

HEDQF

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HEDQF

SOCIAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Student views
of their university

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FOREWORD



The Higher Education Design Quality Forum is an independent organisation which exists to promote high quality design across university campuses, buildings and facilities, in the knowledge that this enhances teaching, learning, research and public engagement.

Research is a core component of the charity's activities, supporting the higher education sector to create, maintain and deliver high quality environments through greater understanding and knowledge of how they affect the people that use them.

The objectives of the Research Working Group echo the overall aims of the charity, specifically to initiate research projects which focus on promoting positive outcomes of building users and exploring the success of completed projects in use.

Although this may seem obvious, the student voice is vital to the success of these research initiatives, as it is to all building projects within the sector. We are

committed to engaging with the student community and capturing their opinions and perspective across all our research projects. We also understand that 'one size does not fit all' and we need to work harder to ensure we capture representative data from this community. Working with an organisation such as YouthSight a, trusted independent insight consultancy with an under-30s opinion of 150,000 members allowed to take another step in this journey.

As a Charity we are reliant on the experience and commitment of our members and in this case, HEDQF is particularly indebted to Dr. Caroline Paradise and her colleagues in the Research Group for instigating and managing this research programme and for producing this excellent summary.

We hope this report provides the basis is for thought-provoking dialogue and further questions. We would also welcome your feedback via admin@hedqf.org.uk

Julian Robinson

Chair of HEDQF and Director of Estates LSE



INTRODUCTION

Although the National Student Survey (NSS) creates a significant presence in the academic year of each and every institution, the learning experience for any student cannot only be captured by formal taught sessions or contact-time metrics.

With many courses developing new pedagogic approaches that incorporate blended learning, using methods such as flipped classrooms or utilising virtual learning environments (VLE) students address a significant amount of the curriculum studying either with colleagues or on their own. Learning experiences that take place outside the 'classroom' setting have an increasingly important role.

Whether you call that informal learning or social learning, ensuring that the university campus provides successful environments for these activities is becoming as important as delivering the right number of 'rooms'

to satisfy timetabling requirements. Design teams are constantly re-evaluating the success of the physical environments they create to support these informal experiences that can be both impromptu or semi-structured. The changing nature of both formal and informal learning requires designers to continually examine how students engage with different space types.

In order to get greater insight into the way students choose to study, we believe it's important to get their views. Over 1000 full time undergraduate students provided their views for this survey, through the YouthSight omnibus panel.

Caroline Paradise

HEDQF Research Group Chair
Associate Director, Atkins/ SNC Lavalin

In order to create a 'sticky campus', universities must listen to the student voice to better understand the student experience. This report shows where and how students are studying and helps inform the types of spaces and facilities Estates teams develop in future.

A key highlight of the report is that the Library is and continues to be the hub of the campus for students, with the majority of us spending the most time in this space. Another point that was highlighted is that as courses introduce more group work to enhance students' graduate attributes, Estates teams will need to create spaces for student interaction, group study and group quiet space.

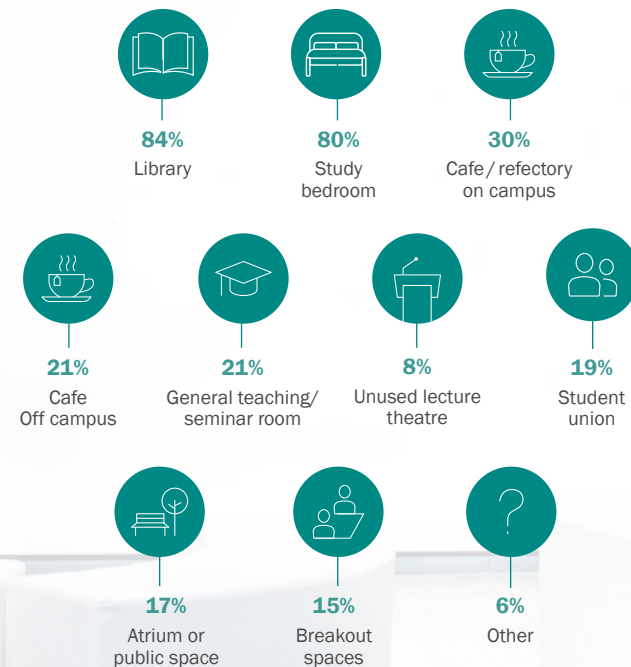
HEDQF's commitment to engaging with students' is pivotal to the success of developing spaces that support the student experience and this report is key in providing food for thought amongst Estates teams across the sector.

Kate Powell,

President of Glasgow University Students'
Representative Council 2017-18



Q. WHERE DO YOU STUDY OUTSIDE TEACHING HOURS?



(Multi-response questions)

STUDY SPACES

Accurately capturing space utilisation data of timetabled spaces across a campus presents many university teams with a challenge. Establishing this data for the spaces that students choose to study outside formal sessions is even more difficult. Although self-reported data has its limitations, getting

suggest that there is a preference towards using designated study areas rather than repurposing other spaces such as cafés or break out areas. Both these spaces are also quite likely to provide a silent or quiet studying environment and in the instance of their bedroom a space that they can control.

acknowledging that good coffee is increasingly becoming a prioritised amenity. Among the lower ranked spaces for study across a campus, general teaching/seminar rooms came out as more likely to be used than the student union or break out spaces. This is possibly because students are more

“THIS COULD SUGGEST THAT THERE IS A PREFERENCE TOWARDS USING DESIGNATED STUDY AREAS RATHER THAN REPURPOSING OTHER SPACES SUCH AS CAFÉS OR BREAK OUT SPACES.”

...DO STUDENTS ONLY ASSOCIATE THE WORD ‘STUDY’ WITH FORMAL SPACE?

an understanding of student preferences of the places they choose to study outside formal teaching can give us a broad picture of where they spend the bulk of their time. The responses from the student body identify the library and their study bedroom as chosen study spaces outside taught sessions. On the surface this could

A smaller percentage of students highlighted café spaces as places they would choose to study and slightly more students would choose to study in cafés on campus, than off-campus. These livelier spaces might be preferable for other reasons, such as providing space for group study or more simply access to food and beverages,

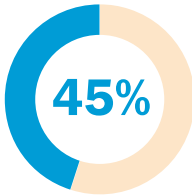
likely to get access to appropriate furniture and power and data points. They are also spaces that can accommodate groups working together. Overall these responses emphasise the important role that student accommodation and the study bedroom still plays in the learning experience of students.

STUDYING ON AND OFF CAMPUS

A ‘Sticky Campus’ is terminology derived from universities keenness to encourage students to stay on campus for longer periods of time beyond their timetabled contact hours. There are a number of perceived benefits for encouraging students to spend more time on campus both from an educational perspective as well as creating stronger social support networks whether that is through study or sport and leisure activities. There are also potential knock-on revenue benefits for an institution if the number of people on campus remains consistently high.

From these survey results the amount of time spent studying on campus varies by the course being studied. Although there is not a significant difference across these disciplines, there does seem to be a trend for students studying Science & Technology based courses to spend a higher percentage of their time studying on campus. This is likely to be related to the requirement for specialist equipment or access to technical resources.

Q. AVERAGE TIME SPENT STUDYING ON AND OFF CAMPUS



on campus



off campus

Discipline	On campus	Off campus
Life Sciences	41.5%	58.5%
Medicine & Dentistry	42%	58%
Humanities and Social Science	42.9%	57.1%
Other	45.9%	54.1%
STEM	47.1%	52.9%
Creative Arts and Design	47.8%	52.2%
Law	51%	49%
Business and Admin	53.5%	46.5%

The responses to the survey show that students say they spend on average 45% of their study time on campus. Although this represents a very slight preference for studying away from the campus, many institutions would be keen to reverse this relationship or even increase the amount of time spent on campus further.

The success of solutions employed to achieve a sticky campus is dependent on a range of factors including the context within which the institution is located, proximity to local town or city centre, transport links and the amenities available on campus. As highlighted on the previous page, a student’s decision to stay on campus beyond formal teaching sessions can be affected by the course they are studying as well as the year of study or whether they are full time or part time.

Each student is likely to have a variety of reasons for deciding to stay on campus, one of the complexities to providing a successfully ‘sticky’ campus. To start to get a better picture of relative importance of these variables the survey asked students to indicate reasons for studying both off and on campus from a range of options captured in the legend opposite.

GRAPHIC LEGEND: RESPONSE REASONING



It’s convenient



The environment is quiet



I can study with my friends



The space is comfortable



It has the curriculum resources I need



I can ask people for help



There are fewer distractions



I can study on my own



Has technical resources needed. e.g. software, special equipment



Other (please specify)

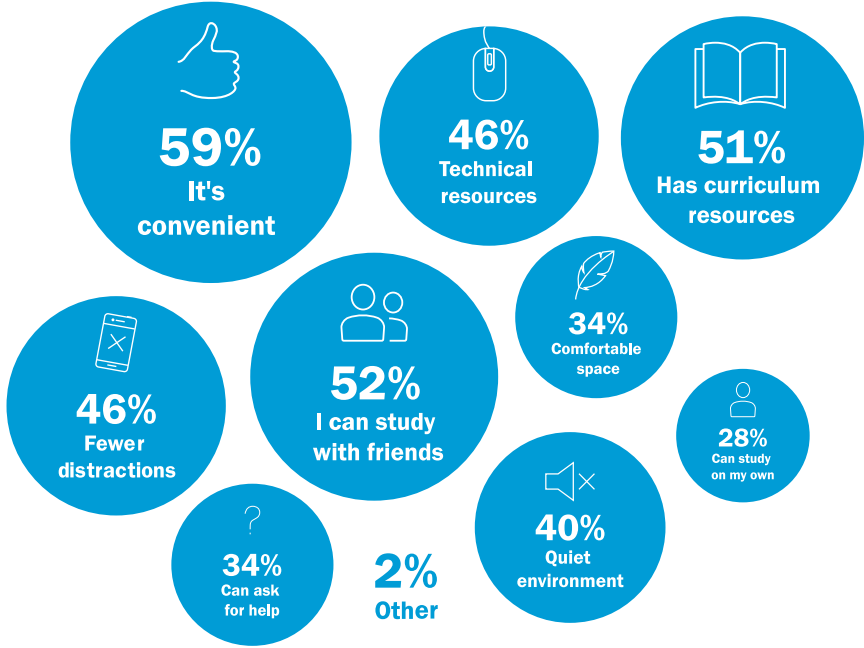


Easy to concentrate

STUDYING ON CAMPUS

Looking in more detail at the reasons stated for choosing to study on campus, convenience, providing the ability to study with friends and availability of curriculum resources are the most common responses. Although 'convenience' was rated the highest, if we take the top 5 responses we get a picture of the reasoning behind choosing to study on campus. The ability to access technical resources as well as curriculum resources and an ability to study with friends indicates that convenience is about having access to the material they need for study as well as space to work in groups rather than on their own. Convenience may also refer to timetabling of taught sessions and the time available to them in between these sessions. As many higher education courses incorporate an amount of group project work, particularly at undergraduate level, campuses that provide a good amount of space for group study are likely to viewed positively by students.

Q. WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY ON CAMPUS?

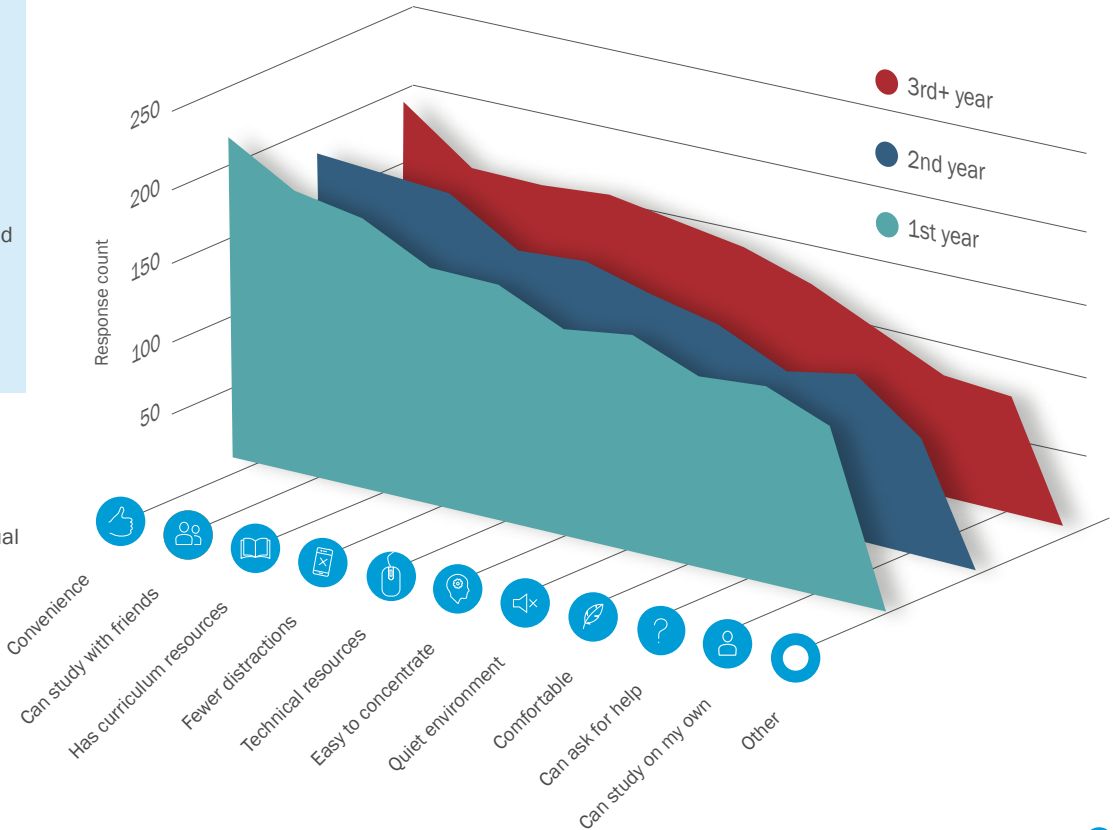


(Multi-response questions)

ON CAMPUS ►

This graph (right) shows the reasons students choose to study on campus filtered by academic year, it's looking to assess whether students requirements for studying on campus change during their journey through University. All three years groups reported that the top reasons for studying on campus is that it is convenient, that they can study with friends and that they can access resources.

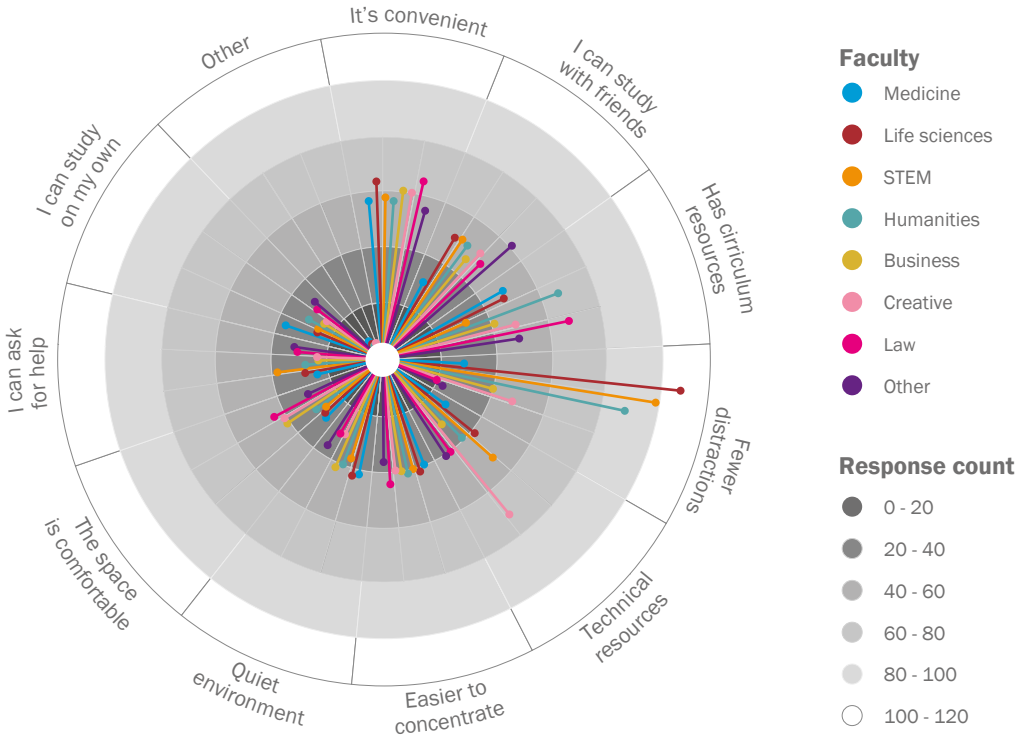
More detailed exploration and understanding of the type of resources students require access to and the success factors around online and virtual curriculum material might provide further insights.





STUDYING ON CAMPUS BY FACULTY

This graph shows the reasons identified by students for studying on campus, filtered by faculty. There are some slight differences across faculties the highest ranked reasons for studying on campus. Higher number of students in Life Sciences, STEM and Humanities subjects reporting fewer distractions a key reason, while students in Creative subjects report technical resources as the highest ranked reason.

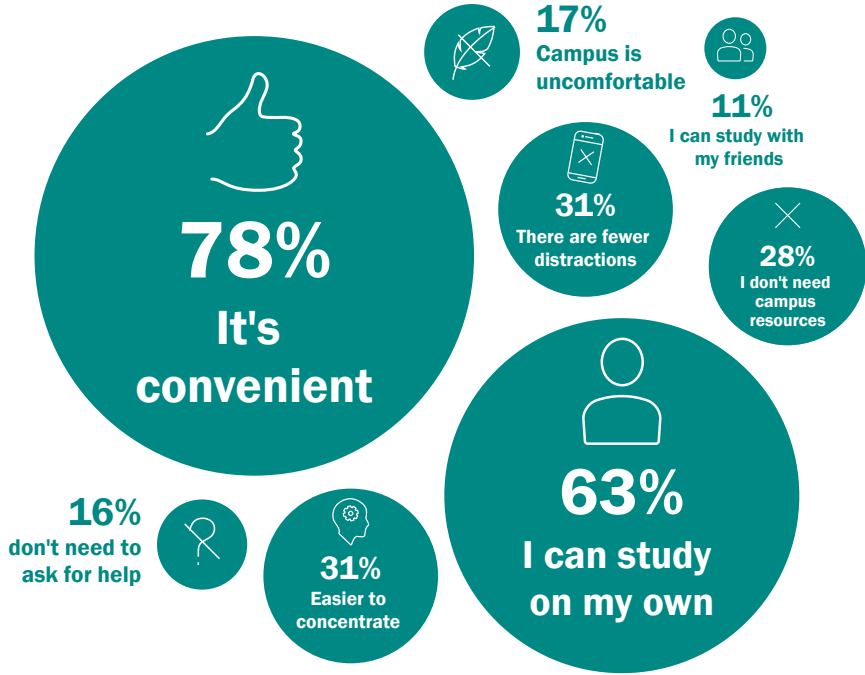


STUDYING OFF CAMPUS

Unlike the reasons students gave for their choice to study on campus, which were more evenly balanced across 3-5 factors, for the time that students study off campus the reasons they identify are more clearly focused on two main responses. Almost 80% of responses state convenience as the reason for choosing to study off campus, with being able to study on their own also highly rated. It is interesting to note that convenience was also the highest rated response to why students choose to study on campus.

It is not evident from these data what the specific reasoning behind this preference for convenience, therefore it might be valuable to evaluate the relationship between campus and the proximity of other locations used by students for study at a range of institutions. As an example, how far a student needs to travel to get to campus each day may have an impact on when they choose to go there and how long they choose to stay there as well as the available amenities in each location.

Q. WHY DO YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY OFF CAMPUS?



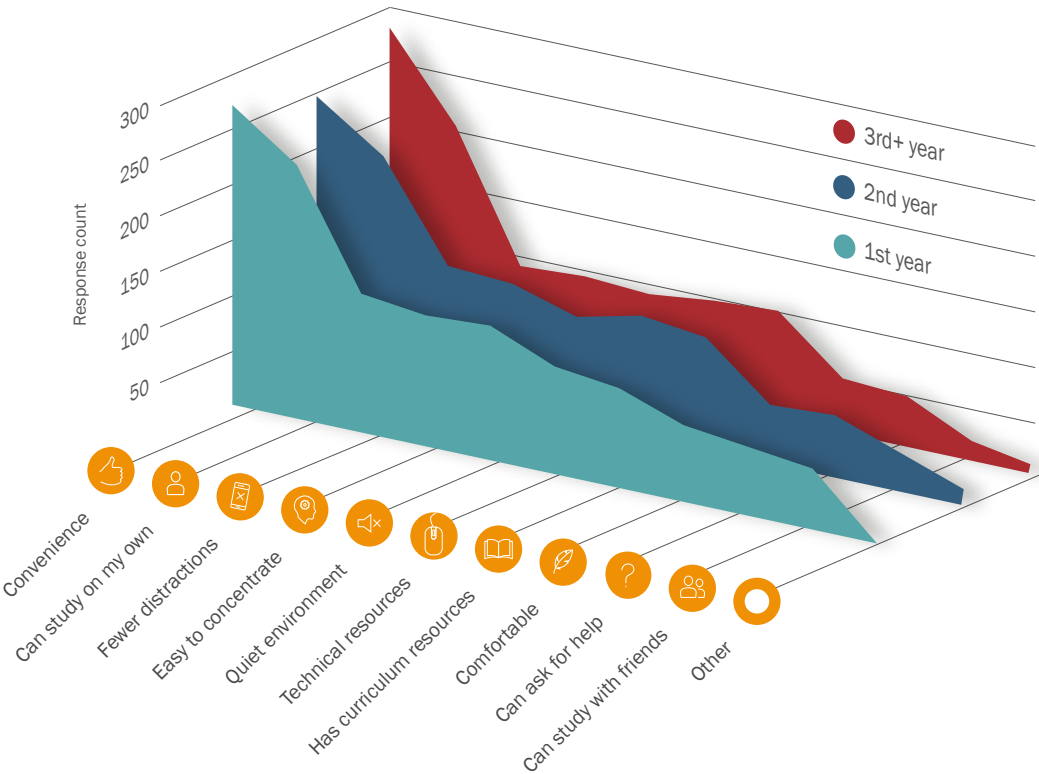
(Multi-response questions)

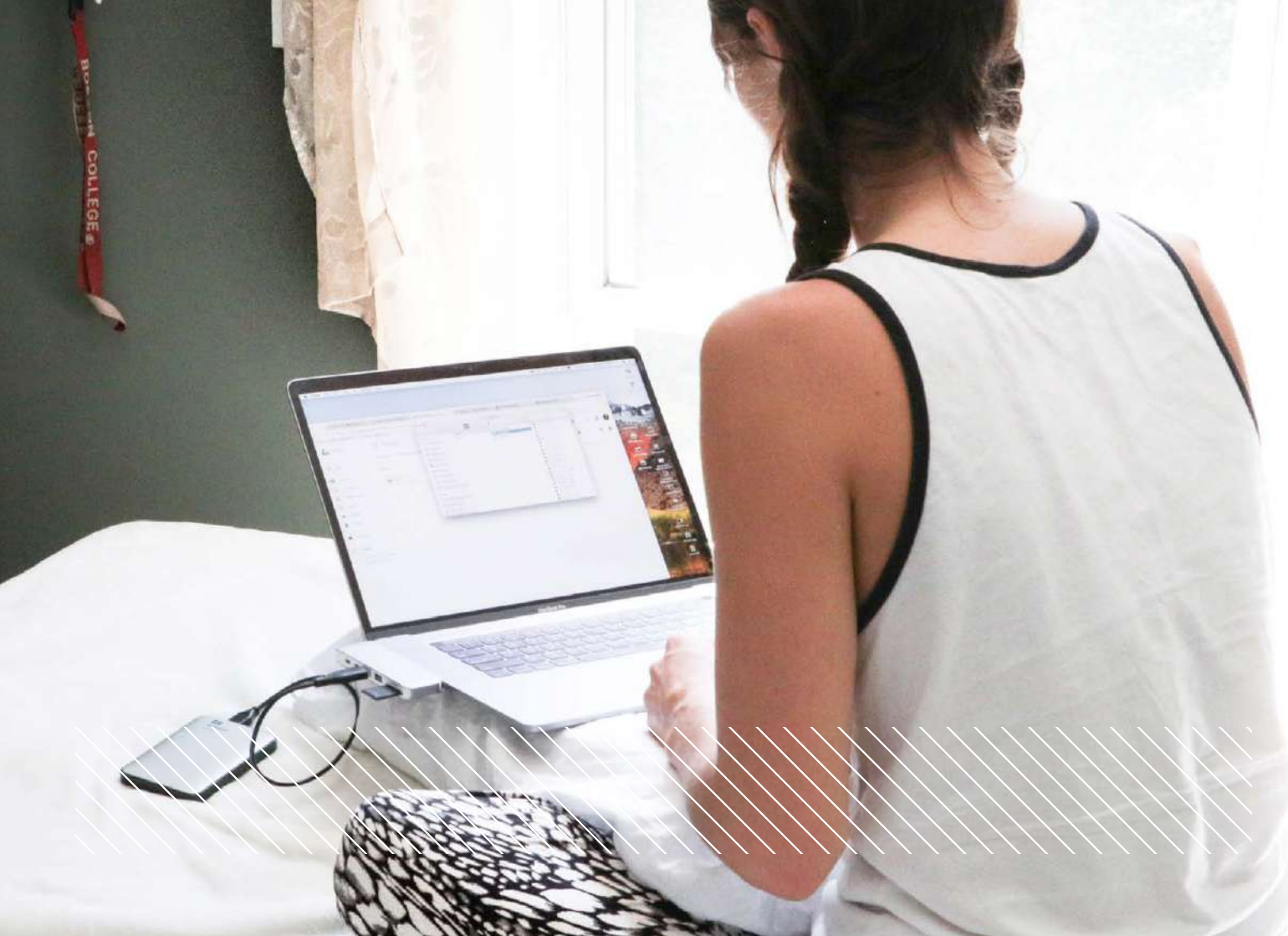
OFF CAMPUS ►

When filtering the results (right) by academic year, we can also see that convenience was the most common answer across all years. The convenience of studying at home and being able to study alone are reported as being much more important than other reasons.

Although much less significant, encountering fewer distractions and it being easier to concentrate are also seen as important reasons. This further emphasises the need for students to be able to find quiet study areas as well as wanting to be able to study with or alongside friends.

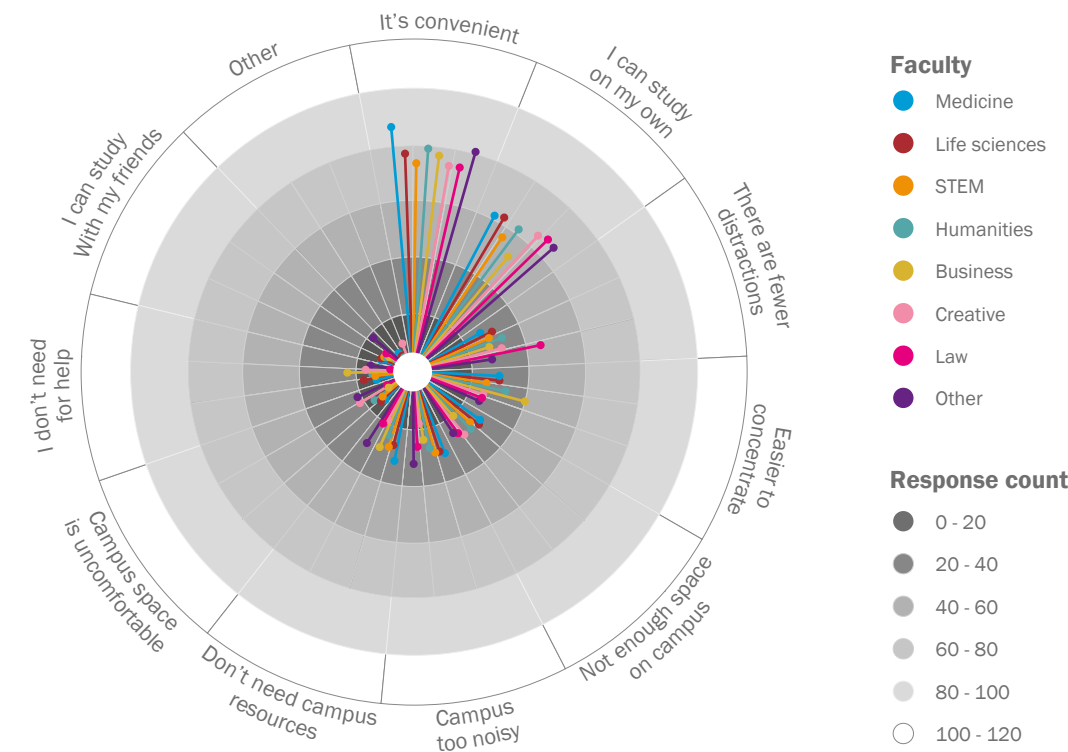
When filtering the results by year, we can also see that convenience was the most common answer across all years.





STUDYING OFF CAMPUS BY FACULTY

This graph shows the reasons identified by students for studying off campus, filtered by course or faculty. The reasons for studying off campus do not vary significantly, with students from all faculties identifying convenience and the ability to work alone as the top reasons.

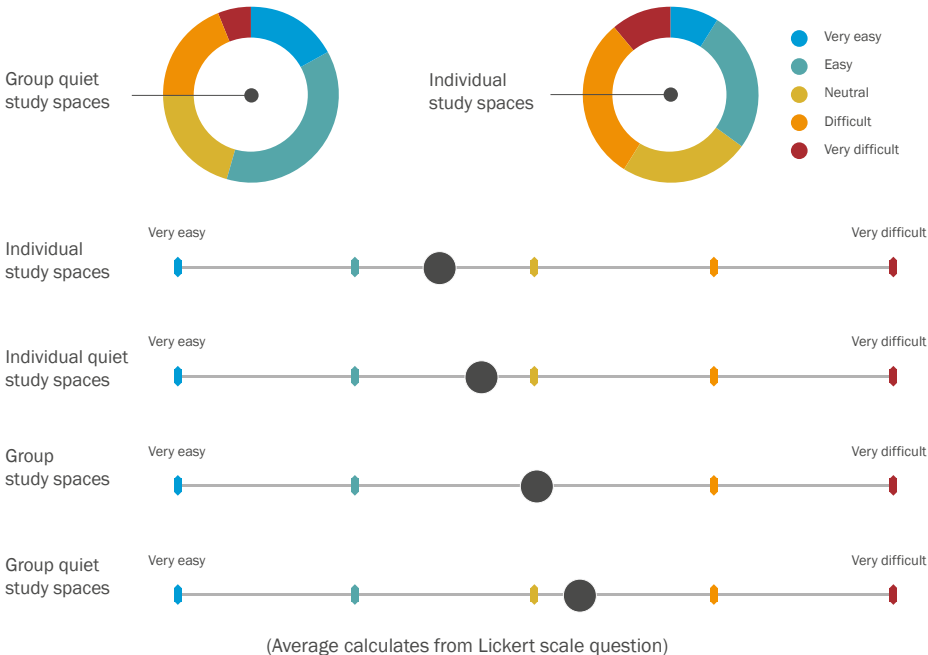




The bar graph to the right shows, on average, how difficult students reported finding these different space types, and the donut charts show a more detailed breakdown of response for group quiet work spaces and individual study spaces.

The results from this survey suggest that group quiet study spaces are the hardest spaces to find on campus outside of teaching hours, and that individual study spaces are easier to find, particularly those that are not considered quiet spaces. If we consider this against the responses the students gave when asked why they would choose to study on campus, specifically being about to work with friends, quiet group study spaces being the hardest to find seems to be a challenge worth resolving. This might suggest that the spaces that are provided for group study may not be perceived as effective for this type of activity, whether that is proximity to other spaces, technology connectivity or furniture. It would be valuable for institutions to establish what the types of space across the campus their students find valuable for group study and exactly what type of environment would be conducive to this activity.

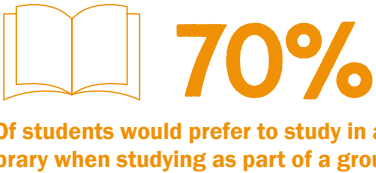
Q. WHICH TYPE OF STUDY IS DIFFICULT TO FIND ON CAMPUS?





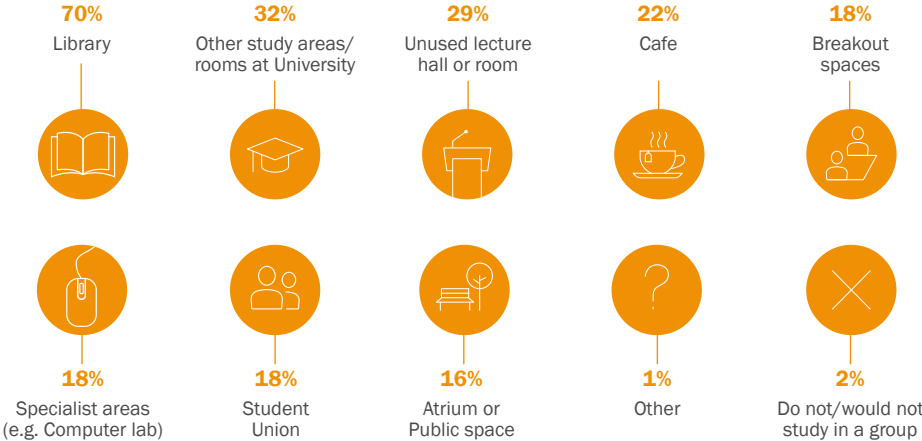
GROUP STUDY

Group work is an important part of many university courses, an activity which often takes place on campus. Almost all student respondents agreed that they would choose study as part of a group on campus.



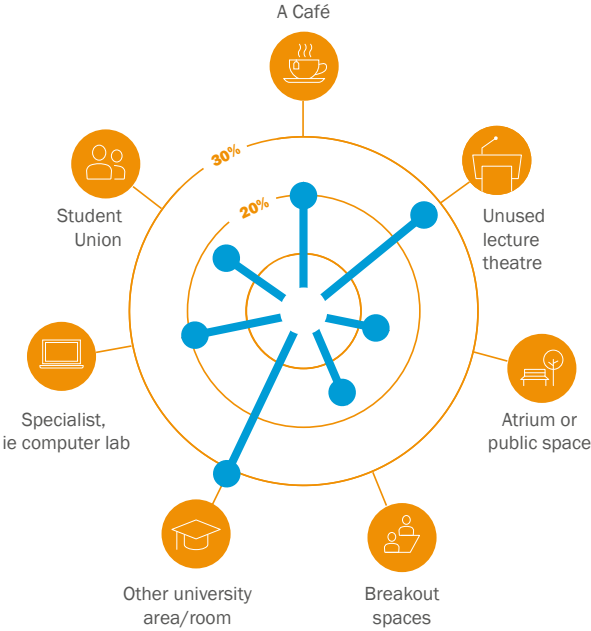
Looking in more detail at the types of spaces that students would choose if studying as part of a group, a high majority of 70% would choose to study in a library. The second most common response is ‘Other study areas / rooms’ and ‘unused lecture hall or room’, which indicates that students tend to prefer more traditional or formal spaces for group work. These responses might seem contradictory to anecdotal feedback from students that these more formal spaces as they are deemed to be ‘owned’ by academics.

Q. IMAGINE YOU ARE STUDYING AS PART OF A GROUP. WHERE DO YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY?



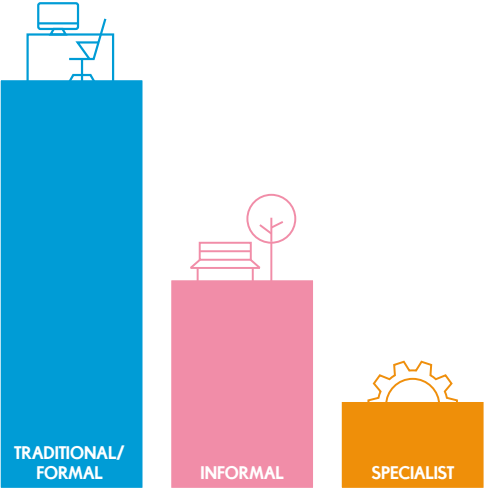
This might be because these spaces tend to be quieter and that students feel they are more able to focus in these types of spaces, or in the case of the library that the resources they need are closer to hand. This would indicate that quiet areas for focussed group work are as important as quiet areas for individual work, but as the responses on the previous page show, can be the most difficult to find. Understanding the attributes of these spaces which students perceive to be important, such as quiet or access to resources, could be used to support the design of other dedicated group work areas that better support students needs. This is an area that warrants further research and dialogue with the student community.

PREFERRED STUDY SPACE



Excluding the Library, preferences for spaces to use when studying as a group tend to be more traditional or formal.

To gain further insight into the space types and possible attributes preferred for group study, we filtered the responses to exclude 'Library'. We then also categorised these as traditional, formal and specialist spaces. Filtering the data in this way shows that students prefer more traditional settings for group study, even when choosing to study outside the library.

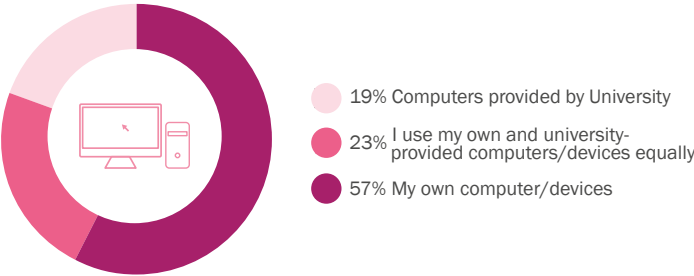


Traditional or formal study spaces are more preferred to informal or public spaces. Specialist spaces are not widely preferred for group study.

RESOURCES & FACILITIES

Even a decade or more into the era of BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) and many people owning a number of different smart devices, most institutions still debate the requirement for fixed computers provided on campus. In some instances, universities are finding that current provision is in such high demand that they are having to install more equipment across their campuses.

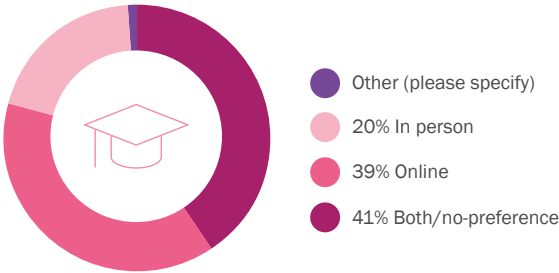
COMPUTERS AND DEVICES



When you're studying on campus, given the choice would you prefer to use your own computers/devices or computers/devices provided by your university?

The response to the survey suggests that students still prefer to use their own device whilst on campus but over 40% stated that they would either prefer to use a university-provided computer or device for at least some if not all of the time. A mixed provision is likely to be the most successful solution.

LEARNING RESOURCES

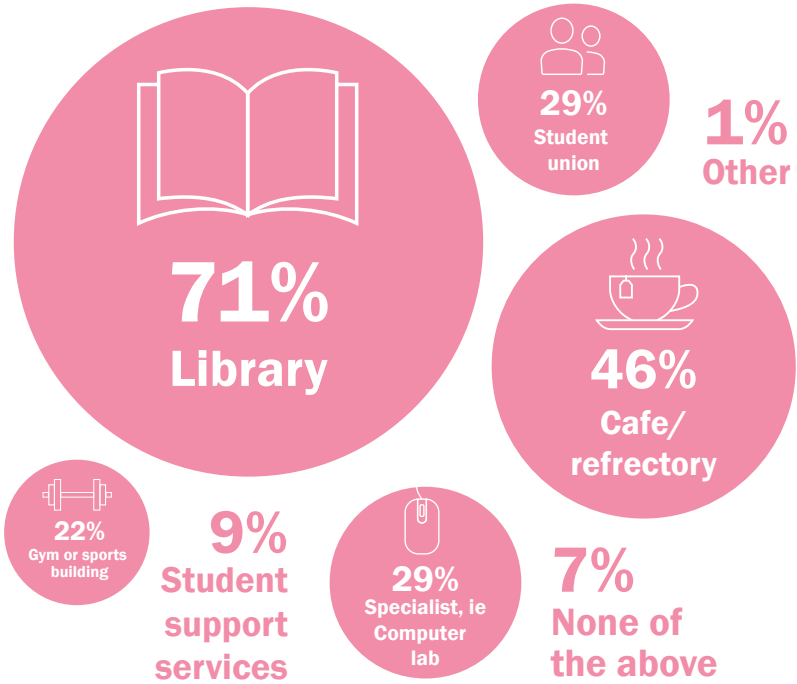


Thinking now about your university's learning resources, do you prefer to access these in person or online?

As most technical resources are now available online or at least have an electronic version, there have been some suggestions that the university library is dying out. However, the results to this survey suggest that over 60% of students either would prefer to access resources in person or have no strong preference for online or in person. This suggests that it is more that students are choosing different ways to access information but the physical environment of the library is still in high demand.

The fact that around 40% of respondents would prefer to access resources online emphasises this point, how student engage with technical information and knowledge gather has changed and that the spaces provided need to respond to this change.

Q. WHICH FACILITIES DO YOU USE MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK?



(Multi-response questions)



APPENDIX – SURVEY QUESTIONS

Q1. Where do you study outside of teaching hours?

Answers:

- Library
- Study bedroom
- Cafe/rectory on campus
- Student union
- Atrium / public spaces
- Breakout spaces
- Lecture theatre
- Other

Q2a. In general, what percentage of your time do you spend studying on campus?

- 0%,
- 1-10%
- 81-90%
- 91-100%

Q2b. In general, what percentage of your time do you spend studying off campus?

- 0%,
- 1-10%
- 81-90%
- 91-100%

Q3. Why do you study on campus?

- It's convenient e.g. near to lectures
- I can study with friends
- It has the curriculum resources I need
- There are fewer distractions
- It has the technical resources I need
- I find it easier to concentrate than in my room / a cafe / somewhere else etc
- The environment is quiet
- The space is comfortable
- I can ask people for help
- I can study on my own

Q4. Why do you study off campus?

- It's convenient e.g. I can study at home
- I can study on my own
- There are fewer distractions
- I find it easier to concentrate than on campus
- The environment on campus is too noisy
- Not enough space on campus
- I don't need to go on campus for resources
- I don't need to ask people for help
- I can study with my friends
- Other

Q5. Imagine you're studying on campus as part of a group. Where would you choose to study?

- Other study areas / rooms within university
- A lecture hall / room that isn't being used
- A cafe
- Breakout spaces
- Specialist labs e.g. computer lab
- Student Union
- Atrium / public spaces
- Other
- I do not / would not study on campus as part of a group

Q6. When you're studying on campus, given the choice would you prefer to use your own computer / devices or computers / devices provided by your university?

- My own computer/devices
- I use my own and university-provided computers / devices equally
- University-provided computers / devices
- Other

Q8. What type of workspace do you find difficult to find on campus?

- 8.1. Individual study space
- 8.2. Silent Individual Study Space
- 8.3. Group Study Space
- 8.4. Quiet Group Study Space

Ans: Very difficult, Quite difficult, Neither nor, Quite easy, Very easy

Q9. Thinking now about your university's learning resources, do you prefer to access these in person or online?

- Both - no preference between only or in person
- In person
- Online
- Other

Q10. Which university facilities do you tend to use on a regular basis (more than once a week)?

- Library
- Cafés / rectory
- Student Union
- Specialist labs e.g. computer lab
- Gym or sports building
- Student support services
- Other
- None of the above

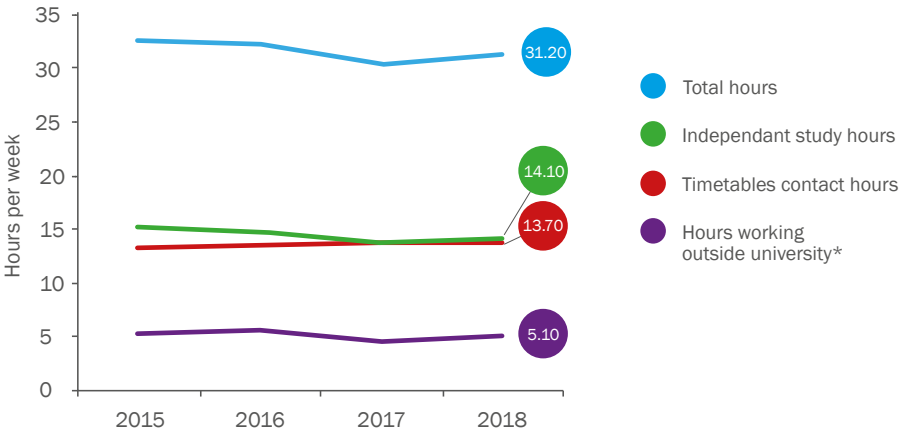
CONTACT HOURS

Contact hours refers to timetabled or tutor mediated hours for teaching or other planned interaction with students. This could take the form of lectures, workshops, labs, supervised studios, seminars or tutorials¹.

Understanding how much time students spend on contact hours, can provide greater insight into the ratio of different space types required by universities.

The recent HEPI / Advance HE 2018 Student Academic Experience Survey² (n = 14,000 students), found that the average timetabled contact hours are 13.7, and average independent study hours are 14, indicating that students are splitting their time between formal and informal learning. Contact hours have remained relatively similar since 2015.

TOTAL WORKLOAD (HOURS) IN AN AVERAGE WEEK



Base: All respondents. 2015 (15,129), 2016 (15,221), 2017 (14,057), 2018 (14,046)

¹ northampton.ac.uk/ilt/current-projects/defining-contact-time/

² Student Academic Experience Survey 2018, HEPI, Jonathan Neves and Nick Hillman

*Reported hours working outside the university includes course related placements.

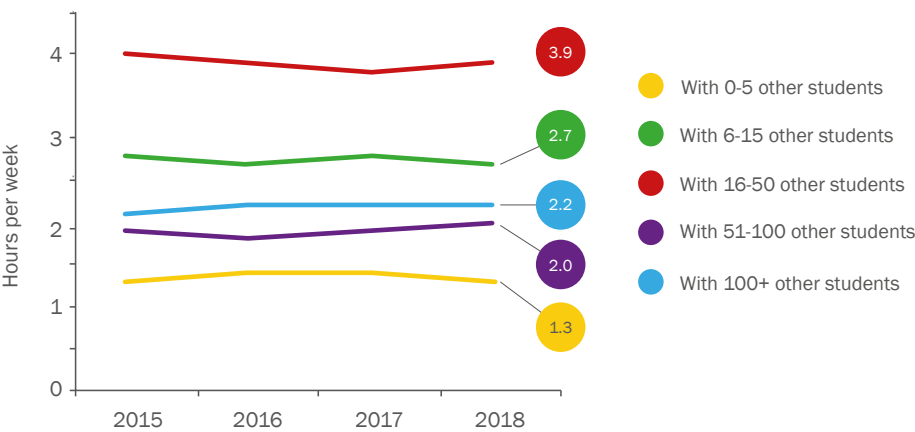
Within this survey it was also found that 64% of students report being satisfied with the timetables contact hours, and 19% being dissatisfied. While the percentage who are dissatisfied might seem relatively low in comparison, the survey also found that dissatisfaction can have an impact on overall perceptions of value for money.

Contact hours can vary greatly by both course type and Institution. The survey found that students in Science and STEM subjects tend to have both higher contact hours and higher hours of independent study. Work outside course* is highest in Medicine and Education courses, where work placement may be a significant part of their coursework.

Reported timetabled contact hours includes a range of activities from formal lectures to small group activities. The HEPI survey also asked students to provide detail on the hours spent in different class sizes.

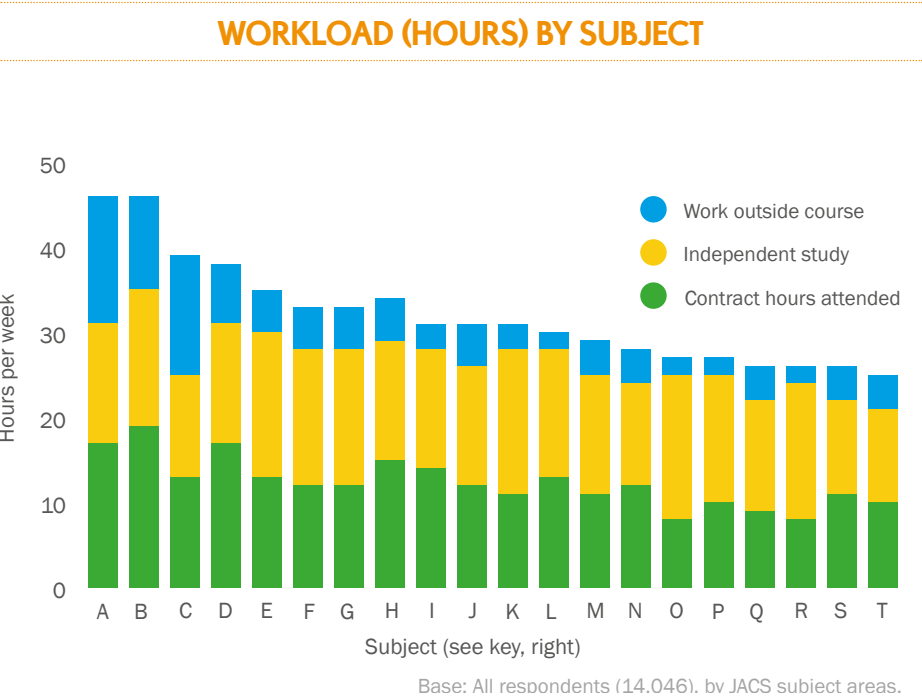
On average, the most time, 3.9 hours, is spent in classes with 16-50 other students. Small class sizes, which may relate to tutorial or timetabled group working, represent the smallest amount of timetabled contact hours for students, 1.3 hours.

HOURS PER WEEK SPENT IN DIFFERENT CLASS SIZES



Base: All respondents. 2015 (15,129), 2016 (15,221), 2017 (14,057), 2018 (14,046)

Graph source: Student Academic Experience Survey 2018, HEPI, Jonathan Neves and Nick Hillman*



Graph source: Student Academic Experience Survey 2018, HEPI, Jonathan Neves and Nick Hillman*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank Youthsight for their support with development of question set in order to help us engage with the student community.

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