, and 10% of students said that their decision about whether to apply to HE at age 18/19 had been impacted by COVID-19.

- Older students were more likely to report that their future decisions had been influenced by COVID-19, with half of Year 13 students and 48% of Level 3 Year 2 students reporting that their decision about what to do next had been influenced by COVID-19.

- There were high levels of uncertainty from all year groups surrounding whether students' future decisions and HE decisions had been impacted by COVID-19.

- The decisions of female and Asian students were more likely to have been influenced by COVID-19 than other demographics.

- 27% of students reported experiencing 3 or more challenges when home-learning due to COVID-19. This rose to 33% of students in Year 13.

- 37% of students said that limited contact with a tutor and/or subject teacher had made it more difficult from them to continue learning at home, which was the most commonly reported challenge.

- Female students and students with a disability were more likely to report that their home learning had been impacted by challenges. There was little difference between the challenges faced by UCP students and non-UCP students.

- Asian, Black and Mixed ethnicity female students were the most likely to have experienced three or more challenges, with 1 in 3 students from these groups having experienced 3 or more challenges.
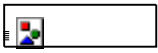
Limitations

The outcomes discussed in this report must be interpreted with caution due to a number of limitations. Some of these limitations are discussed briefly below.

- Only students from the 46 HeppSY partnership schools and colleges were eligible to complete the survey. Therefore, the differences between UCP and non-UCP students may be minimal, as students will attend the same schools/colleges and are likely to live near to other pupils from their school or college, regardless of UCP status.

- Responses were received from a low number of students who were eligible to complete the survey. Complete responses were received from just 43 of the 46 eligible schools and colleges.

- The survey was distributed online during the global coronavirus pandemic, during which school and college students' learning was severely disrupted due to school and college closures and intermittent home learning. Many students may not have been able to access the survey during this time.

- The low number of Asian (8.1%), Black (2.7%), Mixed Ethnicity (3.1%) and Other Minority Ethnicity (2.4%) students compared to White students (83.7%) who responded to the CFE survey makes it difficult to make robust analyses surrounding the HE expectations of students from non-White ethnic groups. The proportion of ethnic groups in the South Yorkshire region consists of primarily White demographics (90.6%), with 4.8% Asian, 1.9% Black, 1.5% Mixed Ethnicity and 1.2% Other Minority Ethnicity demographics (Office for National Statistics, 2018). The increased proportion of non-White students who responded to the CFE survey may therefore reflect a change in the proportion of non-White young people compared to the 2011 census, which also included older populations, or a decreased number of White students who responded to the survey.

- Ethnicities were aggregated into 5 categories, in order to increase the proportion of students in each group. However, this may have masked trends that are specific to certain ethnicities within each group.

- The low proportion of students who identified as gender Other compared to male and female genders also reduces the robustness of analyses surrounding the HE expectations of non-binary students in the South Yorkshire region.

- Year 9 students were not approached to complete the Wave 3 survey. Therefore, a much lower proportion of Year 9 responses were collected, compared to the Wave 2 survey.

Conclusions and recommendations

This report has drawn on data gathered as part of Wave 3 of the national Uni Connect survey that was administered across South Yorkshire between October and January of 2020/2021. The five sections of this report have discussed the attitudes of school and college students towards HE during the global coronavirus pandemic.

The first section of this report detailed responses in relation to students' likelihood of applying to HE at age 18 or 19. In total, 69% of students from UCP postcodes and 75% of students from non-UCP postcodes indicated that they were likely to apply to HE. Secondary school students in older year groups were less likely to expect to apply to HE than younger secondary school students in Year 9. Year 12 students were the most likely to report that they intended on applying to HE, with 84% of Year 12 students intending to apply. Year 12 and Year 13 students were more than twice as likely to intend to study at a HE institution away from home as they were to study at a local HE institution, whereas the intentions of Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students to study at a local HE institution or away from home were more equivocal. Level 3 students were almost 4 times more likely than A-Level students to say that they intended to get a full-time job, which was primarily driven by UCP students.

Female students were more likely than male students to intend to apply to HE. Students who identified as gender Other were the least likely to expect to apply, and the most likely to be unsure of what they intended to do after their studies. Splitting responses by ethnicity, Black students had the strongest HE intentions, particularly Black female students. White male students were the least likely to intend to apply to HE.

Section 2 discussed students' knowledge of HE and the perceived benefits of HE. The HE topics that students knew the least about were the financial support available for HE study and how to apply to study HE, which 1 in 3 students said they knew nothing about. Additionally, 1 in 4 students said that they knew nothing about the costs of study and where to live whilst studying. Students in younger year groups knew less about HE than students in older year groups. Female students had slightly more HE knowledge than male students, but students with gender Other were more than twice as likely to report they knew "nothing" about some HE topics than male and female students. Black students had the highest levels of HE knowledge, including knowledge about student life, compared to all other ethnicities. Students with a disability were slightly less likely to see the benefits of HE compared to students without a disability.

Students generally saw the social, intellectual and career benefits of HE. Two thirds of students said that the main reason they wanted to go to HE was to get a well-paid job. The most likely reason that students said they may not apply to HE was due to uncertainty over their grades.

Section 3 outlined responses relating to sense of belonging and fit within a HE environment. Students generally had a positive perception of their social and academic fit within HE. Overall, students were most unsure about whether HE is "for people like me", with 46% of students reporting either a neutral or uncertain response to this statement. Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students were more likely than A-Level students to be uncertain or neutral about this statement. Black students generally had the strongest perception of their social and academic fit within HE, particularly surrounding their ability to fit in well with others and their academic ability. Students who were from UCP postcodes, had a disability, or identified as gender Other were less likely to believe that they would fit in well with others, compared to the average.

The fourth section discussed responses relating to students' self-efficacy. There was little difference in self-efficacy scores between year groups, genders, ethnicities, disability status and UCP status. Although the differences between groups were small, there was substantial variation within groups. The self-reported self-efficacy scores were very similar to the responses to the Wave 2 survey, suggesting that students' belief in their own ability to deal with challenges and accomplish their goals has not substantially changed over the past academic year.

The final section discussed students' responses surrounding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their studies and HE expectations. Although students from all year groups reported high levels of uncertainty surrounding whether COVID-19 had influenced their future decisions, 27% of students said that their future decisions had been impacted by COVID-19. Students in older year groups were more likely to say that their future decisions had been influenced, with half of Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2 students reporting that their future decisions had been influenced. Female and Asian students were also more likely to say that their decisions had been influenced by COVID-19 compared to the average.

One in four students said that they had experienced 3 or more challenges that made home learning more difficult for them, with the most common challenge being limited contact with a teacher, which was experienced by 37% of students. There was little difference between the challenges faced by UCP students and non-UCP students. However, students with a disability and female students were more likely to report that they had experienced home learning challenges due to COVID-19, and the home learning of Asian, Black and Mixed Ethnicity students was also reportedly more impacted than average.

In a year where students learning has been disrupted like no other, this report has shown that school and college students in South Yorkshire remain resilient to the challenges they have faced and that their aspirations for the future remain high. The recommendations set out in this report will ensure that the goals of HeppSY and partners remain aligned with students' needs, to best support them to make confident and informed decisions about their futures.

Recommendations for practice

Based on the conclusions drawn in this report, the following recommendations are made with regards to HeppSY practice as we move towards the start of Phase 3:

- Level 3 college students were less likely than A-Level students to want to attend HE after their course, particularly to study away from home. Level 3 college students were also more likely than A-Level students to intend to get a full-time job after their course. Therefore, interventions should focus on reaching a greater proportion of Level 3 college students and discussing the variety of HE pathways open to them.

- White male students were the group who were least likely to intend to apply to HE, so targeted interventions for this group may be appropriate.

- The most common reason that students stated they were unlikely to apply to study HE was due to uncertainty surrounding the grades they would get. Interventions should focus on building academic confidence to help students to realise their academic potential.

Getting a well-paid job was the primary motivation for the majority of students who plan on applying to HE. Therefore, it is important that the latest information about the expected financial return from HE study is provided impartially, including how this varies based on factors such as course studied and type of university attended.

- Gaps in students' knowledge and experiences are associated with their year group. Therefore, activities should be offered on a tiered basis to address year-group specific requirements.

- Activities should focus on ensuring all students can develop a sense of social fit and belonging in HE. Targeted interventions for students who identify as non-binary, students with a disability and students from UCP-postcodes that focus on social relationship-building in a HE setting may be appropriate for these students.

- Activities should address the uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on students' future decisions.

- Follow-up work should be carried out with older learners to support with the impact of COVID-19.
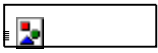
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Appendices
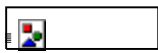
Appendix A – respondent characteristics

Table 1. *Respondents by gender and year group*

Year Group	Gender				Total
	Female	Male	Other	N/A	
Year 9	75	85	3	45	208
Year 10	677	614	20	138	1,449
Year 11	681	547	20	108	1,356
Year 12	436	224	10	29	699
Year 13	241	120	1	11	373
Level 3 Year 1	115	64	3	9	191
Level 3 Year 2	89	49	2	5	145
Total	**2,314**	**1,703**	**59**	**345**	**4,421**

Table 2. Respondents by gender and ethnicity

Year Group	Ethnicity						Total
	Asian	Black	Mixed Ethnicity	Other ME	White	N/A	
Year 9	5	1	4	1	150	47	208
Year 10	117	32	46	35	1,063	156	1,449
Year 11	102	33	42	45	1,030	104	1,356
Year 12	43	25	16	8	584	23	699
Year 13	23	5	10	2	320	13	373
Level 3 Year 1	18	4	4	3	153	9	191
Level 3 Year 2	23	11	3	2	99	7	145
Total	**331**	**111**	**125**	**96**	**3,399**	**359**	**4,421**

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