



NUS/HSBC Student Experience Report: Teaching and Learning



Funded and conducted in association with:



Research conducted by:



national union of students



NUS/ HSBC Students Research Experience

Report:

Teaching and Learning

February 2011



1 Introduction & Methodology

This report discusses the second wave of a programme of research carried out by the NUS and HSBC in May 2010 into students' expectations and experiences of university. The research looked at a variety of areas, including accommodation, finances, assessment, teaching and resources. As such, this report focuses on the 'teaching and learning' element of the research.

The research programme was a quantitative approach and consisted of an online survey, which ran between 3rd and the 31st of June 2010 and the respondents were selected via a Student Panel. A total of 3863 students took part in the survey, fulfilling a variety of interlocking quotas including year of study, institution type and gender. The final results are weighted to ensure representativeness.

2 Executive Summary

- The net satisfaction of students' teaching and learning experience has not changed since 2009, as again the majority of students, 91%, rated the quality of their teaching and learning experience as either good or excellent, with only 4% saying they think it is poor.
- However, there has been a significant decrease in the percentage of students rating their experience as excellent, from 20% in 2009 to 16% in 2010.
- On average students said they receive 13.4 contact hours a week; this has slightly decreased from the average number of hours received in 2009 (14.0).
- The majority of students (78%) said their contact hours are appropriate; however a small percentage (15%) said they are not. These students typically receive fewer contact hours (10.9) than those who think their hours are appropriate (13.9).
- Students said they undertake 15.0 hours of private study a week, fewer than in 2009 (15.4). However, the amount of study required (as reported by the students) has actually increased, from 25.2 hours (2009) to 27.1 hours (2010).
- As in 2009, the main thing that students said would improve the quality of their experience is more contact time, through group or individual teaching sessions, or time with a personal tutor.
- There is still a significant difference between the percentage who would like to be at least somewhat involved in shaping their course (87%), and the percentage that feel they are (59%).
- However, when students who wanted to be involved were asked how they would like to be involved, the most popular choice was providing feedback about the course (76%), which the vast majority of students (94% of the total) said they have the opportunity to do currently. It may be that this discrepancy may arise from the fact

that of the students who have the opportunity to provide feedback, only 45% believe it is acted upon.

- For many students, the feedback they receive about their coursework is not in their preferred format: 67% would find individual verbal feedback the most useful, however only 24% receive feedback in this way.
- Those who receive verbal feedback individually are much more likely to say their feedback provides clear suggestions on improving their performance (80%) compared to those who receive written grades (59%) or comments (63%).
- Overall, only 58% of students said their feedback makes it clear how to improve their performance, although 52% also said it motivates them to study.
- There is a visible demand for more feedback on exams: 88% of the students who received either no feedback or written grades only would like more feedback.
- Overall, only one quarter (23%) of students said that assessments help them to highlight areas they need to focus on.
- ICT is an increasingly large part of the university experience: penetration of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) has increased from 71% (2009) to 78% (2010). However, despite this increased usage, the percentage of students who feel that ICT usage has enhanced their studies has significantly decreased, from 46% (2009) to 42% (2010).
- In fact, when asked if they felt that more teaching should be delivered online, a vast majority of students (75%) disagreed.

3 Quality of the teaching and learning experience

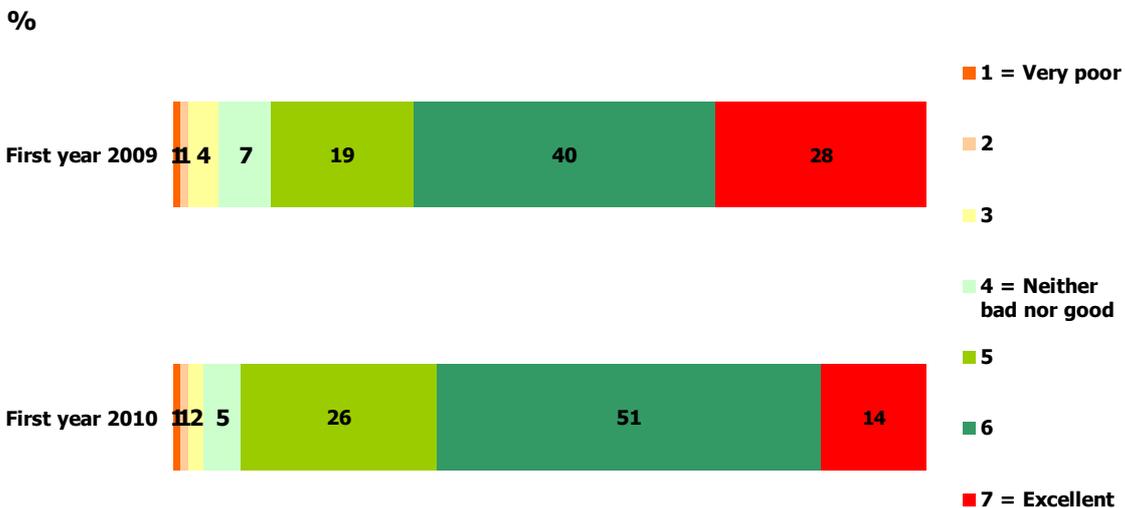
A high percentage (91%) of the students interviewed described the quality of their teaching and learning experience as either good or excellent. This is similar to the percentage seen in 2009.

However, it appears that the percentage of students rating the quality as excellent has significantly decreased, from 20% in 2009 to 16% in 2010.

This is predominantly due to a decrease in the proportion of first years rating the quality as excellent. In 2009, first year students were the most likely to rate their experience as excellent, (14% in 2010 cf. 28% in 2009).

Chart 1: First year students are significantly less likely to rate their experience as 'excellent', compared to 2009

Q14. How would you rate the quality of the teaching and learning experience?



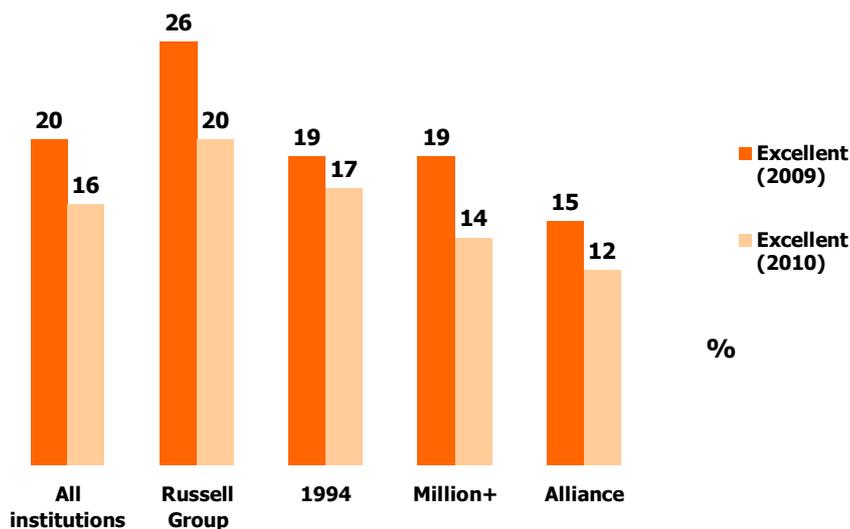
Base: First year 2009 (328); First year 2010 (1182)

Overall satisfaction with teaching is high across all institutions; however, students attending either Russell Group or 1994 Group institutions continue to be significantly more likely to rate the quality of their teaching as either good or excellent.

There have however been significant decreases in the percentages of Russell Group and Million+ students rating their experience as excellent. This percentage fell from 26% (2009) to 20% (2010) for Russell Group students and from 19% (2009) to 14% (2010) for Million+ students.

Chart 2: Russell Group and Million+ students are much less likely to rate their experience 'excellent' than in 2009

Q14. How would you rate the quality of the teaching and learning experience?



Base: All Institutions 2009 (940); All Institutions 2010 (3181); Russell Group 2009 (244); Russell Group 2010 (800); 1994 2009 (141); 1994 2010 (505); Million+ 2009 (156); Million+ 2010 (517); Alliance 2009 (210); Alliance 2010 (694)

The fact that students were less likely to rate their experience as excellent, but just as likely to rate it positively overall, suggests that although students' basic expectations are being met, they are less likely to be delighted with their experience or to have had their expectations exceeded.

This could potentially arise either from university standards decreasing, or from students' expectations increasing, both of which are feasible possibilities. Increased funding pressures may have led universities to cut back on certain elements of teaching, while high media



coverage of the state of the graduate job market and potential future fee increases may have led students to pay greater attention to the value for money of their degrees.

This year, students were asked whether they think all higher education teaching staff should hold a teaching qualification; over two thirds (69%) agreed that they should. This suggests that students feel the quality of their teaching could be improved by their teaching staff holding qualifications: however, it is difficult to say whether this is due to a genuine dissatisfaction with the teaching ability of their staff, or just due to a belief in the importance of qualifications generally.

When looking at these results by institution type, we see that Russell Group students were significantly less likely to think teaching staff should hold teaching qualifications (62%) than students from 1994 Group (72%), Million+ (77%) and Alliance (71%) institutions.

4 Contact & Private Study Hours

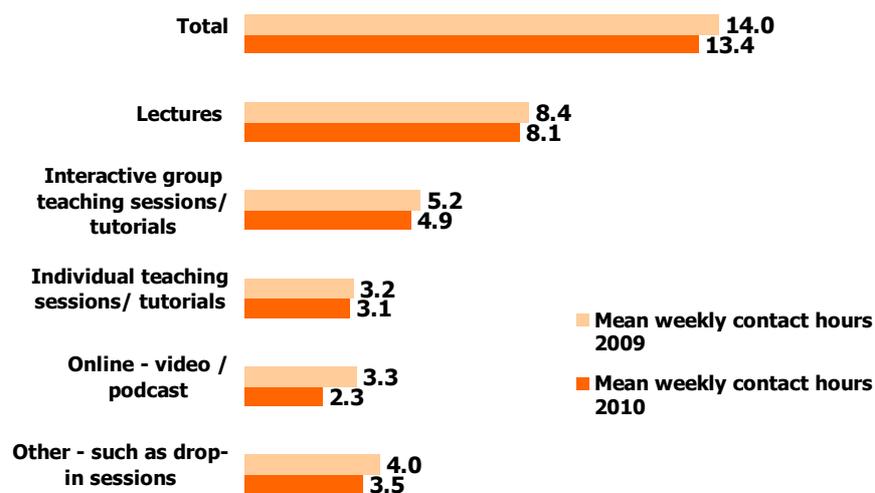
This year, students reported that they receive on average 13.4 contact hours a week, slightly fewer than reported in 2009 (14.0).

Lectures continue to contribute the greatest number of contact hours, with the average student who receiving lectures attending 8.1 hours' worth per week on average. Interactive group teaching sessions/tutorials are the second biggest contributors, providing students who receive them with 4.9 hours of contact time.

Overall, the number of contact hours has fallen slightly for all of the different forms of contact. For online teaching (videos/podcasts) the fall has been particularly noticeable, from 3.3 hours to 2.3 hours per week. Given that the last few years have seen an increase in usage of ICT for studies overall, this is perhaps a surprising finding.

Chart 3: Average weekly contact hours have decreased to 13.4 per week

Q15. On average, how many contact hours a week do you have at this stage of your course, and how are these split into:



Base: All receiving teaching 2009 (939); All receiving teaching 2010 (3179)
 * Mean calculated excluding students who said none

In addition to the weekly contact hours displayed above, 28% of students receive contact hours with their personal tutor each term. These students received 2.0 hours on average.

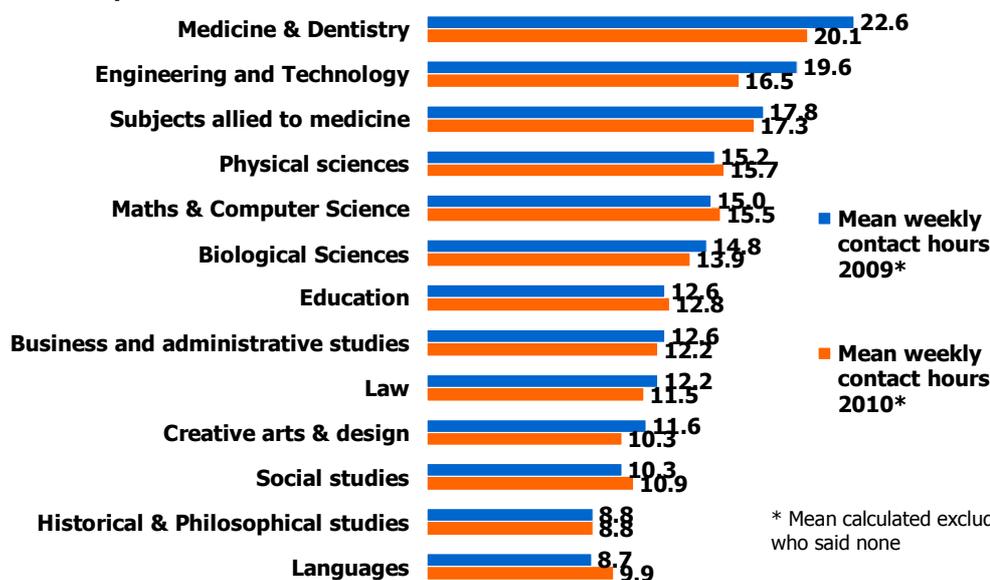
The number of contact hours students receive continues to be affected by subject area, institution type and year of study, with some subjects/institutions having experienced a larger decrease in contact time than others.

Students studying a science subject, medicine, engineering and technology or maths and computer studies reported receiving the highest number of contact hours, as reported in 2009. However, these students have also seen decreases in contact time that are proportionately larger than for those seen for other subjects. In particular, engineering and technology and medicine and dentistry students have had their contact hours decreased by 3.1 hours (-16%) and 2.5 hours (-11%) respectively.

The decrease in student contact hours has been similarly inconsistent across institution types, and has particularly affected students attending Russell Group institutions, whose contact hours fell from 15.6 to 14.7 hours (-6%). Alliance students and Million+ students also saw their contact hours decrease, from 13.1 to 12.6 (-4%) and from 12.6 to 12.4 (-2%)

Chart 4: Students studying medicine and engineering/technology received the most weekly contact hours, but have experienced the largest decreases in contact hours since 2009

Q15. On average, how many contact hours a week do you have at this stage of your course, and how are these split into:



* Mean calculated excluding students who said none

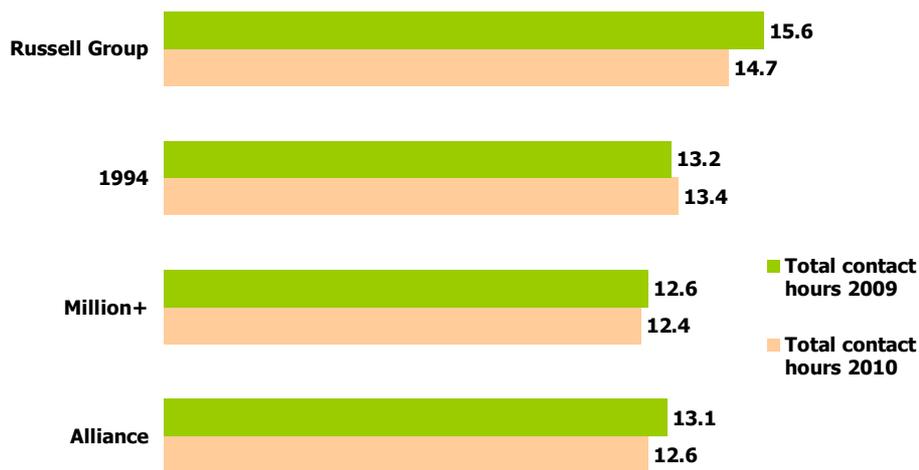
Base: Medicine 2009 (66), Medicine 2010 (170); Engineering/Technology 2009 (74), Engineering/Technology 2010 (232); Subjects allied to medicine 2009 (71), Subjects allied to medicine 2010 (197); Physical sciences 2009 (54), Physical sciences 2010 (202); Maths/Computer Science 2009 (80); Maths/Computer Science 2010 (260); Biological Sciences 2009 (80); Biological Sciences 2010 (280); Education 2009 (40); Education 2010 (152); Business/administrative studies 2009 (78); Business/administrative studies 2010 (248); Law 2009 (36); Law 2010 (119); Creative arts/design 2009 (81); Creative arts/design 2010 (317); Social studies 2009 (82); Social studies 2010 (287); Historical/Philosophical studies 2009 (47); Historical/Philosophical studies 2010 (182); Languages 2009 (55); Languages 2010 (195)

respectively. Conversely, students attending 1994 Group institutions saw their number of contact hours increase slightly, from 13.2 to 13.4 (+1%).

However, despite experiencing the greatest decrease in contact hours, Russell Group students still receive significantly more contact hours than Mission + and Alliance students, and also more (+2.4 hours) than 1994 Group students.

Chart 5: Russell Group students receive the most contact hours, but have experienced the largest decrease in hours since 2009

Q15. On average, how many contact hours a week do you have at this stage of your course, and how are these split into:



Base: All receiving teaching: Russell Group 2009 (244); Russell Group 2010 (799); 1994 2009 (141); 1994 2010 (504); Million + 2009 (156); Million+ 2010 (517); Alliance 2009 (209); Alliance 2010 (694)

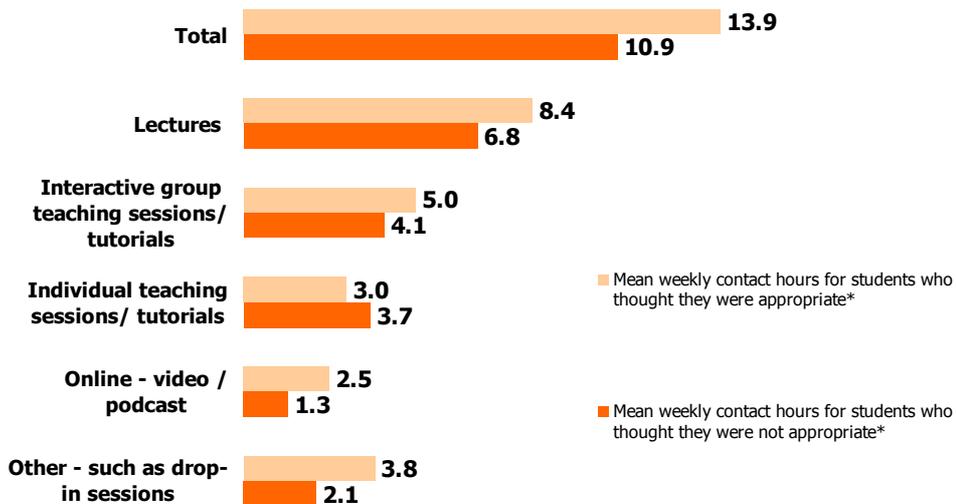
* Mean calculated excluding students who said none

When students were asked if they thought the amount of contact time they received was appropriate, 78% thought it was; however, 15% said it was not.

Students dissatisfied with their contact time typically received significantly fewer contact hours than those who were satisfied. Chart 7 shows that students who thought their contact hours were not appropriate received fewer contact hours for virtually all forms of contact, with the exception of individual teaching sessions/tutorials.

Chart 7: Weekly contact hours are significantly lower among students who don't think they receive enough

Q15. On average, how many contact hours a week do you have at this stage of your course, and how are these split into:



Base: All who think contact hours are appropriate (2450); All who think they are not appropriate (497)

Students from Million+ and Alliance institutions were significantly more likely to say their contact hours were not appropriate, which is perhaps unsurprising given that they also reported fewer contact hours than Russell Group and 1994 Group students.

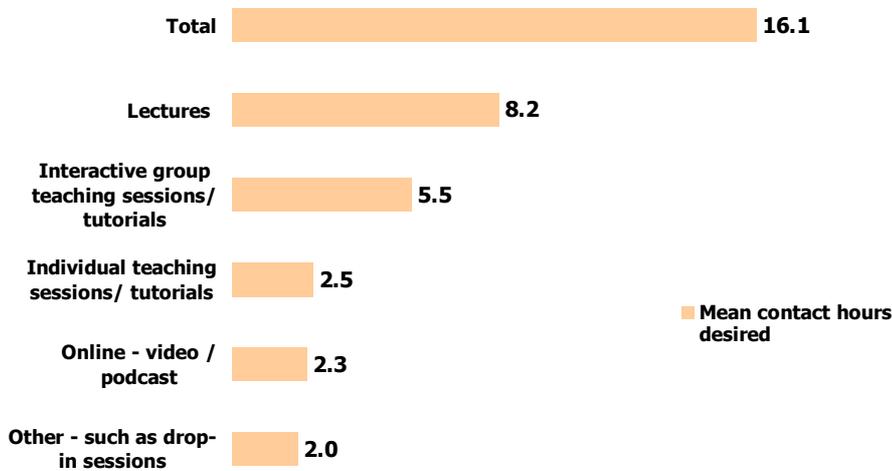
First year students were the most likely to agree that their contact hours were appropriate (83%), which is perhaps surprising given that their contact hours have decreased the most

significantly since 2009, although of course first years will have no prior experience of university teaching to compare their current contact hours with.

When students who thought their hours were not appropriate were asked how many contact hours they would like, the answer was an average of 16.1 hours per week, an increase from 2009, when 15.4 hours was seen as ideal. Given that the average number of contact hours received by students has decreased from 14.0 to 13.4, this suggests that the discrepancy between the teaching hours that students would like and the teaching hours they actually receive has increased between 2009 and 2010. This could potentially be a contributing factor to the decreased percentage of students rating their teaching experience as excellent.

Chart 8: Students who didn't think their contact hours were appropriate, on average, said they would like 16.1 contact hours a week

Q17. How many contact hours a week, and of what type, would you like at this stage of your course?



Base: All who think contact hours are not appropriate (497)
 * Mean calculated excluding students who said none

Students report that the average number of private study hours that their course requires has increased, from 25.2 to 27.1, suggesting an increased dependence on self-study for courses. However, the number of hours of private study that students undertake per week has actually fallen slightly, from 15.4 to 15.0. The shortfall in students' private study hours has therefore increased between 2009 and 2010: from 9.8 hours difference to 12.1 hours difference.

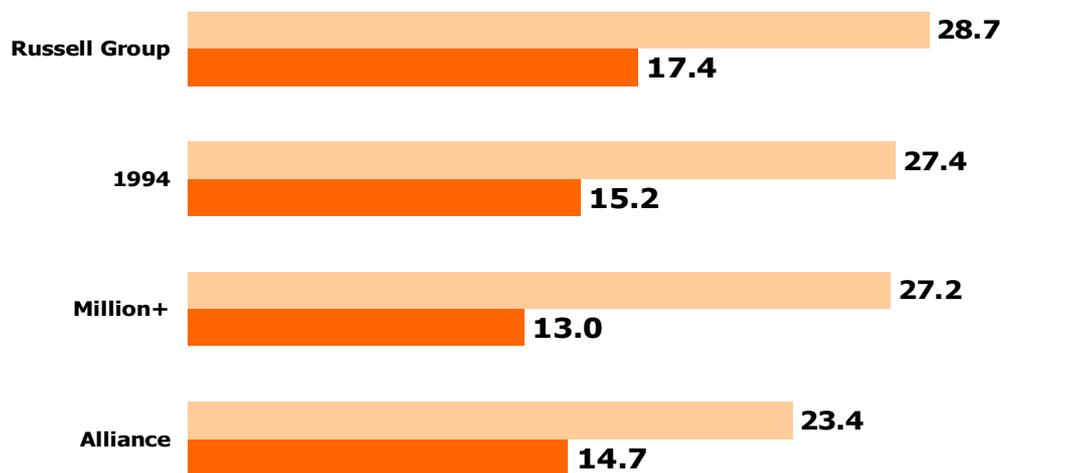
The amount of private study undertaken continues to vary between year groups, with first, second and final year students undertaking 11.9, 13.4 and 18.8 hours of private study respectively.

Russell Group students are expected to undertake the greatest amount of private study (28.7 hours), though this is not too dissimilar to students at 1994 Group, and Million+ institutions, who are expected to undertake 27.4, and 27.2 hours per week respectively. Although for Alliance institutions it was reported to be even lower at around 23.4 hours per week. However, the number of hours that Russell Group students actually undertake (17.4) is significantly larger than the number completed by students from 1994 Group, Million+ and Alliance institutions (15.2, 13.0 and 14.7 hours respectively).

Chart 9: Though the amount of private study required is fairly constant by institution, Russell Group students undertake more private study than students from other institutions

Q18. In addition to contact hours, how many hours per week do you spend on private study?

Q19. How many hours of private study does your course require?



Base: All who receive teaching: Russell Group (799); 1994 (504); Million+ (517); Alliance (694)

* Mean calculated excluding students who said none

■ Private study expected
■ Private study conducted

5 Nature of contact hours

As seen in 2009, over half of the contact hours that students receive (51%) are with lecturers. Students attending either Russell Group or 1994 Group institutions continue to be significantly more likely to receive contact time with professors.

When students were asked what motivated them to learn, the majority chose aspirational reasons: 'wanting to do the best I can' (80%) and 'having an inspirational lecturer' (66%) were the most popular choices.

Chart 10: 'Wanting to do the best I can' continues to remain the main motivation to learn

Q22. Which, if any, of the following motivates you to learn? Please select all that apply.



Base: All answering Section 3: 2009 (940); 2010 (3181)

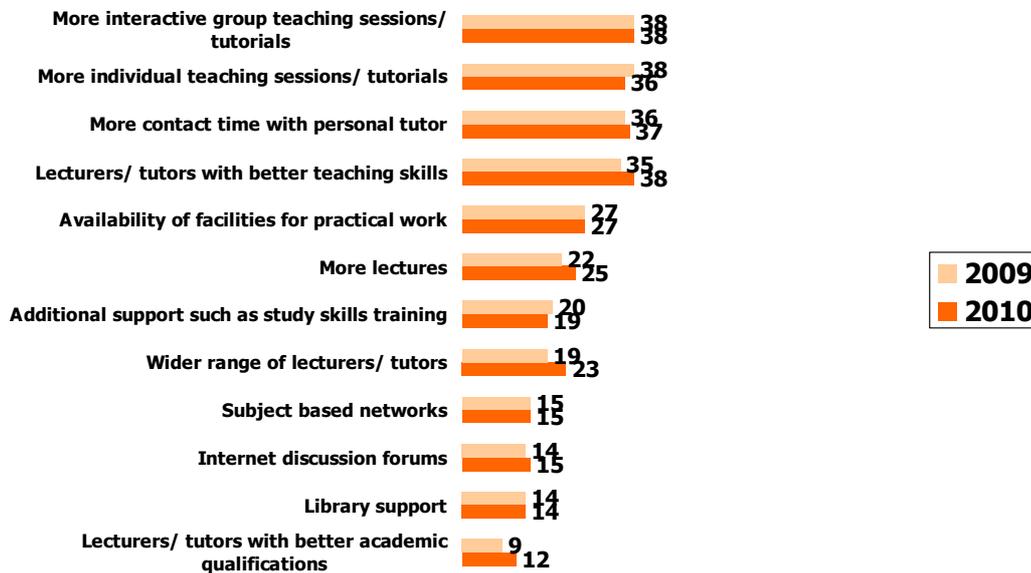
Given the intensive press coverage of university fee increases and the competitive graduate job market, it is perhaps surprising that the percentage of students saying they are motivated by getting value for money for the fees they have paid (38%) has only marginally increased since 2009 (37%). Although given the recent development, we may see this being a bigger motivation in years to come. An exception to this is seen for students attending Million+ institutions, who were much more likely to say they were motivated by obtaining value for money (50%) than they were in 2009 (35%), suggesting that these students are paying more attention to the value for money delivered by their courses.

Students from Mission + and Alliance institutions were also significantly more likely to be motivated by the opportunity to do practical work' (50% and 45% respectively), while second and final year students were more likely to be motivated by an inspirational lecturer (66% and 72% respectively).

As the first wave of research in 2009 revealed, the main thing that students said would improve the quality of the experience is more contact time, through group or individual teaching sessions, or time with a personal tutor. There are no significant differences between the percentage of students who chose particular options between 2009 and 2010, with the exception of 'a wider range of lecturers/tutors', which was chosen by 23% of students this year, compared to 19% in 2009.

Chart 11: Students continue to say increased contact time would improve the quality of their teaching and learning experience

Q24. What would improve the quality of the teaching and learning experiences at your university?



Base: All answering Section 3: 2009 (940); 2010 (3181)

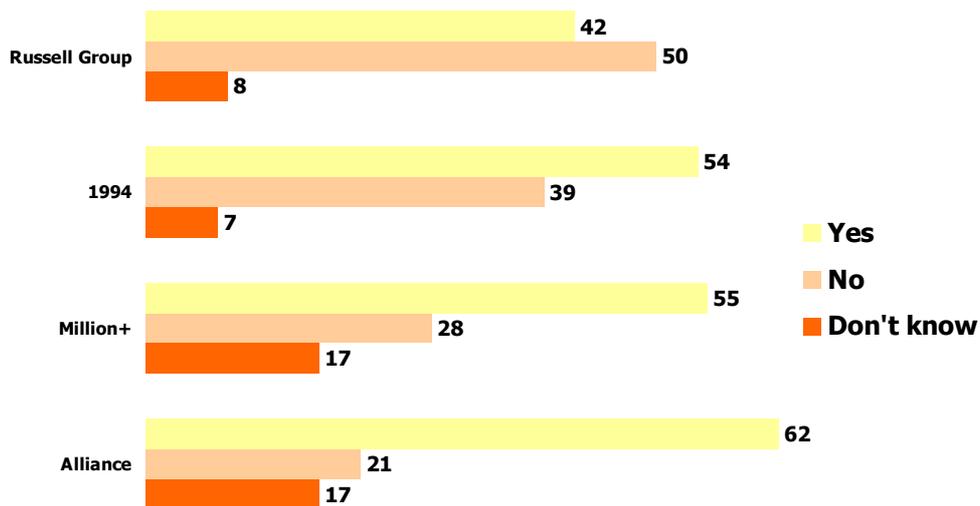
The percentage of students who said 'availability of facilities for practical work' would improve their experience was significantly higher for Million + (33%) and Alliance (30%) students, compared to Russell Group (16%) and 1994 Group students (20%), where the facilities are better in comparison.

Almost two-thirds of students (62%) are aware that the quality of their institution is assured by an external agency; a third (38%) is unaware. However, of the students who are aware, only half (49%) are happy with the arrangement, while 47% do not know what this means in practice. 4% of students are unhappy with this arrangement.

Students were also asked whether they thought a 2:1 from their university was broadly comparable with a 2:1 from any other university. Just over half (55%) agreed with this statement, while a third (32%) disagreed. Russell Group students were significantly more likely to disagree with this statement (50%), compared to students from 1994 Group (39%), Million+ (28%) or Alliance (21%) institutions. This belief may partly be due to the greater number of hours of private study Russell Group students undertake (17.1 hours), compared to 1994 Group, Million+ and Alliance students, as mentioned in section 4.

Chart 13: Students from Russell Group institutions are less likely to think a 2:1 from their university is broadly comparable to one from any other university

Q25N. Do you think a 2:1 from your university is broadly comparable with a 2:1 from any other university?



Base: Russell Group (800); 1994 (505); Million+ (517); Alliance (694)

Finally, students were asked about their living arrangements during term time. A quarter of students (24%) said they live on a university campus. These students were predominantly

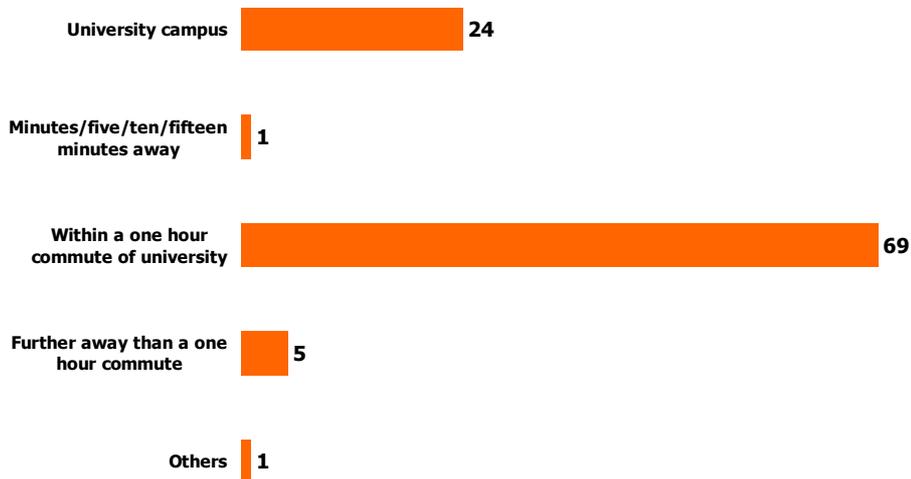
first years, 49% of whom reported living on campus, compared to 16% of second years and 12% of third years. Students from Russell Group and 1994 Group institutions are also significantly more likely to live on campus (31% and 38% respectively) than Million+ or Alliance students (14% and 22% respectively).

A small percentage (1%) reported living minutes away from university; however the majority of students (69%) said they live within a one-hour commute.

Although the results from our school leavers survey indicate that with continued pressure on students with regards to funding of education, a fifth of the new breed of students would turn towards living at home with parents over the coming years during their course.

Chart 14: The vast majority of students live within a one hour commute of university

Q26N. And which of the following best describes your living arrangements during term time?



Base: All answering Section 3 (3181)

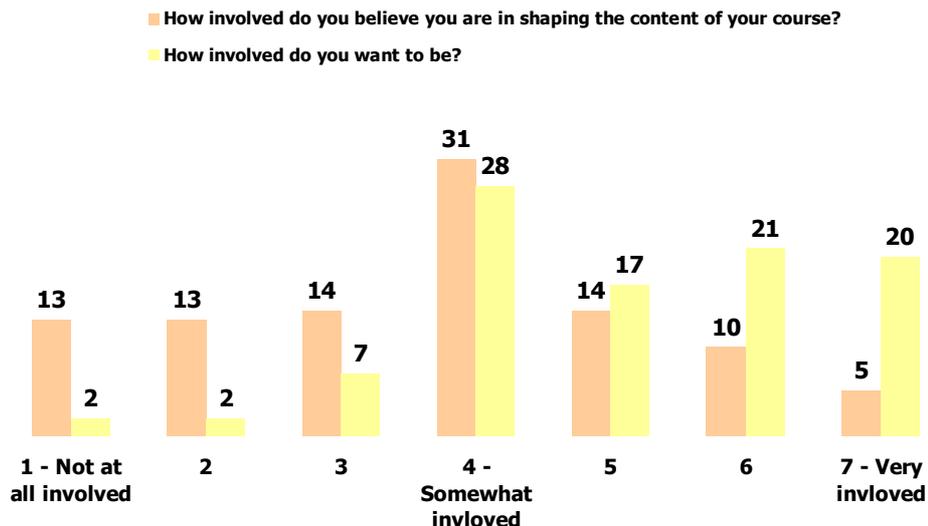
6 Personalisation

As found in 2009, there is a significant difference between how involved students believe they are in shaping their course, and how involved they would like to be. Nine out of ten (87%) students said they would like to be involved in shaping the content of their course; however, only three in five (59%) of students said that they are actually involved.

Chart 15: There is still a disconnect between how involved students feel they are in shaping their course and how involved they want to be

Q26. How involved do you believe you are in shaping the content, curriculum or design of your course?

Q27. How involved do you want to be in shaping the content, curriculum or design of your course?



Base: All answering Section 4 (3179)

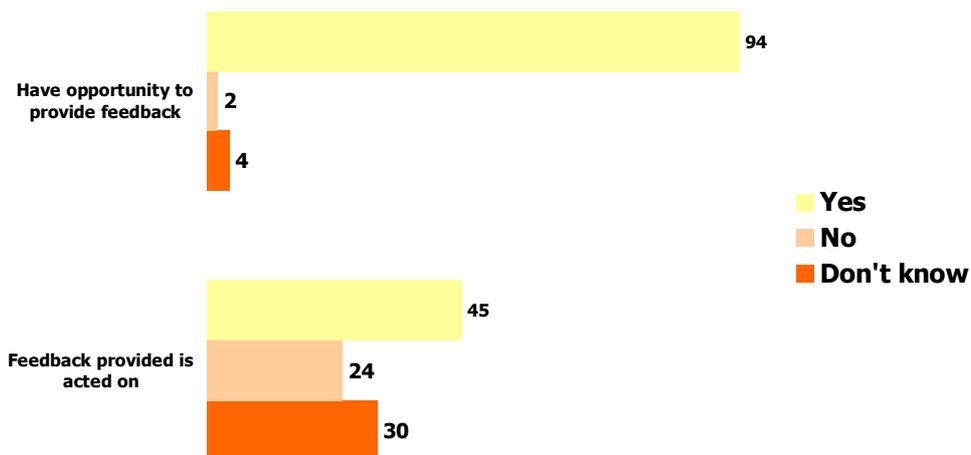
Students wanting greater involvement were asked how they would like to be involved; three quarters (76%) said their preferred option would be providing feedback on the course design. However, when subsequently asked if they had the opportunity to provide feedback about their course, almost all (94%) students said they did have this option.

The fact that a majority (94%) of students have the opportunity to provide feedback about their course, yet only three fifths (59%) feel they are involved with shaping it, suggests either that students are not taking up the opportunity to provide feedback (despite it being available), or that they do not feel that their feedback has had an effect in shaping the course. The latter argument is given weight by the fact that only 45% of those able to provide feedback said they believe their feedback was acted upon.

Chart 16: The vast majority have the opportunity to provide feedback about their course, but less than half believe this is acted upon

Q29. Do you have the opportunity to provide feedback to your University/faculty/department about your course?

Q30. Do you believe that the feedback you provide is acted upon?

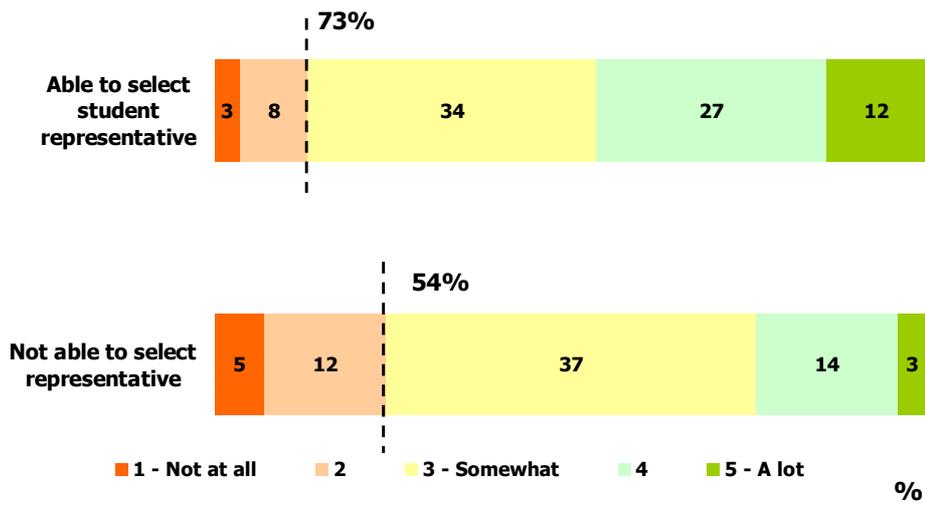


Base: All answering Section 4 (3179); All with opportunity to provide feedback (2977)

The vast majority of students, 88%, said their course has a student representative. Students from Russell Group (90%) and 1994 Group institutions (94%) are more likely to have a course representative (94%) than students from Million+ (85%) or Alliance institutions (86%).

Of the students who have a representative, 70% said they were able to select them. Those who chose their representative were significantly more likely to believe that their views are listened to (73%) than those who were not able to (54%).

Chart 17: Students able to select their student representative are still more likely to say their views are listened to
Q33. To what extent are their views listened to?

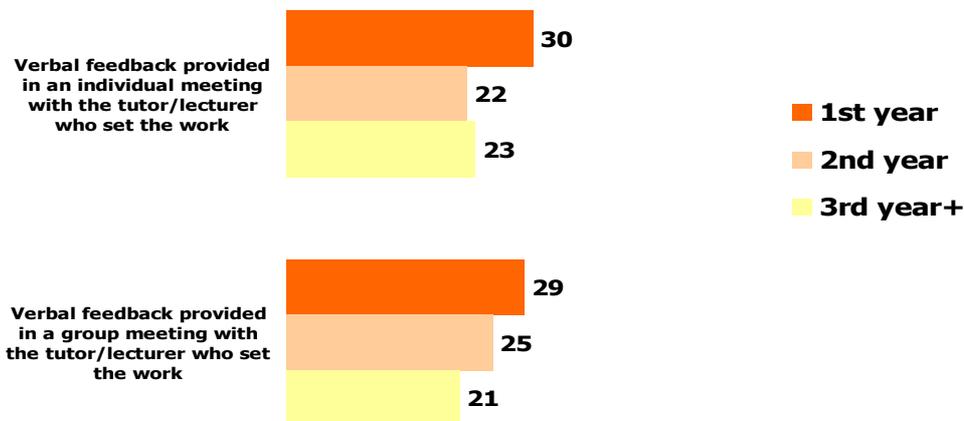


Base: Those able to choose representative (1998); Those not able to choose representative (598)

7 Coursework & Exam Feedback

The most frequently used forms of feedback continue to be written grades and comments, which are received by 88% and 81% respectively. Verbal feedback is also common, with 24% of students receiving it in an individual meeting, and 24% receiving it in a group meeting. Only 1% of students said they do not receive any feedback on their coursework.

Chart 18: First years are more likely to receive verbal feedback in both group and individual meetings than the other years are
Q34. How do you receive feedback on your coursework?



Base: First year (1148); Second year (1108); Third year+ (895)

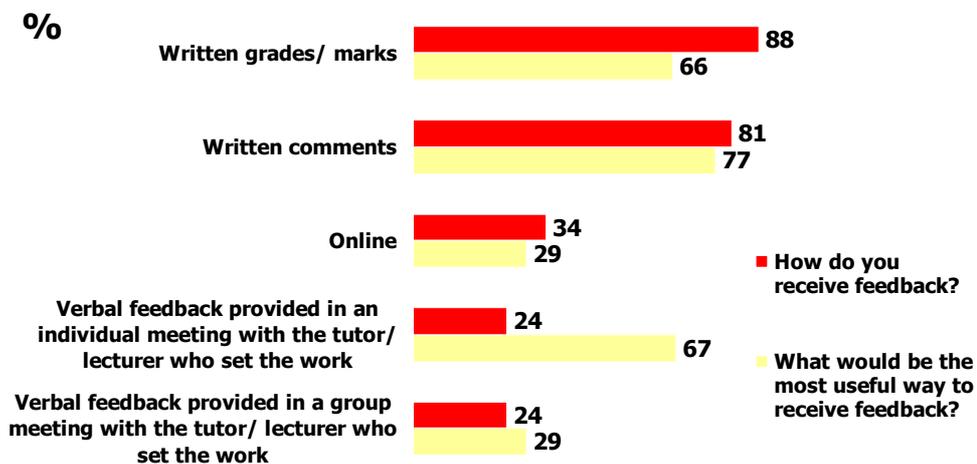
When asked what the most useful way(s) to receive feedback on coursework would be, the most popular response was written comments (77%).

Verbal feedback was also popular, with 67% saying that verbal feedback in an individual meeting would be useful. However, as seen above, only 24% of students actually receive feedback in this way.

Chart 19: The percentage of students who would like individual verbal feedback is still much larger than the percentage which receives feedback that way

Q34. How do you receive feedback on your coursework?

Q36. What would be the most useful way for you to receive feedback on your coursework?

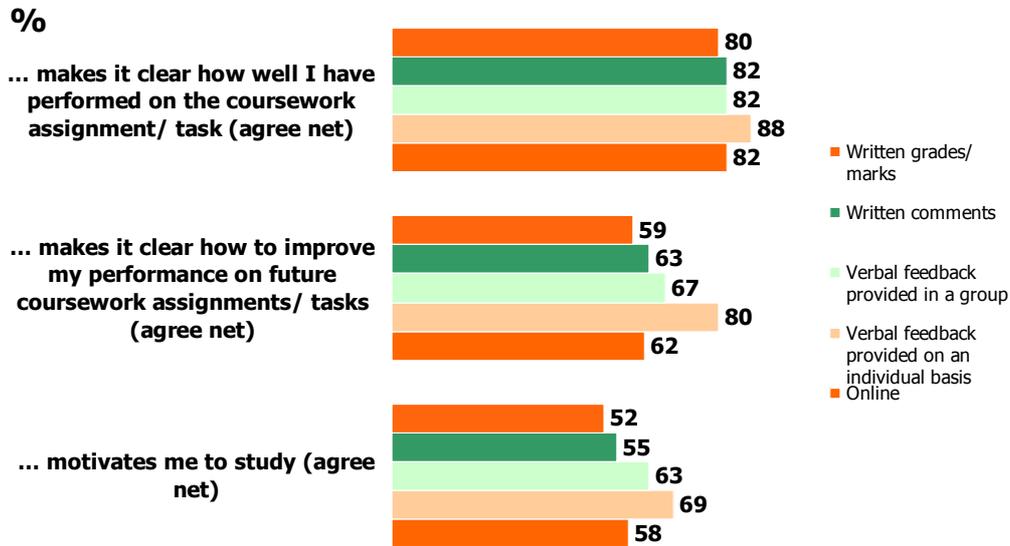


Base: All answering Section 5 (3151)

Of the students receiving individual verbal feedback, 80% said their feedback makes it clear how to improve their performance in future coursework/tasks. This is significantly more than the percentage of students who agreed with this statement when evaluating written grades/marks (59%), written comments (63%), verbal feedback in a group meeting (67%) or online feedback (62%).

Chart 20: Students receiving individual verbal feedback were more likely to say their feedback makes it clear how to improve their future performance

Q35. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about feedback you receive? The feedback I receive

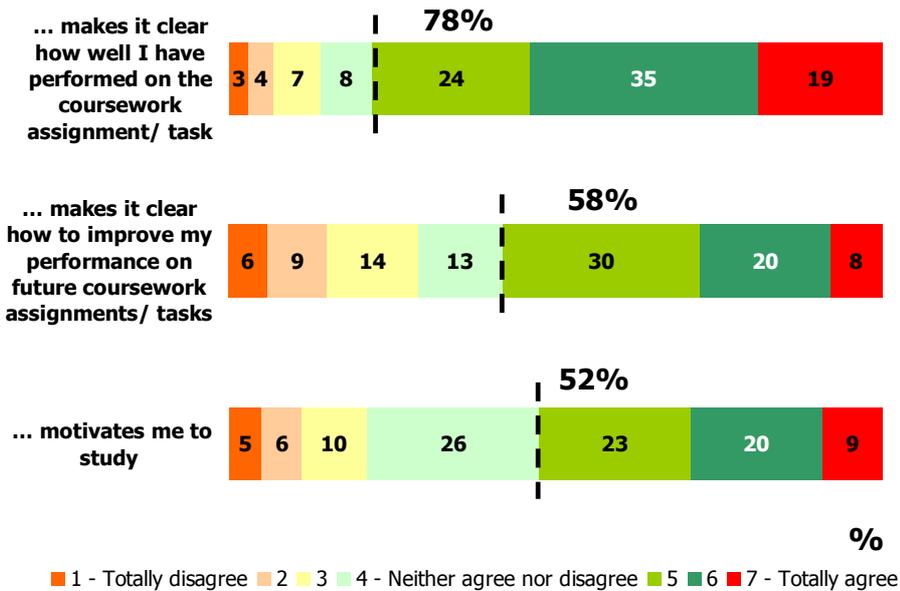


Base: All who receive verbal feedback in a group (786); All who receive verbal feedback on an individual basis (807); All who receive written comments (2594); All who receive written grades/ marks (2805); All who receive feedback online (1047)

Taking all of the feedback methods into account, only 58% of students overall said their feedback makes it clear how to improve their performance. Additionally, only 52% said it motivates them to study; however, a fifth (22%) of students disagreed that the feedback they receive makes it clear how well they have performed.

Chart 21: Just over half (52%) of students said their feedback motivates them to study

Q35. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about feedback you receive? The feedback I receive



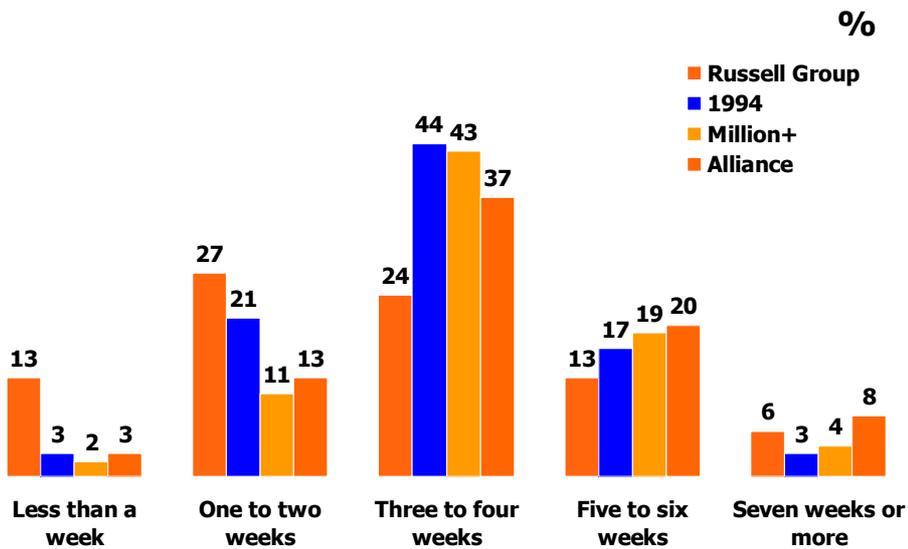
Base: All receiving feedback (3120)

These findings suggest that students continue to find their feedback limited. Those who receive verbal feedback appear more satisfied than average; however, the vast majority of students do not receive this type of feedback, despite showing an interest in receiving it. Increasing the availability of verbal feedback could therefore be a way of increasing students' satisfaction with their feedback, and potentially with their learning experience overall.

When asked how long it takes for them to receive feedback on their coursework, a quarter (23%) said they receive it within 2 weeks and a further third (34%) said they receive it within four weeks. Although a quarter (24%) reported having to wait five weeks or more for feedback. The findings were more favourable for Russell Group students, who were significantly more likely to receive their feedback within a week (13%) or two weeks (40%).

Chart 22: Russell Group students are much more likely to receive coursework feedback within two weeks

Q37. How long – on average – does it take for you to receive feedback on your coursework?



Base: Russell Group (806); 1994 (498); Million+ (504); Alliance (685)

Perceptions of these feedback times varied: 55% of students said the timing of their feedback meets their expectations, while 39% said it does not.

Students dissatisfied with the timing of their coursework feedback were asked how long they would reasonably expect it to take to receive feedback. Of these students, 64% expect feedback within two weeks, while 98% expect it within four weeks. This is substantially more than the percentage who currently receive feedback within two (5%) or four (46%) weeks.





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