

1 **Previous education experience impacts student expectation and initial**  
2 **experience of transitioning into higher education**

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25 **Abstract**

26

27 Entering higher education (HE) is one of the most significant transitions in a student's  
28 life and is negatively impacted by any disparity between expectation and initial  
29 experience when joining their course. The current study explored how the students'  
30 experiences of learning and teaching practices in their previous educational  
31 environment influenced their expectations and initial experiences of HE. The study  
32 adopted a mixed methods approach, initially surveying 69 students concerning their  
33 previous educational experiences, expectations and experiences of HE. Informed by  
34 the questions in the survey, two semi-structured focus groups comprising a total of 6  
35 students were completed and analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The current  
36 research identified specific challenges students face as they transition into HE, often  
37 resulting in an initial culture shock as that adapt to their new learning environment.  
38 These challenges are, to some extent, a consequence of their previous learning  
39 environment. Whilst expectations of HE were cultivated in their previous educational  
40 environment, they were not always accurate and resulted in a mismatch between  
41 expectation and reality of HE. This article identifies what may be missing for a student  
42 as they transition from further education into HE, and explores some of the  
43 opportunities HE faces in addressing these deficits.

44

## 45 1 Introduction

46

47 Higher Education (HE) across England (United Kingdom) has been set long-  
48 term expectations to ensure students are 'supported to access, succeed in, and  
49 progress from higher education' (Office for Students (OfS), 2022). Whilst the English  
50 HE sector has a positive record on student progression, relative to international  
51 comparators, the persistence of non-completion suggests that this remains a prevalent  
52 issue within the UK (Hillman, 2021). Transitioning into HE marks one of the most  
53 significant transitions in a student's life (Beasley and Pearson, 1999); students are  
54 required to develop new academic skills, whilst simultaneously acquiring new social  
55 skills and adapting to their role as an independent learner in a cultural setting different  
56 to what they may know.

57

58 Successfully transitioning into HE increases students' chances of success (i.e.,  
59 reducing the likelihood of dropout, Wilcox et al., 2005). Theoretical models provide a  
60 framework with which to conceptualise student transition. Tinto's model of social  
61 integration (1975) recognises the importance of students integrating into social and  
62 then academic systems within an institution. The model proposes that successful  
63 integration enhances students' *commitment*, positively influencing their intended  
64 *persistence* in their studies and their eventual academic outcome (Fincham et al.,  
65 2021). Whilst a student's initial commitment is continually modified by their interactions  
66 with social and HE institution's academic systems (Fincham et al., 2021), students  
67 who demonstrate delayed or minimal commitment at the outset, limit their integration  
68 and subsequently increase their risk of non-continuation (Hadjar et al., 2022). One  
69 approach to mitigate delayed *commitment* is highlighted through Nicholson's cyclical  
70 transition model (1990), where students prepare (*preparation*) to enter HE, achieving  
71 a state of *readiness* through developing precise and realistic expectations of the  
72 environment they are about to enter (De Clercq et al., 2018). Lizzio (2006) proposes  
73 a more encompassing approach, with five 'senses of success' (*capability*,  
74 *connectedness*, *purpose*, *resourcefulness* and *academic culture*), each of which are  
75 essential to students' transition into HE (Larsen et al., 2020). Whilst Lizzio (2006)  
76 contends that there is commonality in students' needs as they enter university, he  
77 takes a pragmatic stance to student transition, suggesting a 'one size fits all' approach  
78 is not feasible, and with no guarantees for a positive impact on a positive student  
79 outcome.

80

81 More recent models provide an additional lens to consider student transition.  
82 Risquez et al. (2008) presented the U-Curve Theory of Adjustment, which recognises  
83 the initial negotiation of unrealistic expectations as a period of 'culture shock',  
84 characterised by feelings of disillusionment and dejection, as students potentially face  
85 adjustment to the changes in their environment (location and culture shock), social life  
86 (meeting new people, sharing accommodation, interacting with academic staff) and  
87 academic/learning environment (Denovan and Macaskill 2013; Gu et al., 2010;  
88 Thurber and Walton 2012; Wrench et al., 2013). Burnett's student experience model  
89 (2007) presents student transition from much earlier in a student's life, framing the first  
90 of 6 phases '*pre-transition*' from aged 13-17 years old (school years 9-12 in England).  
91 It is during the pre-transition phase that students begin to consider studying in HE and  
92 make decisions based on career planning, knowledge and familiarity of courses,  
93 university culture, family and work commitments and financial factors (The Quality  
94 Assurance Agency for HE (QAA), 2023). It is in the period between having a firm offer

95 of a university place and starting welcome/orientation week where students enter the  
96 second phase of '*transition or preparing for HE*' and commonly encounter mixed  
97 feelings of excitement and fear (Burnett, 2007).  
98

99 Previous research conducted by Timmis et al. (2022) investigated student  
100 transition into HE through utilising second and third-year undergraduate students'  
101 perspectives. Students wrote a letter to their younger self, providing guidance on how  
102 to successfully transition into HE. One of the six themes identified from analysing the  
103 letters highlighted the need for students to '*Beware of unrealistic expectations*' and the  
104 value of gathering appropriate information to facilitate imagining/planning realistic  
105 expectations for university life. The gap between student expectation and experience  
106 when joining their course is common (Holmegaard et al., 2014) and complex, with  
107 many contributing factors (Tett et al., 2017; Tomlinson Simpson and Killingback,  
108 2023). This is influenced by individual characteristics (e.g., family background,  
109 personal attributes, previous academic performance and family encouragement e.g.,  
110 Tinto, 1975); personal attributes including being an independent, self-regulated  
111 learner (Hockings et al., 2018; Jonker, 2011; Pather and Dorasamy, 2018; Rowley et  
112 al., 2008), a collaborative, critical thinker able to communicate in large audiences (e.g.,  
113 Hayman, 2017, 2018; Hockings et al., 2018; McMillan, 2013); course characteristics  
114 (Timmis et al., 2022) and degree level expectations (Farhat et al., 2017; Lowe and  
115 Cook 2003); teaching practices (Money et al., 2017); personal circumstances including  
116 cost associated with the degree (e.g., travel from home to place of study) and time  
117 requirements around commuting to university (Timmis et al., 2022; Holmegaard et al.,  
118 2014; Yorke and Longden, 2008).  
119

120 In recent months, across England there has been a much stronger political  
121 narrative surrounding the value (benefit) of HE degrees, with the OfS threatening to  
122 impose sanctions on universities that are failing to deliver 'good' outcomes for students  
123 (Department for Education (DfE), 2023). Outcomes are being partly regulated through  
124 the number of students who initially enrol on a course and complete their studies  
125 (continuation and completion) and progress into a highly skilled job or further study 15  
126 months after graduating (progression; condition B3, OfS 2023). Whilst student  
127 retention has long been identified as a concern in HE (Wilson et al., 2016), the subject  
128 area of Sport and Exercise Sciences is particularly poor, having recently been ranked  
129 second lowest across 34 subjects in terms of students projected to obtain a degree  
130 (OfS, 2021) and is an area of continued concern for those involved in sport and  
131 exercise sciences education.  
132

133 To better understand the link between the risk to non-continuation (drop out)  
134 when transitioning into HE and students' unrealistic expectations, it is necessary to  
135 investigate the learning and teaching experiences of first year sport degree students  
136 who had recently enrolled in HE and compare these experiences with how they were  
137 taught at their previous educational establishment, further education. Literature has  
138 shown that students self-report differences between teaching and learning  
139 experiences in further education compared to HE (e.g., Cook and Leckey, 1999; Lowe  
140 and Cook, 2003) and the study habits students formed in further education persist to  
141 the end of the first semester of university (Cook and Leckey, 1999). However,  
142 aforementioned research focused on students' self-reported difference and did not  
143 seek to understand the experiences of students as they transition into HE, or negotiate  
144 any unrealistic expectations. If students' capabilities to navigate change and transition

145 into HE are to be fully understood and resourced, it is necessary for research to  
146 foreground students' lived realities (Gale and Parker, 2014) and increase the current  
147 understanding by considering students' own perspective (Maunder et al., 2013).

148 Through using both survey and focus groups, the current project investigated  
149 how the students' previous education experience impacts student expectation and  
150 initial experience of transitioning into HE.

151

152

153 **2 Method**

154

155 **2.1 Organisational Context**

156 This study was undertaken at Anglia Ruskin University (ARU), an English HE provider  
157 which traces its origins to the Cambridge School of Art, founded in 1858, and granted  
158 university status in 1992. ARU’s passion for widening access to, and participation in,  
159 HE, recognises education for all and is an enabler of positive transformational change  
160 for both individuals and wider society, realised in the institution’s mission;

161

162 “Transforming lives through innovative, inclusive and entrepreneurial education and  
163 research.”

164

165 ARU’s student body is best characterised by its diversity, attracting students  
166 from groups that are underrepresented in HE. 30.2% of our students fall into quintile  
167 1 of at least one of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), Tracking  
168 Underrepresentation by Area (TUNDRA) and Income Deprivation Affecting Children  
169 Index (IDACI) measures. We attract considerably more mature (57.1% aged 21+),  
170 minority ethnic (36.0%), female (62.9%), and local (36.5%) students than the  
171 respective sector averages (29.9% aged 21+, 29.0% minority ethnic, 56.1% female,  
172 21.8% local). 34.7% of our students have an Access/Foundation/‘other Level 3’ course  
173 as their entry qualification (sector average, 17.0%), and 16.7% of our students have  
174 ‘other’ entry qualifications – typically mature learners admitted on the basis of their  
175 prior and experiential learning (sector average, 8.1%).

176

177 ARU has offered sport degree courses since 2000. Initially offering a degree in  
178 Sport and Exercise Science, the discipline has grown to meet industry demands and  
179 provides a pathway for academic study across 4 undergraduate and 1 postgraduate  
180 degree programmes.

181

182 **2.2 Participants**

183 The total sample which completed the survey comprised 69 out of 92 eligible  
184 participants (75% completion rate), of which 64% were male and 36% were female  
185 (0% identified as other/nonbinary). Most participants were aged 18 or 19 years (77%),  
186 Caucasian (70%), classed as ‘home’ students (93%) and studied either A-Levels  
187 (33%) or Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) courses (36%), at sixth  
188 form (59%) or college (32%) full-time (97%). BTEC courses and A-Levels are widely  
189 recognised level 3 qualifications that enable entry into HE settings within the United  
190 Kingdom. BTEC courses are vocational and renowned for providing specialist and  
191 applied work-related learning across a range of sectors whereas A-Levels offer more  
192 traditional subjects and class-based approaches to teaching and assessment. The  
193 participant demographics related to each programme of study can be seen in Table 1.

194

195 >>>>TABLE 1 HERE<<<<<

196

197 **2.3 Procedure**

198

199 In October 2023, all level four (first year) undergraduate and foundation (level  
200 3) sport students were invited to participate in the study. Following institutional ethical  
201 approval, an initial recruitment email outlining the study aims, objectives and  
202 procedures to follow, along with participant information sheet and consent form were

203 sent to all students, inviting them to participate. Prior to data collection, consenting  
204 participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time and  
205 they were assigned numbers to protect anonymity.  
206

207 Surveys were completed during teaching weeks six and seven of semester one  
208 (November 2023) at the start of a face-to-face lecture. Participants were briefed to  
209 answer each section honestly and to leave any questions blank which they did not fully  
210 understand/did not apply to them or their context. Two members of the research team  
211 attended each data collection session, distributed then collected hard copies of  
212 surveys and responded to any participant queries. Following completion of the survey,  
213 participants were invited to attend a focus group, enabling opportunity to expand on  
214 their answers provided in the survey.  
215

## 216 **2.4 Research Design**

217 This current study has adopted a mixed methods approach, utilising both  
218 quantitative and qualitative techniques to generate data, in order to get a more  
219 'complete' picture (Kumar, 2019). Fetters et al. (2013) specify three levels of  
220 integration of mixed methods research – design, methods and  
221 interpretation/integration. Mixing quantitative and qualitative methods aims to  
222 maximise the strengths of each approach, whilst offsetting the respective weaknesses  
223 of each to generate stronger conclusions (Stephens and Stodter, in press). The  
224 quantitative survey aimed to capture data on a large representation of the student  
225 cohort at level four in order to gain a generalised view of their previous educational  
226 backgrounds and experiences, and expectations of study at HE. The subsequent  
227 qualitative focus groups provided the opportunity to gather further insight and rich  
228 description related to the research questions that the survey on its own may not  
229 provide. Likewise, the smaller sample size of the focus groups may have been  
230 relatively limited in generalisability on their own (Stephens and Stodter, in press).  
231

### 232 **2.4.1 Survey**

233 The survey structure was developed by the research team and informed by  
234 previous HE transitional studies (e.g., Hayman et al., 2017) which had identified  
235 several relatable variables and key demographics. The survey, initially piloted on a  
236 group of undergraduate sport students, informed the final design, which comprises  
237 mainly closed questions, including a mix of yes or no and likert scale options. There  
238 were no correct or incorrect answers. The survey was piloted with four second-year  
239 sport undergraduate students which established an approximate completion time of  
240 ten minutes, with all wording considered appropriate and understandable for first-year  
241 undergraduate and foundation cohorts. In the survey, participants provided responses  
242 to five separate sections addressing: (A) background demographic information  
243 including gender, age, ethnicity, previous study experience and qualifications (B)  
244 experiences of completing their further education qualifications at their previous  
245 education establishment (C) expectations and experiences to date of their university  
246 sports degree programme and (D) skills they perceived as necessary to be successful  
247 on their university course and (E) teaching resources they utilised within their further  
248 education and university studies to date. A copy of the survey is available on request  
249 from the first author.  
250

### 251 **2.4.2 Focus Groups**

252           Whilst the surveys collected data from a larger sample, focus group interviews  
253 were subsequently conducted to gain richer data from a smaller sample group to  
254 explore the 'why' and 'how' rather than 'what' and 'how many' (Gratton and Jones,  
255 2004). Two focus groups were conducted in March 2024, taking place approximately  
256 four months post-survey to allow time for participants to reflect on their experiences in  
257 HE, whether there had been any mismatch with expectations, and the potential impact  
258 of this. The focus groups were semi-structured in nature and informed by the questions  
259 posed in the survey, with three level four sport students in each, lasting 34 minutes  
260 and 44 minutes. Participants were invited to participate from the initial survey sample,  
261 with additional consent provided following receipt of a separate participant information  
262 sheet. Students were reminded that they were free to withdraw and could answer  
263 questions voluntarily.

264

265           The focus group data were subject to inductive thematic analysis, a widely-used  
266 method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) in qualitative  
267 research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim  
268 and read for data familiarity. Transcripts were reread and coded by labelling interesting  
269 items deemed pertinent to the research questions. Similar codes were clustered  
270 together to generate initial subthemes, and subsequently reviewed. Relationships  
271 between subthemes were considered and defined before grouping into high-order  
272 themes and used as a structural framework for the section that follows.

273

### 274 **2.4.3 Integration**

275           Linking mixed methods of data is key to maximising the strengths of each  
276 approach with the whole being stronger than the sum of its parts (Mason, 2006). The  
277 quantitative and qualitative approaches form equal parts in this research study  
278 (Kumar, 2019). Whilst the survey was used to inform focus group questions, the results  
279 from each method were initially analysed separately, using a phase connection  
280 approach for integration, whereby quantitative and qualitative components are  
281 separate until an explicit connection is made to provide more complete and validated  
282 conclusions (Plano Clark and Ivankova, 2016). Following initial analysis, the results  
283 from each approach were merged into a combined dataset to provide a coherent  
284 narrative around the three themes of FE experiences and HE expectations and  
285 realities. Quantitative survey data were used to explore generalisability of findings from  
286 the focus groups, for example, whether the whole cohort view success in HE as  
287 aligning to the framing of HE study set by the teaching staff from the previous  
288 educational establishment of the focus group participants. Similarly, qualitative data  
289 were used to explain the survey results in more depth, e.g., to discuss the practical  
290 implications of different class sizes, using contextualised verbatim text examples with  
291 further opportunity to reflect on perception of the transition to and experience of HE.

292

293

294

295



296 **3 Results** The current study explored students' experiences of learning and  
297 teaching practices in their previous educational establishment, their expectations and  
298 initial experiences in HE. The results section integrates both survey and focus group  
299 results into a single narrative. Key survey data are drawn from Tables 2-4 and  
300 presented alongside the themes reflected in the thematic analysis; These themes and  
301 sub themes are represented in the thematic map below (figure 1).

302  
303

304 >>>Figure 1 HERE<<<<

305

306 Figure 1. Themes (dark grey) and sub themes (light grey) relating to the research  
307 question understanding students' experiences of Learning and Teaching practices in  
308 their previous educational establishment and their initial expectations and experience  
309 in HE.

310

### 311 **3.1 Experiences of FE**

312

313 The theme *Experiences of FE* included sub themes ***Prior learning***  
314 ***environment*** and ***Accessibility and supportive nature of tutors***. Students in their  
315 prior learning environment experienced a high level of consistency in the tutor that  
316 taught them. The highest response was a single tutor (30%). Whilst a portion of  
317 students had variation in the number of staff teaching them between modules/subjects  
318 (28%), ranging from the same one or two tutor(s) within the subject, occurring due to  
319 occasionally being taught by other tutors for sessions "linked to a specific sport" or  
320 "someone who knew a bit more about a certain sport". Few had experienced large (3+)  
321 teaching teams (12%).

322

323 Students also experienced small class sizes, with a small portion (29%) having  
324 experienced a classroom with more than 30 people. "Sport was definitely the smallest,  
325 or one of the smallest classes we had", ranging from "16 to 20 people for each class"  
326 to "around ten-ish". The (small) class size provided opportunity to engage with the  
327 session "For the smaller classrooms, I think it was more beneficial [for learning]". The  
328 consequence of the small class size provided opportunity to be "a lot more vocal",  
329 potentially because the environment "felt a lot more casual....it was more like  
330 discussion based". This environment also resulted in "more one-on-one conversations  
331 [with the tutor]" and personalised learning "you [the student] can set work and [the  
332 tutor] be going around so you get more time [with the tutor] if you need it".

333

334 Most students experienced a mixture of lecture and practical/lab sessions. The  
335 length of taught classroom sessions were commonly 1-2 hours (70%), with few  
336 sessions being longer (7%). The length of practical sessions were commonly 1-2 hours  
337 (58%), although a portion experienced shorter 30mins-1hr sessions (26%). Students  
338 were able to select their favoured format of lessons (selecting all that applied).  
339 Approximately half of students favoured practical sessions (49%) and mid-sized group  
340 seminars (44%). A quarter of students favoured lectures (25%). Small group sessions  
341 (9%) and laboratory sessions (12%), whilst preferred by some, were less favourable.  
342 Students preferred the practical sessions "just because it's hands-on", more than the  
343 "theory side" but recognised the value of initial theory (lecture) through "needing the  
344 study [lecture] that you do beforehand to then go into the lab". Students recognised  
345 that they "did really like small classroom settings [lecture] with theory" and how their

346 experience was “more down to my teachers”. “It depended on the teacher, so  
347 sometimes it was more like sitting and just listening, or sometimes we'd just be doing  
348 presentations and us teaching the other students in class”. Where students did  
349 comment negatively about their lecture experience, this was attributed to “one subject  
350 that's like three hours straight, so it was quite boring. You know, because you're just  
351 sitting, you just watch the PowerPoint and the teacher speaks. So it was quite  
352 repetitive and it was boring as well because it was too long, the classes”.

353

### 354 **3.2 Expectations of HE**

355

356 The theme, *Expectations of HE* included sub theme **Preparedness**. The close  
357 relationships between students and tutors created an opportunity for tutors to share  
358 their experiences and prepare the students in some manner for HE. “For the  
359 experience of university, all the teachers were very open about their experiences”, “the  
360 actual experience of university both in and outside of the classroom, I like that it's just  
361 open kind of thing. It's like how they actually presented it, not lied about what it'd be,  
362 based on their own experiences with it”. However, whilst students wanted to hear  
363 about the experiences of their tutors, not all received it which subsequently resulted in  
364 feeling that “They [tutors] didn't really prepare us for uni, like what happened there, but  
365 they did prepare us a lot when we were applying to it, but not necessarily like what to  
366 expect when we go into uni”.

367

368 Students recognised that certain academic expectations were preparing them  
369 for HE. “English, we kind of learned how to embed quotes into things or like criticism  
370 of literature, criticism into our essays. I guess that kind of links to what we're doing  
371 now, but just at a very basic level. And then for history, because we were giving  
372 presentations, public speaking I guess, and doing our own research. So yeah, kind of.  
373 It was kind of like a little preparation to uni, I guess, so...”.

374

375 The other sub theme **Scare tactics to be an independent learner** resulted  
376 from the information the tutors shared with the students. “What my teacher told me  
377 was that it was going to be a whole bunch of work. They kind of scared us almost”.  
378 “We were told, from what I'd heard, everything's basically on you”. “I just knew that in  
379 university we're not going to be spoon fed all the time because in school we were  
380 spoon fed a lot. Like the teachers just give you everything and there's not a proper  
381 way to learn it because they're just giving you everything”. Whilst most students were  
382 experiencing interactive engaging teaching sessions in their current place of study,  
383 when they attend university “the lectures will be on, it's more of a they talk, then you  
384 take down notes”. “It was made out to be like, oh, you've got to be taking notes like  
385 every single time you're at a lecture. You have to be proper on it”, “it's just, they talk to  
386 you, it's not interactive”.

387

388 The expectations of HE, shaped by the experiences shared by their tutors,  
389 helps to contextualise the responses to the questionnaire which asked students to rate  
390 the skills and attributes necessary to be successful in HE. Success in HE was  
391 attributed to intrinsic factors related to attendance and being responsible for their own  
392 learning (68% and 67% strongly agreeing, respectively). Students shared (see  
393 *Experiences of FE sub-section*) how the interactive and engaging teaching  
394 approaches adopted by the teacher shaped their enjoyment of the lectures. Similarly,

395 success in HE was attributed to extrinsic factors associated with the quality and  
396 enthusiasm of the teacher (61% and 51% strongly agreeing, respectively).

### 397 398 **3.3 Realities of HE**

399  
400 The theme, *Realities of HE* included sub themes **Academic environment,**  
401 **Initial negative emotions, Ownership of their situation,** and **Establishing a social**  
402 **network through routine.**

403  
404 Within the *academic environment* students reflected on the teaching format  
405 and approach. Whilst students valued the opportunities lecturers provided for  
406 engagement in lectures, students recognised how there was opportunity to not  
407 engage. "I think the lectures are really engaging. They try to make it... They don't just  
408 try to deliver something, but they just... They try to get the students to answer (which  
409 doesn't always work)". "I think that would help as well, if people speak more in classes,  
410 contribute more" but "maybe you know that if you don't [answer], someone else will  
411 say something or [tutor] move on". The experiences of the lectures are that "it's quite  
412 a big group and there's a lot going on in that session". "The smaller ones  
413 [seminars/practical] are just better....because everyone actually interacts and talks".  
414 "Like for physiology our practical sessions, because it's quite small, I actually got to  
415 talk to so many people I didn't think I would have spoken to besides these two  
416 [gestures to others in the focus group]. So it's like, okay, I got to know more people.  
417 So I like the smaller ones because you get to like meet new people you didn't think  
418 you would speak to." "Yeah, people talk more in seminars".

419  
420 Student's experienced seminars differently to their previous educational  
421 environment. "It's quite different how seminars work here... [school was] like a self-  
422 directed session rather than you telling us, [at university] you have to do this [activity]  
423 in this particular seminar. Yeah, [at school] it's just like we do whatever work we need  
424 to get done, basically. They just give us free time during school".

425  
426 Students reflected the different approach to assessment between previous and  
427 current place of study. "In my previous school we just had like a week [to complete  
428 part of an assessment], they won't really give us all [of the assessment] they would, I  
429 guess, they would give us [a weekly] due date but it wouldn't be as much". In their  
430 current place of study, students face "a set date on when everything's due and it's  
431 usually months ahead so we have actually time to work on it" resulting in "we know  
432 our assignments from the get go, we know what we're building towards, so there's that  
433 clear plan". "Whereas here, it's you've got so much time to work towards it".

434  
435 Students valued the approachable, pastoral nature of lecturers. "It just feels like  
436 they care, not just as a student, but as a person as well. Emotionally, they'll be like,  
437 oh, if you need anything, let me know. So I think that just makes my day as well". "I  
438 definitely like it when lecturers are more open. It just makes it less scary as well, and  
439 I can ask. I'm not too shy to ask for help". "Here it's like, it's not just about the lectures,  
440 they will also come and ask if you need anything or if you just need to talk. There's a  
441 lot of support, not just from the lecturers, but also if you need other stuff". "I feel like  
442 they encourage you to book a meeting if you're lost or to ask questions if you feel lost  
443 or you need help. They invite you to do it". "In university, everyone is really welcoming  
444 and encourage you to ask for help. So you can book a meeting with anyone". "Usually

445 a meeting is 15 minutes, I think. I wanted more, and most of the time, they let you take  
446 as much of their time as possible. But I know everyone's really busy, but they still make  
447 time for you". "And here it's more like you can talk to them [academic staff] a bit more  
448 freely, you know, I feel like there's more of a connection. It helps, it's less scary I guess  
449 to ask or to like just talk about something like, I don't know, anything else. It is definitely  
450 easier".

451  
452 The realities of HE were met with *initial negative emotions*. The initial  
453 experiences of the large cohort lectures "was overwhelming, because the first day I  
454 went all the way to the back, and I sat, and I can see everyone's laptops, and I'm just  
455 like, I feel like I wasn't doing the work, because everyone's typing, typing, typing, and  
456 I'm just sitting there like, oh, what am I doing? So it was overwhelming". But others  
457 "didn't feel like any particular way, I was just like, okay, well, there's a lot of people I  
458 have to find a place to sit. That's all I thought".

459  
460 Students reflected that during the initial weeks, they had an initial "dislike", or  
461 "shock", but over time something changed, "but I was like, then I got used to it". "I think  
462 it was a bit of a shock, but then I think after a couple of weeks it kind of was just a  
463 really smooth transition", "but once you get into it, uni is actually quite a smooth  
464 transition, I think". "Yeah I actually do really enjoy coming to uni. I didn't really enjoy  
465 going to school before. I hated it, I didn't even want to do a degree first because I  
466 thought it would be the same like initially when I first started, yeah, but then I like it  
467 now". "I actually like uni now. Because from high school it's different. So I'm enjoying  
468 uni and I'm especially like because I'm doing what I like so I'm really enjoying the  
469 course and just the uni experience".

470  
471 Part of the enjoyment reflected by students may be attributed to the "refreshing  
472 nature" of HE, "you're used to being in an environment where you've got to study, but  
473 then coming to university, it felt a bit more refreshing", "I think that university is a bit  
474 better, I'd say. I think it's just more relaxed.... sixth form was casual but this is a lot  
475 more casual", "there's a lot more breathing room to kind of relax". "It's a lot more of a  
476 relief, it's like, okay I get to do this and then I get the rest of the day to myself to either  
477 continue studying if you need to or just get on with whatever you need to do in the day.  
478 It's a lot more relaxing, you get a lot more free time I'd say".

479  
480 Students recognised the need to take **ownership of their situation** and the  
481 responsibility of self in their success, "It's you who fails at the end of the day, so there's  
482 a consequence". "Like, it's just all independent and down to you. Like, if you're willing  
483 to learn, you're able to learn". "And then you're placed into a room where... I'm making  
484 it more scary than it is, but you're in a room with complete strangers, even the lecturers,  
485 you don't know them, they're not going to do the work for you, so that's when you're  
486 kind of like, oh, okay, I've got to do this now, I can't rely on, just because I know this  
487 lecturer, I know this person, I know everyone here, it's like you've got to do it for  
488 yourself, you kind of have to, it's not, for me, it's not like learning it, it's like, okay, I'm  
489 put in this situation, I am forced. You've got to work it out". "Here I'm actually doing  
490 things by myself which I really like because I'm actually being independent doing my  
491 own research. Last semester I really liked the assignments because I got to do it by  
492 myself as well".

493

494 Students' external environment outside the university impacted their approach  
495 to studying. It was realised that a consequence of having to be independent outside  
496 the university resulted in independence *leaking* into being an independent student. "I  
497 lived at home and now I'm living in dorms, it's completely different. I have to buy my  
498 own groceries and everything and get a job and what not. I couldn't really have those  
499 opportunities when I was at home because that's stuff my parents do. They have their  
500 own job, like getting the money in. I couldn't get a job because I'd have school all day.  
501 So I guess that type of individuality would be different to the previous education". "So  
502 I still think there's a lot more to it, that, a lot more responsibility, as opposed to just  
503 being at home". "I think the only shocking thing was, well not really shocking, but the  
504 living by myself thing, that's the only thing I didn't really prepare myself for".  
505

506 Recognising the opportunities outside of formal studies created opportunities  
507 for students to grow their whole self. "For me it's the amount of opportunities to do stuff  
508 outside of uni [course]. I really like the fact that they have societies". "And I also like  
509 the fact that we can do the professional development, they give us a lot of opportunities  
510 to just try stuff really, because you will do things that will build you up, like your CV  
511 and stuff, so if that wasn't compulsory, I don't think I would have done it, but now that  
512 I'm doing it, it's like, oh this actually helps. So I do, I do like the PDT [Personal  
513 Development Tutorial; pastoral system] and I do enjoy my courses as well and I do  
514 like the lectures because they're all so nice".  
515

516 In the initial weeks, students **established a social network through their**  
517 **routine**. "I think just having that, that kind of routine, like at the beginning, so you come  
518 in, the first time you sit down in a lecture hall and there's like 100 students there, and  
519 you're just not used to it at all, and then you go into a seminar and it's back down to  
520 20, 30, or well, it should be probably higher, but most of the time it's like, it's like, once  
521 you just get used to that, like, oh, even speaking in front of 100 people is completely  
522 different to the thing you do before, especially when you don't know any of them". The  
523 familiarity of routine, shared with many other students created opportunity to establish  
524 new friendships, "I think it's once you're in a routine and then you become familiar with  
525 people as well, obviously the lecturers and people in the class. So, see, in the first,  
526 like, two, three days, I was by myself and I was like, okay, this is going to be a long  
527 three years. And then we [fellow students] became friends. We become friends with  
528 some other people as well who we actively see all the time, communicate with". This  
529 experience also resonated with international students, "Oh, well it's because I'm an  
530 international student, so like, when I first came here I'm away from my family and my  
531 own friends, and it was hard to make friends when I first came as well. So I was like  
532 by myself and I didn't really understand how to even use Canvas [online learning  
533 management system] for example. So it was like I was doing things by myself and it  
534 just got depressing for like the first few months because I was by myself. But then  
535 obviously after I met them [friends] and then I got to know the course and I got used  
536 to things, I started to like it". The smaller teaching groups also facilitated opportunity  
537 to connect, "I feel like for the practicals, the physiology ones, we got split. We're not in  
538 the same group, but they're smaller groups, so I've met people I've never talked to  
539 before and they're really nice, but the thing is that they've been split from their friends,  
540 that they'll actually talk to you".  
541

542 The development of a friendship group served to remove elements of isolation,  
543 "So once you have your friend group, like, we used to have a two hour break, I think,

544 after the first lecture. So like once we had something to do through that [break], or  
545 because obviously, there's wasn't really much work set at the start. It's like, you just  
546 had a routine, you knew you had people you'd go there with, you wasn't by yourself  
547 and you got a bit more confident with the lecturer and the lecturers themselves. I think  
548 it just became a lot more smooth", "and especially once you then get friends or you  
549 end up not having to spend like two hours alone, like in between slots" and "this  
550 semester I would say I'm much better, but last semester I was just like getting used to  
551 things and doing things by myself so it was not what I expected uni to be. Quite an  
552 adjustment". 'You just had a routine, you knew you had people you'd go there with,  
553 you wasn't by yourself and you got a bit more confident with the lecturer and the  
554 lecturers themselves".

555

#### 556 **4 Discussion**

557

558 To better understand the link between the risk to non-continuation (drop out)  
559 when transitioning into HE and how this is impacted by a student's expectations when  
560 entering HE, the current project utilised focus groups, informed through an initial  
561 survey, to explore students' experiences of learning and teaching practices in their  
562 previous educational establishment and their initial expectations and experience in  
563 HE. Results highlighted themes aligned to students' experiences on FE, expectations  
564 of HE and Experiences in HE. The discussion considers *The reality of HE* for a student,  
565 identifying *what is missing* as they transition from FE into HE.

566

567 Understanding how to be an independent learner and possess effective time  
568 management skills are necessary for student success (Christie, Barron & D'Annunzio-  
569 Green 2013). The development of these (and related) academic skills have been  
570 similarly reported in the literature as important in facilitating student transition into HE  
571 (e.g., Scouller et al., 2008; Timmis et al., 2022; Van der Meer et al., 2010; Wilson et  
572 al., 2016; De Clercq et al., 2018) and understood as "early transition needs" to enable  
573 integration into the academic environment (Wilson et al., 2016). It is through  
574 establishing these academic skills that students begin forming a positive student  
575 learner identity (Leese, 2010), which is an essential factor in the persistence and  
576 success of a university student (Briggs et al., 2012).

577

578 In the current study, at the start of their HE journey, students did not recognise  
579 the importance of being an independent learner or requiring effective time  
580 management skills; the highest rated skill was time management, but only 41%  
581 strongly agreed this was valuable. It should be recognised that students have come  
582 from an FE environment with high dependence (support) from their tutor which didn't  
583 necessarily expose them to the level of independence and time management skills  
584 needed in HE. As one student commented in the focus group, "Like the teachers just  
585 give you everything and there's not a proper way to learn it because they're just giving  
586 you everything."

587

588 Whilst students studying at university are required to become "self-regulated  
589 learners" (Zimmerman, 2000), they need support, starting during induction/orientation  
590 week, and continuing throughout the first year (Palmer et al., 2009; Van der Meer et  
591 al., 2010) as they learn to become independent (Wilson et al., 2016). This support  
592 requires a nuanced co-curricular and curricular approach which recognises the  
593 diversity within the first-year student cohort (e.g., where students have progressed

594 from), subsequently allowing distinct learner identities to be developed (i.e., Briggs et  
595 al., 2012). Our previous research has demonstrated the value of utilising pre-arrival  
596 resources to support students' transition into HE and a similar pre-arrival model could  
597 be employed as a skills development programme.  
598

599 The relationships students develop with academic staff and their personal tutor  
600 are an important part of their integration into academic life (McGivney, 1996).  
601 Experiencing staff as supportive and approachable helps students to gain confidence  
602 within the academic environment and increases their willingness to seek out support  
603 (Morosanu et al., 2010; Tett et al., 2017). However, students can perceive the  
604 relationships with academic staff as much more distant compared to their previous  
605 place of study, where interaction with teaching staff was embedded in everyday  
606 learning practices (Christie et al., 2008). In the current study, whilst students  
607 highlighted the approachable, pastoral nature of the lecturers, students reported that  
608 the frequency of communication with their tutor reduced from FE to HE,  
609 communicating daily/weekly reducing from 40% to 16%, and communicating monthly  
610 increasing from 16% to 33%. The reduction in contact with staff between FE and HE  
611 likely impacts the perception from students that academic staff are much more distant  
612 which could be further exacerbated in an environment where students have high  
613 expectations with being able to access academic staff outside of scheduled teaching  
614 classes (Tomlinson et al., 2023).  
615

616 In FE, most students used emails (86%) as a common method of  
617 communicating with tutors. However, half also relied on more informal 'catching' the  
618 tutor around teaching session (52%) or dropping by the tutor's office (57%). In HE,  
619 94% of students use email to communicate with tutors, however, only 65% prefer to  
620 use this method of communication. 42% 'catch' the tutor around the teaching session,  
621 with 33% preferring this approach. 26% prefer to knock on the door, but only 9% use  
622 this approach to communicate. Only 20% make use of the tutorial system (whether in  
623 person or online) and only 7% prefer this approach; further work is needed to better  
624 understand students' reticence to use the tutorial system.  
625

626 In HE, whilst emails are the mechanism for students to communicate with  
627 lecturers, the less formal approaches used in FE, whilst preferred, are absent. It is  
628 likely that this initial negotiation of communication expectations serves as a period of  
629 'Culture Shock', characterised by feelings of disillusionment and dejection, as students  
630 potentially face adjustment to the changes in their environment (Risquez et al., 2008).  
631 Recommendations for practice suggest (in the initial weeks of a student's transition  
632 into HE) holding course leader 'drop in' sessions, when an open-door policy is  
633 increasingly provisioned, reducing as the term progresses.  
634

635 The gap between student expectation and experience when joining their course  
636 is common (Holmegaard, Ulriksen, and Madsen, 2014). In the current research,  
637 students highlighted how they came from an FE environment where they experienced  
638 high levels of support and connectedness to their tutor and class. However, when  
639 entering HE, they experienced initial negative emotions, feeling overwhelmed, isolated  
640 and lonely. Whilst the initial 'culture shock' (Risquez et al., 2008) and negative  
641 emotions dissipated as the term progressed (likely as they established a social  
642 network and sense of connectedness through their routine), there is clear opportunity  
643 to better support the transition of students into the HE environment. Particular effort

644 should be directed toward modules with high student numbers, to tackle the 'sea of  
645 students' in the lecture and mitigate against student's feeling overwhelmed and lost  
646 amongst the masses. In addition, where students are experiencing a variety in  
647 lecturers, additional work is required to develop a sense of belonging and  
648 connectedness (Artinger et al., 2006), such that students feel connected and  
649 supported (Hausmann et al., 2007). Indeed, students who do not feel adequately  
650 supported by their institution are more likely to drop out, especially in their first year of  
651 study (Wilcox et al., 2005).

652  
653 Results from this current project provides additional support for designing  
654 increasingly flexible and relational modes of sport education provision (Su and Wood,  
655 2023). This relationship rich approach to education (Felten and Lambert, 2020;  
656 Gravett, 2023) will likely better support the academic needs and ease the transition to  
657 independent learning of sports students as they enter HE. Whilst resource constraints  
658 will likely impact pedagogic design principles, recommendations for practice should  
659 review initial large group sessions (lectures of 100+ students) and instead consider  
660 smaller, more personalised learning with the same lecturer throughout several weeks,  
661 enabling social networks to be established quicker and increased connectedness with  
662 their lecturer; sessions can develop into larger groups as the term progresses.

663  
664 Tinto's (1993) theory of student integration identifies the importance of social  
665 interaction in university as it enables students to create a sense of belonging to the  
666 institution, a critical part of the retention process (Wade, 1991). When students  
667 develop this sense of belonging, they become involved in other university activities  
668 and further integrated into the university (Miller, 2011). Students, however, often do  
669 not immediately fit in at university and encounter a transient space between home and  
670 university life, where they experience feelings of not belonging (Blair, 2017).  
671 Transitioning students therefore need support with getting to know their peers and the  
672 university community and in feeling at home in HE (Ackermann, 1991; Hausmann et  
673 al., 2007; Cabrera et al., 2013; Gale and Parker, 2014; Coertjens et al., 2017).

674  
675 The results from the current work have identified the contrast between the  
676 relative high level of support and frequency of contact with their tutor in FE and the  
677 reduction when entering HE. The initial negative emotions reported in the focus groups  
678 when entering HE may well be attributed to the reduced contact or loss of support  
679 between places of study. Coupled with aspects of isolation in the initial weeks of HE,  
680 this could be attributed to the idea of mattering (France and Finney, 2009).

681  
682 Mattering is conceptualised through feeling that we impact the lives of those  
683 around us and are significant to our immediate environment (Elliott, Kao, & Grant,  
684 2004) and is important for developing self-identity, sense of belonging, and  
685 understanding one's purpose in life (Elliott et al., 2004; Rosenberg, 1985; Taylor and  
686 Turner, 2001). France and Finney (2009) make an important distinction between  
687 belonging and mattering; belonging to a group not being sufficient to elicit feelings of  
688 mattering. Rather, for an individual to matter, not only does their presence in the group  
689 need recognising and valuing, but the individual must, themselves feel as though they  
690 are important and make significant contributions to the group. Through ensuring  
691 students, as they enter HE, are afforded opportunity to develop meaningful  
692 relationships with people who are focused on the student's welfare (e.g., fellow  
693 students, lecturers, personal tutors etc.), this will foster a sense of mattering and fill



694 the need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Through actively encouraging  
695 students early in their HE journey to engage in wider university activities will also  
696 increase the student's opportunity to forge connections and foster a sense of  
697 mattering.

698  
699 Likely the result of the experiences and advice received from the students' FE  
700 tutor (see 3.2 *Expectation of HE* sub-section), students recognised the importance of  
701 being responsible for their own learning (67% strongly agreed this was a key skill).  
702 Sub theme *taking ownership* (of both the personal and professional) highlighted  
703 students' lack of familiarity and preparedness with the freedom HE 'life' entails (Liu  
704 and Zhang, 2023). This lack of preparedness is likely associated with their experiences  
705 in FE where they attended every day (62%) or 4+ days (78%). In HE this reduced to  
706 ~3 days a week with students experiencing gaps between teaching sessions,  
707 uncertain how to manage these breaks. The reduction in time spent in university is  
708 filled by students having a part-time job. Only 3% of students stated for certain that  
709 they would not have a part time job. 55% stated that they planned on working 10+  
710 hours a week; approximately one third (28%) planned on working 15+ hours a week,  
711 equivalent to 2 full day's work. Our previous research highlighted the need for  
712 students, as they transition into HE, to be aware of their personal needs. Specifically,  
713 the need to take care of oneself, paying attention to different aspects of life that affect  
714 overall wellbeing (Timmis et al., 2022). Students need to be supported in negotiating  
715 the demands of paid employment and university studies through learning to cultivate  
716 a healthy lifestyle and taking care of one's mental health (Timmis et al., 2022). With  
717 the number of students in part-time work increasing, alongside the number of hours  
718 worked per week (Wonkhe, 2024) institutions are being challenged to consider how  
719 the part-time work students undertake alongside their studies can become increasingly  
720 relevant to their future careers and integrated into their learning (Wonkhe, 2024).  
721 Integrating paid employment into a student's subject of study would provide a more  
722 cohesive educational journey, affording the opportunity for the skills and knowledge  
723 developed within their paid employment to permeate into their studies, and vice-versa.

724  
725 As students adapt to being responsible for their own learning, most students  
726 (92%) reported having at least 'good' attendance in HE. However, 10% of the sample  
727 stated that their attendance (at best) would be either 'average' or 'good', suggesting  
728 that they would miss between 1 in 5 sessions (20%) to 1 in 2 sessions (50%). Barriers  
729 to attendance are a little contradictory. The most frequent barrier was reported as a  
730 9am start (36%), but only having one session in a day (17%), possibly due to cost of  
731 travel with repeat commutes to the university (22%) was a barrier; only 25% of the  
732 sample are commuter students, travelling 10+ miles to attend HE. 64% live close (less  
733 than 3 miles) to campus. Conversely, a long break between sessions (23%), or  
734 sessions finishing later into the afternoon/early evening also impacted attendance  
735 (12%), presumably due to part-time work commitments.

736  
737 It is recognised that the current study only focused on capturing the lived  
738 experiences of Sport and Exercise Science undergraduate students, and this was  
739 deliberate. When students enter HE, they are not only faced with understanding the  
740 wider university culture in which they operate (Beasley and Pearson, 1999), but the  
741 culture of their specific study programme, and this requires getting to know the place,  
742 practices, and knowledge of that particular environment (Beasley and Pearson, 1999;  
743 Gregersen et al., 2021). Due to cultural differences across study programmes

744 (Ulriksen, Holmegaard and Madsen, 2017) and institutions, it was necessary to ensure  
745 that the lived experiences gathered from the students was specific to the context of  
746 their culture. Readers of this research are encouraged to view these results through  
747 the lens of their particular environment (Smith, 2018).

748  
749 Our previous work (Timmis et al., 2022; 2024) suggested that student transition into  
750 HE is not a one-off event, completed during welcome/induction week. Rather, it is a  
751 more fluid and enduring component of the university experience (Pennington et al.,  
752 2018) which is shaped by the individual experience students gather in their complex  
753 interaction with their institution (Trautwein and Bosse, 2017). Future research should  
754 therefore consider a longitudinal approach which goes beyond capturing the students'  
755 initial experiences and recognising longer-term challenges or successes as they  
756 transition into their HE environment.

## 757 758 **Summary**

759  
760 The current research identified specific challenges students face as they transition into  
761 HE, often resulting in an initial culture shock as that adapt to their new learning  
762 environment. These challenges are, to some extent, a consequence of their previous  
763 learning environment. Whilst expectations of HE were cultivated in their previous  
764 educational environment, they were not always accurate and resulted in a mismatch  
765 between expectation and reality of HE. Additional work is needed to prepare students  
766 for the realities of HE through providing tutors (in FE) with more accurate  
767 understanding of the realities of HE and ensuring pre-arrival information for students  
768 enables a greater understanding of the realities of HE.

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**Table 1. Respondent demographics of each programme included in the study. In brackets is the % of the programme cohort sample.**

		Sport and Exercise Science	Sport Coaching & Physical Education	Sport and Exercise Therapy	Strength and Conditioning with Rehabilitation	Sport Foundation
<b>Respondents (% of sample)</b>		<b>22</b> (32%)	<b>10</b> (15%)	<b>30</b> (44%)	<b>3</b> (4%)	<b>3</b> (4%)
<b>Gender</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>14</b> (64%)	<b>9</b> (90%)	<b>15</b> (50%)	<b>3</b> (100%)	<b>2</b> (67%)
	<b>Female</b>	<b>8</b> (36%)	<b>1</b> (10%)	<b>15</b> (50%)	-	<b>1</b> (33%)
<b>Age (years)</b>	<b>18-19</b>	<b>17</b> (77%)	<b>8</b> (80%)	<b>22</b> (73%)	<b>3</b> (100%)	<b>2</b> (67%)
	<b>20-21</b>	<b>4</b> (18%)	<b>2</b> (20%)	<b>5</b> (17%)	-	<b>1</b> (33%)
	<b>22-25</b>	<b>1</b> (5%)	-	<b>3</b> (10%)	-	-
	<b>26-34</b>	-	-	-	-	-
	<b>34+</b>	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>15</b> (68%)	<b>8</b> (80%)	<b>22</b> (73%)	<b>1</b> (33%)	<b>1</b> (77%)
	<b>Asian</b>	<b>4</b> (18%)	<b>1</b> (10%)	<b>2</b> (7%)	-	-
	<b>Black</b>	<b>2</b> (9%)	<b>1</b> (10%)	<b>1</b> (3%)	-	<b>2</b> (33%)
	<b>Other</b>	<b>1</b> (5%)	-	<b>5</b> (17%)	<b>2</b> (67%)	-
	<b>Prefer not to say</b>	-	-	-	-	-

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**Table 2. Experiences of previous education environment.**

Question	Response option	Nr.	%
Distance lived from FE	Less than 1 mile	15	21.7
	Between 1-3miles	24	34.8
	Between 3-10 miles	18	26.1
	More than 10 miles	11	15.9
	blank	1	1.4
Had a job	Yes	47	68.1
	No	21	30.4
	blank	1	1.4
Nr. hours worked	1-4 hours	5	7.2
	5-9 hours	10	14.5
	10-15 hours	20	29
	15+ hours	11	15.9
	Blank	23	33.3
Format of lessons	Classroom (more than 30 people)	31	29.2
	Group seminars (10-20people)	30	28.3
	Small group seminars (less than 10 people)	12	11.3
	Laboratory sessions	13	12.3
	Practicals (not laboratory sessions)	16	15.1
	Other (please state):	2	1.9
	blank	2	1.9
Length of classroom based lessons	Less than 30 minutes	0	0
	30 minutes -1 hour	13	18.8
	1-2 hours	48	69.6
	2 hours+	5	7.2
	blank	3	4.3
Length of practical sessions	Less than 30 minutes	2	2.9
	30 minutes - 1 hour	18	26.1
	1-2 hours	40	58
	2 hours+	2	2.9
	blank	7	10.1
How many staff taught on a module/subject?	1	21	30.4

	2	14	20.3
	3	6	8.7
	3+	8	11.6
	Varies between modules / classes	19	27.5
	blank	1	1.4
Methods used to communicate with tutors	Before or after a taught session	36	52.2
	Email	59	85.5
	Pre-booked tutorial	6	8.7
	Knock on the door / face to face	39	56.5
	Social media (e.g. facebook, linked in, twitter)	4	5.8
	I didn't communicate with my tutors	1	1.4
	Microsoft Teams	1	1.4
Frequency met with tutor outside of taught sessions	Daily	7	10.1
	Weekly	21	30.4
	Monthly	11	15.9
	Once every few months	10	14.5
	Once a year	1	1.4
	When I requested one	13	18.8
	Never	6	8.7
	blank	0	0
Average nr. hours per week timetabled classes	Less than 5 hours	0	0
	5-10 hours	14	20.3
	11-15 hours	25	36.2
	More than 15 hours	28	40.6
	blank	2	2.9
Average nr. days per week timetabled to be in college / 6th form	1	0	0
	2	3	4.3
	3	12	17.4
	4	11	15.9
	5	43	62.3
	blank	0	0

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**Table 3. Skills and attributes necessary to be successful in HE.**

<b>Domain</b>	<b>Question</b>	<b>Strongly Agree (%)</b>	<b>Agree (%)</b>	<b>Domain average* (%)</b>
Intrinsic	Attend most of my taught sessions	68.1	27.5	55.8
	Take responsibility for my own learning	66.7	31.9	
	Reach out to my tutors when I need help	47.8	42	
	Be an independent learner	40.6	53.6	
Skill / attribute	Have excellent time management skills	40.6	50.7	32.6
	Have excellent organisational skills	37.7	55.1	
	Be good at goal-setting	36.2	52.2	
	Have excellent communication skills	33.3	56.5	
	Have critical thinking skills	31.9	63.8	
	Have excellent technological skills	15.9	47.8	
Extrinsic	Have high-quality teaching	60.9	34.8	38.4
	Have enthusiastic and motivated tutors	50.7	44.9	
	Have combination of face-to-face and online teaching	21.7	30.4	
	Have state of the art facilities to learn in	20.3	56.5	

\*Average positivity score (strongly agree only) across each domain

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**Table 4. Realities of current education environment.**

Question	Response option	Nr.	%
Distance live from HE	Less than 1 mile	24	34.8
	Between 1-3miles	20	29
	Between 3-10 miles	6	8.7
	More than 10 miles	17	24.6
	blank	2	2.9
Have a job	Yes	57	82.6
	No	2	2.9
	Not sure	10	14.5
	blank	0	0
Nr. hours work	1-4 hours	2	2.9
	5-9 hours	11	15.9
	10-15 hours	20	29
	15+ hours	19	27.5
	Blank/unsure	17	24.6
Most enjoyed format of lesson	Classroom / lecture	17	24.6
	Group seminars (10-20people)	30	43.5
	Small group seminars (less than 10 people)	6	8.7
	Laboratory sessions	8	11.6
	Practicals (not laboratory sessions)	34	49.3
	Other (please state):	0	0
	blank	1	1.4
Methods used to communicate with tutors	Before or after a taught session	29	42
	Email	65	94.2
	Pre-booked tutorial	14	20.3
	Knock on the door / face-to-face	6	8.7
	Face-to-face via teams so I don't have to come onto campus	9	13
	Social media (e.g. facebook, linked in, twitter)	0	0
	I don't plan on communicating with my tutors. If so, can you briefly explain why?	0	0

Preferred methods to communicate with tutors	Before or after a taught session	23	33.3
	Email	45	65.2
	Pre-booked tutorial	5	7.2
	Knock on the door / face-to-face	18	26.1
	Face-to-face via teams so I don't have to come onto campus	8	11.6
	Social media (e.g. facebook, linked in, twitter)	2	2.9
	blank	1	1.4
Expected frequency meet with tutor outside of taught sessions	Daily	0	0
	Weekly	11	15.9
	Monthly	23	33.3
	Once every few months	12	17.4
	Once a year	0	0
	When I need / request a meeting	21	30.4
	blank	2	2.9
How has your attendance been at university since you started in September?	Excellent (90-100%)	39	56.5
	Very good (80-90%)	16	23.2
	Good (70-80%)	8	11.6
	Average (50-70%)	5	7.2
	Poor (30-50%)	0	0
	Very poor (10-20%)	0	0
	I haven't attended (0-10%)	0	0
	Blank	1	1.4
What might be a potential barrier that may hinder your attendance	Cost of travel	15	21.7
	Only having one session on a day	12	17.4
	Having a long (more than 2hr) gap between my taught sessions on a day	16	23.2
	Having a 9am start	25	36.2
	Having a 5/6pm finish	8	11.6
	Work commitments	9	13
	Other^	18	26.1

1100 **^Other:** Sick, Session content, Waking up late, Family commitment, Sport commitment,  
1101 Transport issue, Weather, Forgetting student identification card, Mental health.