



# **2004 National Students Survey**



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## **Acknowledgements**

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We would like to thank the ITL at the University of Sydney for letting us use their Questionnaire.

We also would like to thank Paul White from UWE Bristol, who bravely agreed to help us do statistical analyses.

The report was prepared by Inna Pomorina with help from John Sloman, Martin Poulter and the support of the whole Economics Network team.

## **Executive Summary**

This is the summary of the report, which analyses the results of the Economics Students Survey in 2004. The survey covered both undergraduates and postgraduates and was carried out by the Economics Network of the Higher Education Academy.

### ***Purpose of the study***

The Economics Network has conducted its second on-line national students survey to obtain information about students' perceptions of learning Economics. The survey is based on a questionnaire developed by Paul Ramsden and used in Australia for more than 20 years. It is part of the Network's programme of research into the needs of our different stakeholders along with the Lecturers, Alumni and Employers surveys. This time, not only undergraduates but also postgraduates took part in the survey. Departments have used the results of the 2002 survey to improve their teaching.

### ***2. Profile of survey respondents***

A total of 2022 students took part in the survey: 1843 undergraduates and 179 postgraduates. Of the respondents:

- 55.7% were male and 44.3% were female;
- 86.5% started their courses under the age of 21;
- 63.5% stated that English was their first language;
- 62.7% had an A-level in Mathematics;
- 63.1% had an A-level in Economics;
- 78.5% stated that Economics was their first choice.

The survey was an observational study and not a controlled experiment.

### ***3. Students' overall assessment***

Students' responses to the survey questions have been analysed separately for undergraduates and postgraduates, with particular attention paid to the differences in responses according to gender, age of entry, level of study, A-level Mathematics, A-level Economics, English as first language and whether Economics was the first choice of course. Standard statistical methods were applied. Responses to each of the questions are summarised in terms of percentage frequency of responses and accompanied by quotes from answers to open-ended questions.

### ***4. Responses to individual questions***

Although only half of the students felt that their degree course had turned out to be as they expected, more than 70.0% of them were satisfied with its quality.

It is too early, with just two surveys, to speak about tendencies or trends, but the results of the 2002 and 2004 surveys are generally consistent. They are also consistent with results of similar surveys of Australian universities.

There were some differences in the way undergraduates and postgraduates answered their questions.

Students tend to agree more with the statements that their Economics courses are intellectually stimulating, sharpen their analytical, communication and problem-solving skills, provided them with all the information they needed for the course, helped to develop the ability to plan their own work, that they benefit from the contact with active researches and are satisfied with the quality of their degree course.

Students tend to disagree more with the statements that they are actively engaged in the lectures, that their workloads are heavy and pace is too fast, that the degree course has helped them to develop their ability to work as team member, that staff seemed more interested in testing what they have memorised, that Economics software is effective in helping them to learn and that it is easy to know the standards of the work expected from them.

As in 2002, students expressed polarised opinions regarding the appropriateness of the amount of maths and stats included in their courses.

### ***Open-ended questions***

Students identified as:

- *best aspects of the course*: the variety of modules on the degree, quality of teaching staff and employability prospects of the graduates;
- *aspects, that could be improved*: passive teaching, poor level of English language of lecturers and teaching assistants, lack of feedback on assessment;
- *hardest aspects of the degree*: maths and stats elements of the course and adjusting to university life;
- *most useful activities in seminars*: active workshops with group discussion, presentations and problem-solving exercises, developing skills useful for future employment;
- *least useful activities in seminars*: lack of interaction, “parrot-fashion repetition of answers”, lack of feedback, lack of communication between lecturers and students.
- *their future career*: banking, finance, accountancy, civil service, consultancy, journalism.

### **6. The factor scale analyses**

The survey questions cluster together to form factor scales. The mean values, on a scale of 1 to 5, were:

- Good Teaching Scale – 3.25;
- Clear Goals and Standards Scale – 3.40;
- Appropriate Assessment Scale – 3.38;
- Appropriate Workload – 3.10;
- Generic Skills Scale – 3.52;
- Environment Scale – 3.39

The means for different scales cannot be compared directly. Their significance is as time-series data for tracking possible future changes. Comparison of data between universities may be misleading, as students differ in terms of personal, educational and family background, which may have a profound effect on their perceptions of learning. For each scale, statistically significant explanatory variables are identified.

## **7. Correlation analyses**

Correlation analyses of the scales shows that they were not independent and there was a strong linear relationship between the Good Teaching Scale and some other scales – Generic Skills Scale ( $r = 0.591$ ), Environment Scale ( $r = 0.582$ ) and a more moderate relationship with the Clear Goals and Standards Scale ( $r = 0.538$ ). The Appropriate Workload Scale and Appropriate Assessment Scale have very poor correlation between themselves and the rest of the scales.

## **8. Conclusions**

The conclusions summarise the results of the report and suggest its possible use by departments in improving teaching quality.

## **9. Appendixes**

Appendix 1 includes the Economics Network Student Questionnaire. Appendixes 2 and 3 include the Tables of Responses to Questions 1 to 27 by undergraduates and postgraduates. Appendix 4 includes representative answers to open-ended questions 28 to 33.

## Purpose of the study

Following the success of our 2002 Students Survey and as part of our research programme into teaching and learning economics, the Economics Network has conducted its second national on-line economics students survey in April–May 2004.

The results of the Students Survey provide us with an inside view of what is really going on in teaching and learning economics in HE UK. It is part of our intelligence gathering to understand better the needs of our different stakeholders, along with the Lecturers, Alumni and Employers surveys.

But the survey is not only about information. It is playing an important role in the enhancement process. Several departments have reported that they found the results of the 2002 Survey extremely useful in providing them with the data for Programme Review, stressing that comments were more considered and thoughtful than responses from institutional surveys (perhaps because students felt that the survey was more independent). Some departments have asked us to run workshops in the areas of teaching that students have identified in the survey to be in need of improvement. We see such action taken by departments as a very important part of their commitment to teaching and learning and would like to encourage them not only to discuss and reflect on their own confidential reports but also to identify areas for action. The Economics Network will be happy to support them in so doing.

More than 2000 students took part in the Survey in 2004: this time not only undergraduates, but also postgraduates. As their experience of studying economics vary, we have decided to have separate analyses of the survey results for undergraduates and postgraduates.

The 2004 Survey used the same questionnaire as the 2002 one, which is based on the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/sceq/>), used at Sydney University for the undergraduates on all academic courses. Parts of what follow are based on the 2002 report.

The theory of teaching and learning that underpins the survey was described by Paul Ramsden (1991) and links students' perceptions of courses to the learning outcomes. A few changes were made to the survey to make it more economics-specific. Additional open-ended questions were added to the questionnaire, regarding the best aspects of the degree, the ones that could be improved and the ones that students find the hardest, as well as the activities in the tutorials that they found more useful and less useful, and the careers that students intended to pursue.

The survey focuses on students' perceptions of studying economics and not on any specific course or module. They are asked to think back over the time they spent at university and to rate their agreement or disagreement on a five-point Likert scale with 27 statements regarding their learning experiences. The statements could be clustered together to form factor scales: the Good Teaching Scale (GTS), Clear Goals and Standards Scale (CGSS), Appropriate Workload Scale (AWS), Appropriate Assessment Scale (AAS), Generic Skills Scale (GSS) and Environment Scale (ES). There were also questions, not included in the scales, regarding students' expectations of their course (Question 1) and their satisfaction with their course (Question 27), as well as whether there was an adequate inclusion of maths and stats in their course



(Question 11). Participants were also asked to provide some demographic information and answer six open-ended questions.

The survey aimed to provide valuable information on students' perceptions of studying economics and to identify the strong and the weak areas in learning and teaching as well as some possible specific problems. The main value of the survey lies in the long term, as the findings will be compared to the results of future surveys that we plan to conduct. The full comparison report on the two surveys to date – 2002 and 2004 – will be published in spring 2005. No comparisons are made between different institutions, as there are too many variable factors to make such comparison meaningful.

All economics departments and schools were invited to take part in the survey. A special letter was sent to Heads of Departments/Schools reassuring them that the results would be confidential to the department/school and only national aggregated results would be published. More departments/schools agreed to take part in the survey this time than in 2002: 62 (58 in 2002) out of 94 departments/schools.

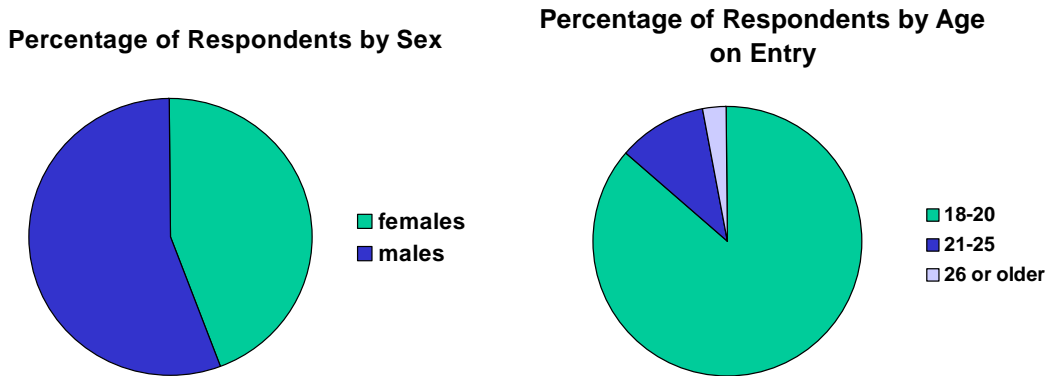
The survey was conducted on line and students were offered five £50 vouchers for randomly chosen winners.

We have taken measures to promote the validity of responses. Students were asked to submit their e-mail addresses to participate in the draw. Duplicate entries were excluded, although it should be noted that this year the number of duplicate entries was very low, compared to the 2002 Survey.

The survey was intended as an observational study and not as a controlled experiment. The respondents do not constitute a random sample of all economics students in the UK, but a self-selected group. As a result, their views may not fully reflect the opinions of the entire student population. Despite the self-selection, however, there is evidence that the expressed attitudes represent more widely held student opinions. The survey covers a broad cross-section of both undergraduate and postgraduate economics education.

## Profile of survey respondents

A total of 2022 students took part in the survey. These were full-time economics students (1843 undergraduates and 179 postgraduates) studying at UK universities. The demographics of the survey participants can be compared to those of the total economics student population using data from the HESA publication, *Students in Higher Education Institutions in 2002–2003*.

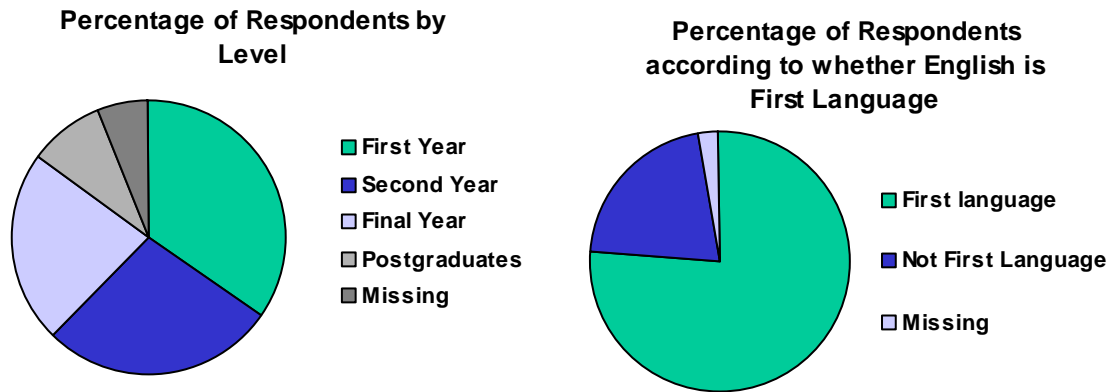


**Figure 1** Characteristics of respondents: sex and age on course entry

Of our survey respondents 44.3% were female (Figure 1), while among economics students in general this percentage is lower at 35.6%. Among undergraduate respondents to our survey, 43.7% were female, while among postgraduates the figure was 49.1%. The larger proportion of female respondents to our survey than in the HESA data is consistent with the widely reported survey research findings that females are more likely than males to answer the questionnaires.

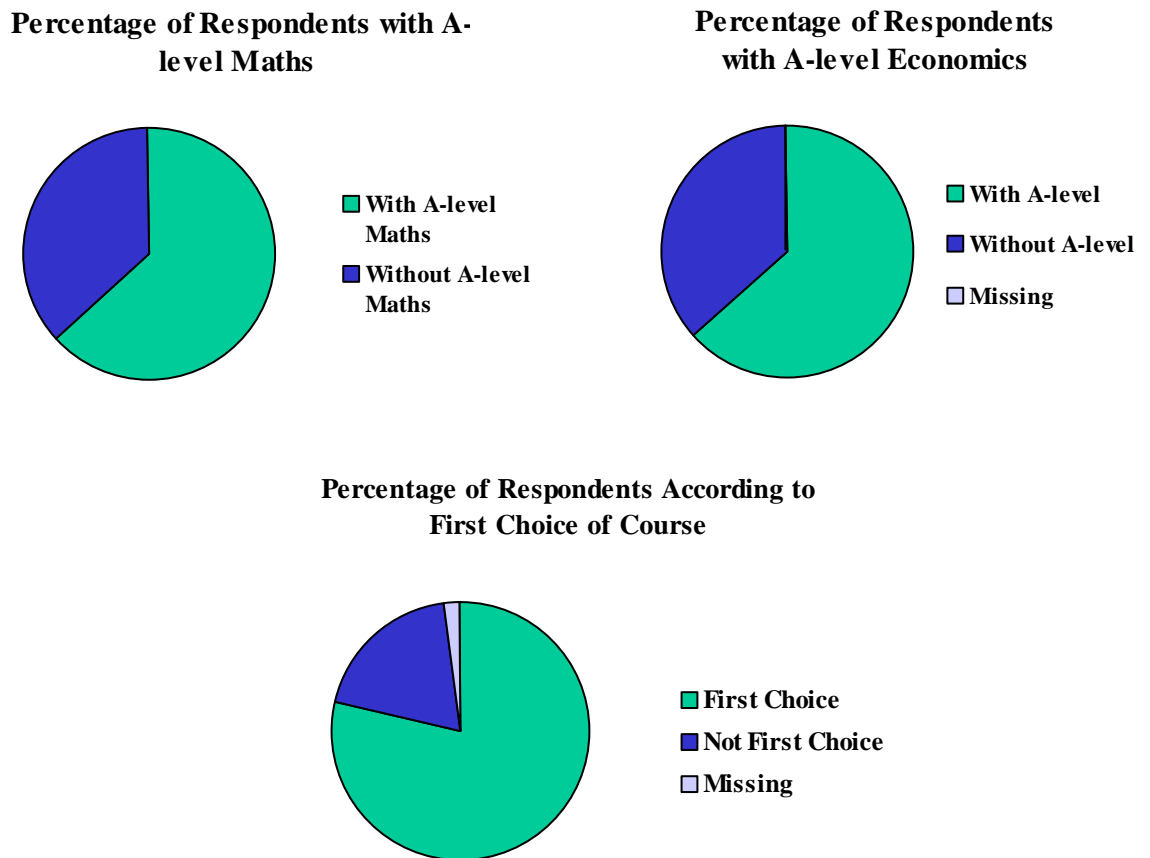
As for the age group, 86.5% of survey participants were under the age of 21, similar to their proportion in the general population of economics graduates (Figure 1). This figure is higher for undergraduates (90.3%) and is halved for postgraduates (48.0%). Students in the 21–25 age group are 8.1% and 36.0% respectively, and those older than 26 are 1.6% and 16.0%.

The question of English was included in the survey, because it was presumed to be an important variable that influences students' experiences in studying economics. And it may be not just the language knowledge itself, but also their education background, as students for whom English was not first language could have school training different from those in UK. Among all the respondents English was a first language for 63.5%, among undergraduates it was for 80.0%, while among postgraduates only for 58.8% (see Figure 2). There are no national statistics regarding this question. The closest match is the domicile of students. According to HESA data, 73.1% of UK economics students come from the United Kingdom, the majority of whom having English as their first language.



**Figure 2** Characteristics of respondents: course level and first language

Other factors that we consider important to take into consideration when talking about students' experiences are whether they have taken A-levels at school in Mathematics and/or Economics and whether taking this course was their first choice (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3** Characteristics of respondents: qualifications and choice of course

The results were as follows: among all the respondents, 62.7% had an A-level in Maths, while 63.1% had an A-level in Economics. As for the choice of the degree, 78.5% stated that Economics was their first choice.

In our analyses of the results, we have found that for each question of the survey described as a dependent variable we could locate potential explanatory variables that are statistically significant. We will discuss it in detail while looking at the responses to each question. These variables were different for undergraduates and postgraduates.

We appreciate that students' experiences vary according to the type of university they are attending. Universities have very different histories and resources to draw on. This is an interesting theme in its own right, and requires further investigation. It was not, however, considered as part of this survey.

We also have not included in the survey questions regarding the facilities provided by the university. Although various facilities, especially the library and computing, are very important to students' perception of learning, they form a separate category and are usually surveyed centrally by the universities themselves.

## Students' overall assessment

In the analyses that follow, students' responses to the survey questions are examined separately for undergraduates and postgraduates students and differences in responses are sought due to sex, age on entry, level of study, A-level mathematics, A-level Economics, English as a first language and first choice of course. The methodology for these analyses is similar to the one used in 2002. All the data were analysed using standard statistical methods. Only relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 level are discussed.

Responses to each of the questions are summarised in terms of percentage frequency of responses. In each instance the outcome categories have been coded

- 1 – Strongly disagree
- 2 – Disagree
- 3 – Neutral
- 4 – Agree
- 5 – Strongly agree

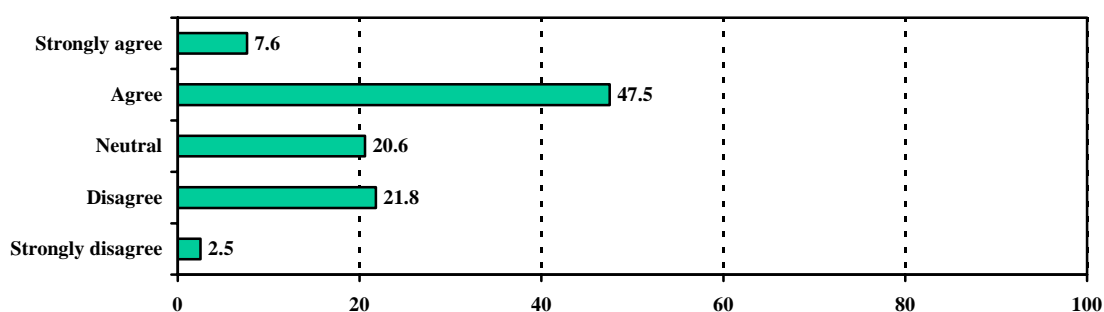
Unless specifically mentioned, in the following analysis the term 'agree' is used for both 'strongly agree' and 'agree' answers and the term 'disagree' for both 'strongly disagree' and 'disagree' answers. To aid comparison, the mean and standard deviation for each question have been calculated by using the codes 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 as if they were scores of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The percentage responses for each category and summary statistics have been calculated using all of the available data, irrespective of whether some of the demographic information on the respondent is missing. Repeat analysis using only those respondents with complete records gives the same broad conclusions. Students' responses are analysed separately for undergraduates and postgraduates and for each group of students statistically significant factors that influence their answers are determined. As it was very time consuming to separate answers to the open-ended questions between these two groups, we have used answers from the whole survey population in our analysis of the responses to these questions and in their use to substantiate students' answers to the closed-ended questions.

In this report we are not planning to do a full comparison of the results of the two surveys of 2002 and 2004 or speculate on the possible explanations of the difference. The comparison report will be prepared later in the spring of 2005. Data from the survey of 2002 is used this time solely for illustrative purposes.

## Responses to individual questions

### Question 1 Studying this degree course has turned out to be much as I had expected.

#### *Undergraduates*



In the first question, students were asked about their expectations of the whole degree course. The data received showed that 55.1% agreed with the statement that ‘Studying the degree course has turned out to be much as I expected’, 20.6% were neutral on this statement and 24.3% disagreed with it. In their answers to open-ended questions, some of the students gave their own explanations of the way the course differed from their expectations. Though only for half of the students studying the degree course has turned out to be as they expected, more than 70.0% of them were satisfied with the quality of their degree course, as their answers to the Q27 show.

Comparing these results to the 2002 Survey results shows that students’ expectations were met to a similar extent this year as two years ago (in 2002 58.5% agreed with the statement).

There are differences in responses to this question according to several factors, including age, Maths and Economics A-levels, and English as first language.

The older the students, the more their expectations of the course are reached, as probably they enter the course with better understanding of what to expect from it: 54.7% of 18–20 year olds agreed with the statement, 57.1% of 21–25 year olds and 70.0% of those aged 26 years and older.

Students who have done A-level Mathematics are more positive in answering this question, than those who have not: 58.3% versus 49.7%. This is a very important issue, as many students who do not have A-level Mathematics complain that the importance for their degree course of an A-level in Maths was not explained to them at the time of application and they were not expecting it to be necessary.

As for those who have taken A-level Economics at school, the situation is similar. They are more positive in agreeing that their expectations of the degree were met than those who do not have A-level Economics: 57.3% versus 50.6%.

Those for whom English is not their first language have more positive opinions about this statement than those for whom English is their first language: 11.5% of them ‘strongly agreed’ with it, compared to only 6.6% of English speakers; and 17.0% of

them disagreed with it, compared to 23.0% of English speakers. These results are very similar to the ones we got in 2002 Survey. According to students' remarks, some of them expected the course to be similar to Economics A-level and had not expected the level of maths necessary for the course. Comments included "*The level of maths expected has been too high from the information they have given us*", "*Personally what I liked about economics at A-level was the critical analyses and discussion of theories and issues. It seems all I do here is work out formulas and assess data*" and "*The economics side of the course has not always been as relevant as I had hoped to reality.*" These responses suggest that some students would gain from fuller prior information about the courses they will be studying.

### **Postgraduates**

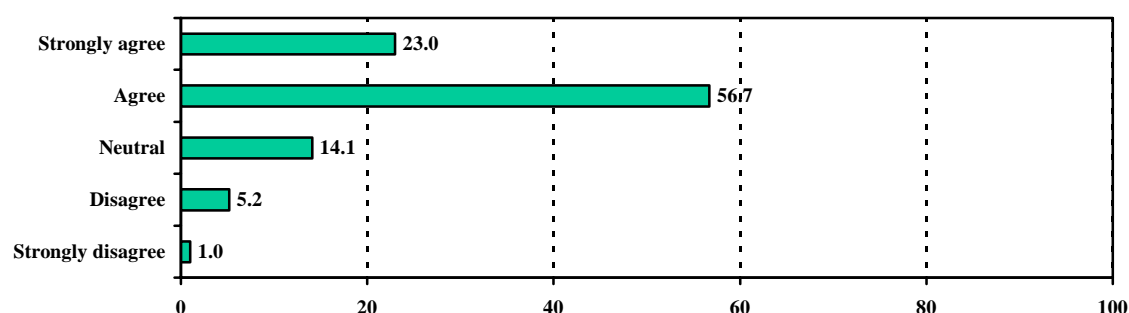
Postgraduate students have a better understanding of what to expect from their course, than undergraduates, so their answers to the first question are more positive: 62.0% agree with it, while 18.4% were undecided and 19.6% disagree with it.

There were differences in the way postgraduates answer this question according to whether it was their first choice and to whether English was their first language. Similar to undergraduates, those who have English as their first language are less positive in answering this question: 8.7% of them strongly agree that their expectations of the course are being met compared to 20.8% of non English speakers and also 25.0% of them disagree with it, compared to only 8.3% of those for whom English is not their first language.

If this course was not a student's first choice, they were far less positive in answering this question. Only 38.9% of them agree that their course turned out to be as they expected, compared to 62.3% for whom it was first choice, and 44.5% disagree with it, compared to only 13.4%. So choice for postgraduates is a very important factor in answering the first question.

## Question 2 The degree course is intellectually stimulating.

### Undergraduates



The number of students who ‘find [their] degree course intellectually stimulating’ is high, with 79.7% of respondents agreeing with the statement. The results are similar to the 2002 Survey, when 81.6% of the respondents were positive about it.

Three factors turned out to be statistically significant for this question: level of study, whether students have A-level Economics and whether English was their first language. Students at different levels of their degree course seemed to view it slightly differently. The higher the level of students’ studies, the more stimulating they find their course. So among first-year students, 77.3% agreed with the statement; among second years, 79.6% agreed; while among final-year students, 83.4% agreed. Nearly all of the 6.1% increase in the agreement to this statement comes from the undecided group. But one in every 12 to 14 students does not find their course intellectually stimulating at any of the levels of study. What could be done to make it intellectually stimulating for all of the students? This requires further investigation.

Students whose native language is English give more positive answers and more of them find the degree course intellectually stimulating than those for whom English was second language (81.0% compared to 75.4%). Students with A-level Economics disagree more with the statement than those without (mean scores are 3.94 and 3.97).

In comments students stressed, “*The course is exceptionally stimulating and you are encouraged to put forward your own understanding and ideas in lectures and tutorials without the fear of ridicule*”. The other one noted, “*The best aspect of my degree is that it encourages independent thinking, is intellectually stimulating and challenging: these are important skills to acquire and prepare one well for later life*”. At the same time, many students express less positive views: “*I think that the course is, at times, highly theoretical with little relevance or linkages to what has already been learnt and real-world applications.*”

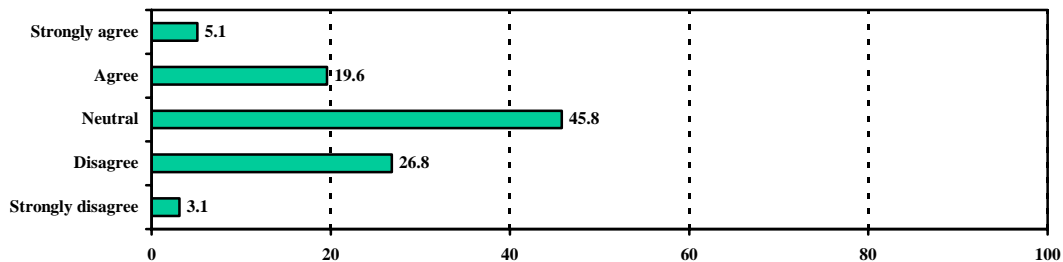
### Postgraduates

Seven out of eight postgraduates find their course intellectually stimulating and only one out of sixteen disagree with this statement, while one in ten is neutral. So postgraduates in general find their course more stimulating than undergraduates. There are no statistically significant factors that influence the answers to this question.



### Question 3 The workload is too heavy.

#### **Undergraduates**



Responding to statement 3, ‘The workload is too heavy’, nearly half of the students (45.8%) were neutral, while 29.4% disagreed and a quarter agreed with it. The results are very similar to the ones in 2002 Survey. Whilst clearly only a minority of students felt that the workload was too heavy, the neutrality of approximately half the students suggests that for them the workload was neither excessively heavy nor light. The evidence in the literature supports the general view that heavy workload promotes a surface approach to learning, meaning that the students are unable to spend the time truly to engage with and understand the material they are meant to be learning. Students’ answers to this question require action from departments if they want their students to achieve desired outcomes and to be ‘deep’ learners, as repeatedly students stress that, “*The work load is heavy, especially in the third year. This means that I often do not have time to research all topics in the depth that I would.*”

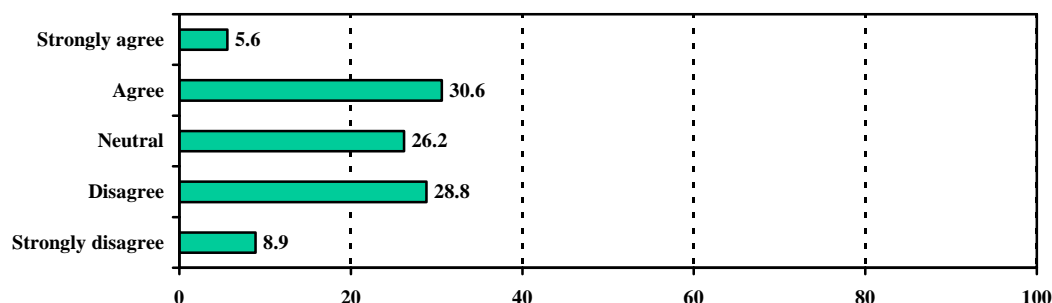
The important variable for this question is gender. Male students tend to disagree more (32.0% of them compared to 26.4% of females) and agree less with this statement (21.3% compared to 29.0% of females). Female students judge their workload to be heavier than do male students, either because they take their studies more seriously or they find economics courses more difficult than male students. This question requires further investigation, as the understanding of the true reason behind these differences could help in narrowing this gap. In their answers to the open-ended questions, students have written statements such as: “*Workload is satisfactory*“ and “*The workload is not too much.*” At the same time, others have written: “*Workload – often uneven and heavy*” and “*The workload is often all or nothing – one semester we have no assessments and the next we have 5 or 6 due in quite close.*“

#### **Postgraduates**

Postgraduates view their workload similarly to undergraduates: nearly half were neutral on this issue, while the other half was equally divided between those who disagree with the statement and those who agree with it. There were no differences between various student groups in answer to this question.

## Question 4 The degree course has helped me develop my ability to work as a team member.

### Undergraduates



More students disagreed with the fourth statement, ‘The degree course has helped me to develop my ability to work as a team member’, than agreed: 37.7% compared to 36.2%. Results are very similar to the ones in the 2002 Survey. That means that more than a third of the students do not view their economics courses as helping them to develop their ability to work as a team member. This is the recurring theme. Thus, given the increased stress on employability as a learning outcome, departments may wish to consider whether there is scope for increasing the opportunities for teamwork and group project work for their students.

There are differences in answering this question according to gender and level of studies. Level of study was also a statistically significant factor for this question in the 2002 Survey. Of first-year students, only 26.7% agreed with the statement, while 39.0% of second years and 47.4% if final-year students agreed with it. So nearly half of the final-year students agree that their course has helped them to develop their ability to work as team members. and this ability has been slowly building during their years of study.

As for the gender differences in answers to this question, females were more positive than males, with 41.8% of females agreeing with it and 31.7% disagreeing. For males the picture is the reverse.

Students express satisfaction with group work: *“The course involves a lot of teamwork, which is very helpful in preparation for work life. It also helps us to understand the work better as you have the knowledge of more than one person.”*

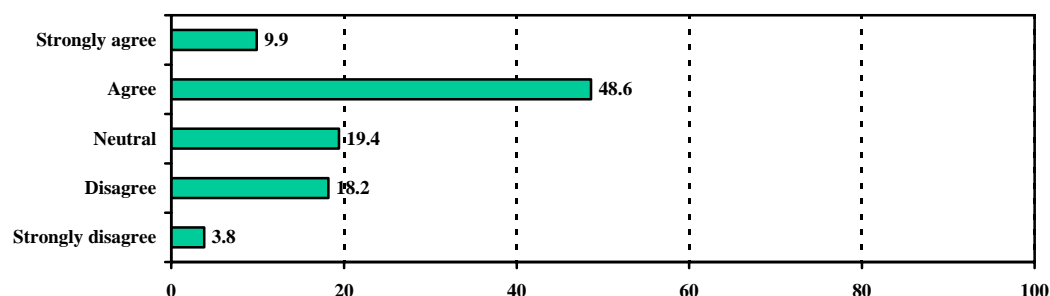
*“Group work – meet new people. There is a significant amount of group work, which helps develop our teamwork skills. There are also lots of opportunities to improve our presentation skills.”* Students suggest putting *“greater emphasis on group work as the course is orientated towards individual work”* and ask that there should be *“more encouragement to work in groups, to develop group skills!”*

### Postgraduates

Nearly half of the postgraduates disagree with the statement; while a quarter was neutral and a quarter agree with it. Probably group work and teamwork is not used much in postgraduate courses. There were no differences between various student categories in answer to this question.

## Question 5 I have usually had a clear idea of where I am going and what is expected of me in this degree course.

### Undergraduates



The majority of the students responded very positively to the fifth statement, ‘I have usually had a clear idea of where I am going and what is expected of me in my degree course’ – 58.6% agreed with it, compared to 63.5% in 2002. There were differences in answers to this question between various age groups. The older the age group of students, the more positive their response is. 70.0% of students coming from the 26 and older age group have agreed with the statement, while only 57.7% from the 18–20 age group have done so. At the same time, the oldest age group has the highest percentage of students disagreeing with this statement – 23.3%, so they seemed to be the most polarised group, who feel strongly about it. Probably even greater clarification of the aims, learning objectives and standards of the courses are needed, since clarity of goals and standards is associated with better learning outcomes.

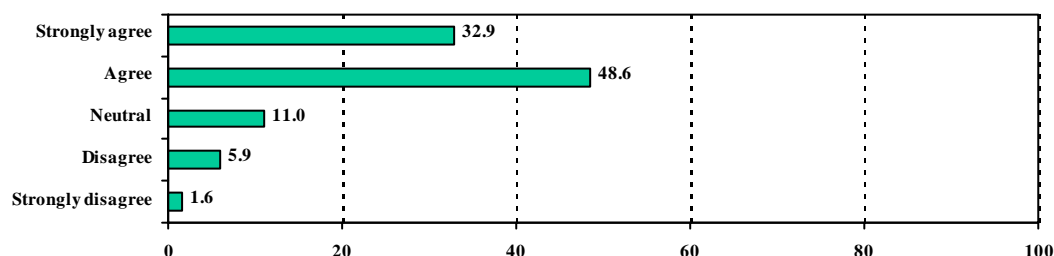
Students’ remarks include “*The requirements for high grades are rarely explained and, if so, poorly. I never know what I truly ought to do to achieve anything more than 65%.*” And “*tutorials need to give more information on what is expected for higher marks in exams*”. “*The teaching is not interactive, and I feel I don’t know what is expected of me*”. Students suggest, “*Some lecturers need to be clearer about where the course is going*”.

### Postgraduates

Though the majority of postgraduates agree with this statement (57.0%), nearly one in five was not sure, while the rest disagree. Students who have A-level Mathematics feel more positive about it than those who do not have A-level Mathematics: 62.9% of them feel positive about understanding where they are going and what is expected of them compared to 50.0% of those who lack A-level Mathematics. This could be due to many postgraduate courses being based on quantitative research.

## Question 6 I am provided with all the information I need about the course (e.g. timetables, exam dates and regulations).

### **Undergraduates**



The sixth statement, ‘I am provided with all the information I need about the course (e.g. timetables, exam dates and regulations)’ received the highest positive response: 81.5% agreed with it. The results are very similar to the 2002 results. Every thirteenth student disagreed with this statement, implying that they are not happy with the administration of the course.

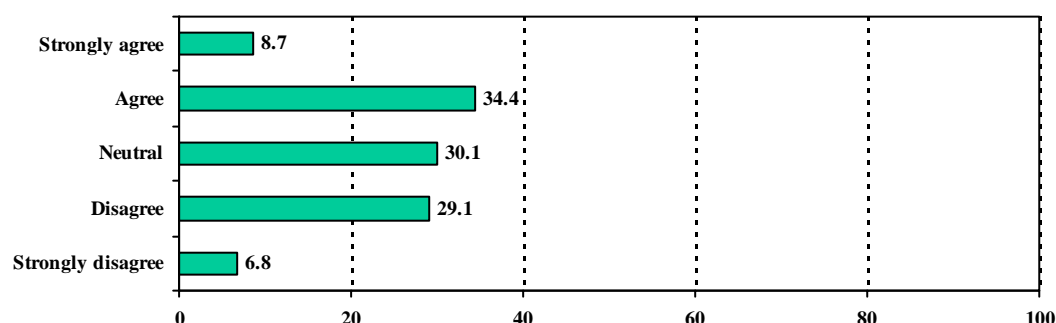
There were differences in students’ answers to this question depending on whether English was their first language or not. Those for whom English is their second language were even more positive about this statement: 85.1% of them agree with it and only one in fifteen students disagree with it. Maybe because they are from overseas they either receive more information than British students, or they took more interest in obtaining this information in order to comply with it. Students suggest that more information should be provided to them “*about what is expected of them, as it can sometimes be difficult to know.*” “*As a student coming from a different educational background it’s hard to know what the test is and how to study for such an important exam. I’m nervous.*” Some students complain that, “*communication is poor e.g. my exam timetable is still not on the student portal*” and “*It’s so disorganised!! We still don’t have exam timetables, things start late, etc.*”.

### **Postgraduates**

Postgraduates also replied positively to this statement: 82.4% of them agree with it, although one in ten disagree with it. There were no differences reported in answers to this question between various student groups.

## Question 7 The teaching staff of this degree course motivate me to do my best work.

### Undergraduates



More than two out of five students (43.1%) agreed with the seventh statement, ‘The teaching staff on this degree course motivate me to do my best work’. This is similar to the 2002 results. But at the same time, nearly every third student is undecided on this question and more than one in four do not find staff motivating them to do their best work. Several factors have a statistically significant effect on students’ answers to this question: age, gender, level of studies, English as second language and whether students have Economics A-level. The more mature students are more positive on this issue: 60.0% of them agree with this statement, while for the 18–20 age group this number is 41.8%. Females feel more motivated by the staff, as 45.9% of them agree with the statement, compared to 40.9% of males.

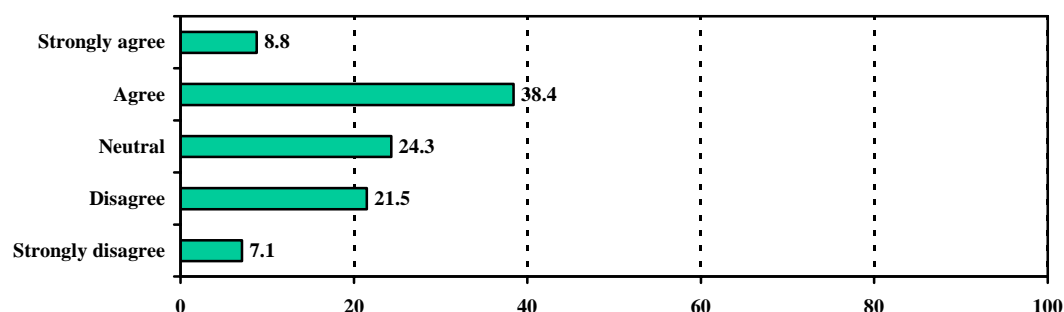
Those, for whom English is not their first language, were more positive than native English speakers: 54.2% of them agree with the statement, compared to 40.6%. As for the level of study, the least positive group were second-year students – only 37.6% of them agree with the statement, nearly the same number as disagree with it 36.2%. Of final-year students 47.3% agree with the statement, while among the first-year students this percentage was 43.8%. Perhaps lecturers of second-year students should pay more attention to students’ motivation in the future. Those without Economics A-levels were feeling more motivated to do their best work by the teaching staff than those with: 45.1% of them agree with the statement, compared to 41.5% with A-level Economics. We are not going to speculate on the reasons behind that, as it requires further investigation. Students wrote, “*The Staff are great and really are inspirational, and encourage me to go the extra mile*”. Others, however, do not agree and complain about lack of “*...encouragement in learning. Repeated courses cause motivational problems for lecturers when motivating pupils*”.

### Postgraduates

Postgraduate students were feeling more motivated by the staff than undergraduates, as half of them agreed with this statement. There were no differences between various student groups in answers to this question.

## Question 8 The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on my work (oral and/or written).

### Undergraduates



Nearly half of the students – 47.2% of them – agreed with the eighth statement, ‘The teaching staff normally give me helpful feedback on my work (oral and/or written).’ A quarter of all students were not sure about the helpful feedback and more than one in four did not find it helpful. Students’ answers to this question reveal an area of possible future improvements. The results are consistent with the 2002 results. Again the age of the students, their level of study and whether English is their first language influenced their answers to this question.

The most positive answers came from mature students, from the 26 and older group. Only 16.7% of them disagree with it, compared to 29.6% from the 18–20 age group. Those for whom English was not their first language were more positive, as usual. Only 15.4% of them disagree with a statement, compared to 31.8% of native English speakers. Most pleased with the feedback they received were students from the final year, more than half of them agreeing with the statement. Students from the second year were less pleased – only 40.6% of them agree with it.

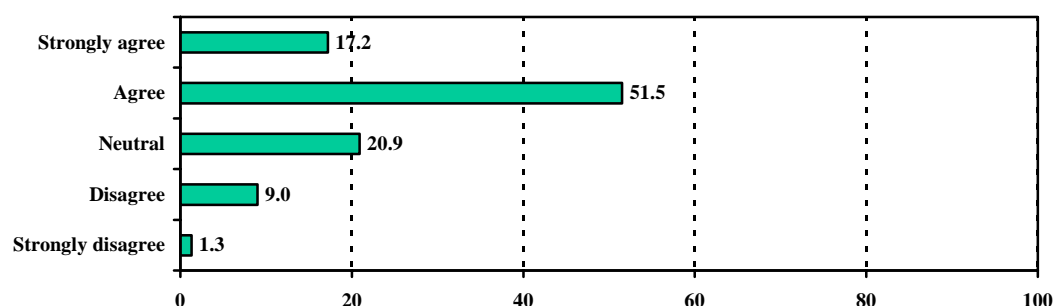
Students praised lecturers who give “...good lecture handouts and feedback from assessments”. Some even say: “The best feature of this course is the feedback students get when there is cause to complain”. More typical, however, are comments such as: “Feedback from tutors gives you a good idea of your progress and where to improve.” “The amount of feedback given to students is the most important part – not enough”. Students complain if “there is no exam feedback making it possible to make the same mistakes for the entirety of the three years without knowing how to improve your level of attainment” and “lack of feedback from essays and tests make it difficult to see where you went wrong.”

### Postgraduates

Postgraduates were more pleased with the feedback they received than undergraduates. More than half of them agree with the statement. There were no differences between various students groups in answers to this question.

## Question 9 The degree course has sharpened my analytical skills.

### Undergraduates



Nearly seven out of ten students agreed with the ninth statement, ‘The degree course has sharpened my analytical skills.’ One in five were undecided and one in ten did not feel that the course had sharpened their analytical skills. The results are similar to the 2002 Survey results.

Students’ opinions were influenced by the level of their studies, by having English as their first language and by having taken A-level Mathematics at school.

Students from the first year were among the least positive about the statement, although 57.5% of them agree to it; while among the final-year students, 84.3% believe that course has sharpened their analytical skills. If English was a student’s first language they were less likely to agree to this statement: 67.5% of English native speakers were positive, compared to 73.8% of others. Students with A-level Mathematics were more positive than those without it: 70.5% versus 65.8%.

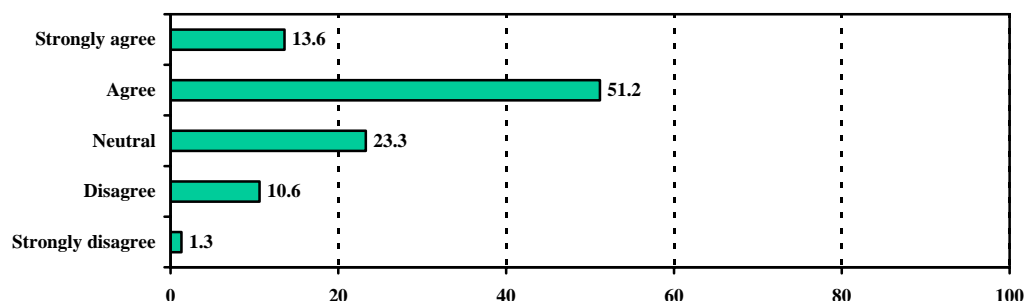
In their own words students put it that, “*economics module helps me to develop a good analytical skills in applying to our economy*” and that “*quantitative analytical skills developed in economics*” will be very useful in their career and “*are some of the most transferable to later on in life such as analytical skills*”.

### Postgraduates

Every three out of four postgraduates believe that this course has sharpened their analytical skills, while only 9.0% of them disagree with it. Gender has influenced students’ answers to this question. Males were more positive with nearly four out of five agreeing to it, while among the females the proportion is lower – 71.5% agree with the statement and one in five females were neutral.

## Question 10 The degree course has developed my problem-solving skills.

### Undergraduates



A majority of the respondents (64.8%) agree with the tenth statement, that the degree course has sharpened their problem-solving skills. At the same time, nearly one in four undergraduates were undecided. We could see that answers to this question differ depending on the level of studies and on English being the first language. The higher the level of study, the more positive the response was to the question. At the first year 54.8% of students agree with this statement, in the second year 66.7%, and in the last year 78.8%. With each year of study students received more practice with their problem-solving skills and they recognise it as a benefit of their course.

Students for whom English was not their first language were more positive in their replies than native English speakers; 69.7% of them agree with this statement compared to 63.6%. It could be due to the difference in teaching methods in UK and their home country and a higher emphasis on problem-solving exercises in UK universities.

Students' answers to this question in this year's survey were similar to the 2002 Survey results, when 68.2% agreed with the statement. Level of studies was also a statistically significant factor for this question in 2002. In their answers to open-ended questions, students have written: "*The status of doing economics is excellent as a signal to employers that I have strong analytical and problem solving skills,*" and that the course "*develops analytical and problem solving skills as well as other transferable skills.*"

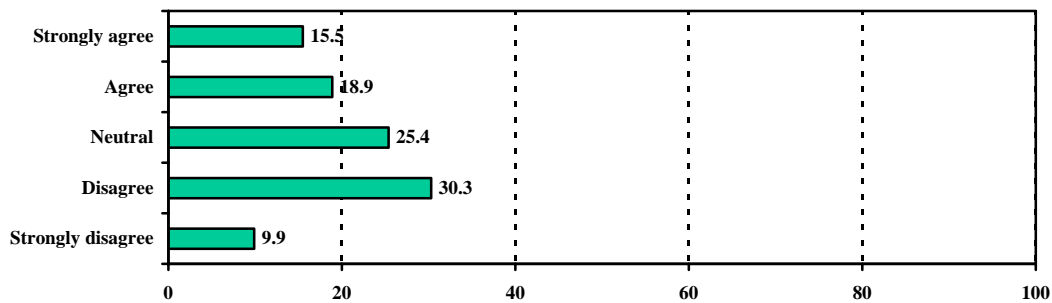
### Postgraduates

Postgraduates were more positive in answering this question than undergraduates: 68.2% of them agreed with it. Among postgraduates, males were more positive than females: 73.7% versus 62.5%. Nearly one in three female postgraduates were undecided on this question.



## Question 11 The degree course contains too much maths and stats.

### Undergraduates



The eleventh statement, ‘The degree course contains too much maths and stats’, was included because over the years a general impression had arisen that economics undergraduates have negative attitudes towards the amount of maths and statistics included in their course.

Answers to this question showed that students are more positive towards maths and statistics than anticipated. The results are similar to the 2002 Survey results. A total of 40.2% of respondents disagreed with the statement, while more than one-third agreed with it and more than a quarter were neutral. Answers to this question were influenced by various characteristics of the students. There were differences in agreement with this statement according to their gender, level of study, whether the respondents had A-level Mathematics, whether they had A-level Economics, and whether English was their first language.

Female students have more polarised opinions than male students: 42.6% of them disagree with the statement, compared to 38.3% of males, and 35.1% agree compared to 33.9% of males.

Among students with A-level Mathematics, only 25.0% agreed with the statement that there is too much maths and stats, compared to 51.0% of those who do not have the qualification. The situation is reversed for those who disagree with the statement: 48.3% of those who do have A-level Mathematics, and 25.6% of those who do not. The situation is similar for those who do not have English as a first language. Only 26.5% of them agree with the statement, while the agreement among those with English, as a first language is higher at 36.0%. This could be the result of better mathematics training of non-native English speakers.

But the situation is different for those who have A-level Economics. Both the 2002 and 2004 data show a higher level of agreement with the statement that there is too much maths on their course among those who have A-level Economics (37.0% in 2002, 38.5% in 2004) than among those who do not (26.0% in 2002, 27.1% in 2004).

There was also a difference in responses between students at different levels of study. 33.9% of first-year and 30.5% of final-year students, but 37.3% of second-year students agree with the statement that there is too much maths and stats on their course – a similar picture to 2002.

Maths was a frequently occurring topic in student responses to the open-ended questions and their comments are deeply divided. Students have written “*To be honest not the best at maths and stats, but these modules are great at again being able to*

*apply theory to actual data. These modules are also great at helping analytical and problem solving skills.” At the same time others stress that courses are “Extremely mathematical theoretical – Should be more focused on what goes on in real world” and ask for changes in “Methodologies of teaching Mathematical material. Too complex, and no detailed methods given.” Some students complain: “The Mathematics Content is poorly taught and the goals are unclear” and “Economics is far too mathematical. It will be good if we can have more theoretical discussions”. They also suggest “I think extra information needs to be provided about the level of Maths required. I have struggled having only a B Grade GCSE Maths qualification” and “The maths part of the course is exceptionally hard. No mention is made of needing A-level Mathematics and it is certainly necessary”, “There is not enough support for students who have not taken A-level Maths.”*

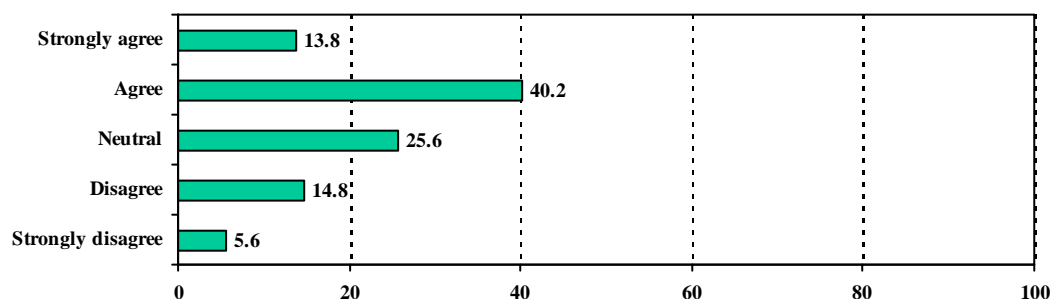
The following quote best describes the situation with maths and stats “*The maths component of the course is found incredibly difficult by some and incredibly easy by others which tends to make both groups switch off a little.*”

### **Postgraduates**

Postgraduates feel positive or neutral about the amount of maths and stats in their degree – more than half of them, actually 52.3% disagree with a statement, while 26.1% are neutral. Only one in five postgraduates think that their course contains too much maths and stats. There are differences in answers to this question depending on whether English was their first language or not. The picture here is different from the one we have for undergraduates. More than half of postgraduate students for whom English is their first language disagree with the statement and 18.3% were neutral, while the figures were 37.5% and 37.5% for those whose first language was not English. We do not speculate on the reasons behind these responses, as it requires further investigation.

## Question 12 My degree course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

### Undergraduates



The majority of the students (54.0%), as in the 2002 Survey, agreed with the statement, ‘My degree course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.’ However, this was not the case for every fifth student and more than a quarter of the students were undecided on this matter. The important variables for this question are age, level of study and whether English is their first language.

The enthusiasm of mature students was stimulated more by their degree course than that of their younger colleagues, with three out of four students older than 26 agreeing with this statement, compared to 60.6% from the 21–25 age group and 53.0% from the 18–20 age group.

Students for whom English was not their first language were more positive in answering this question than those who were native English speakers: 62.9% versus 51.7%.

There were differences in the way students at different levels of study answer this question: surprisingly the most positive answers came from first-year students – 55.2% of them agree with statement; students from the second year were slightly less positive – 52.8%, and the final-year students came third with 52.8% agreeing to the statement.

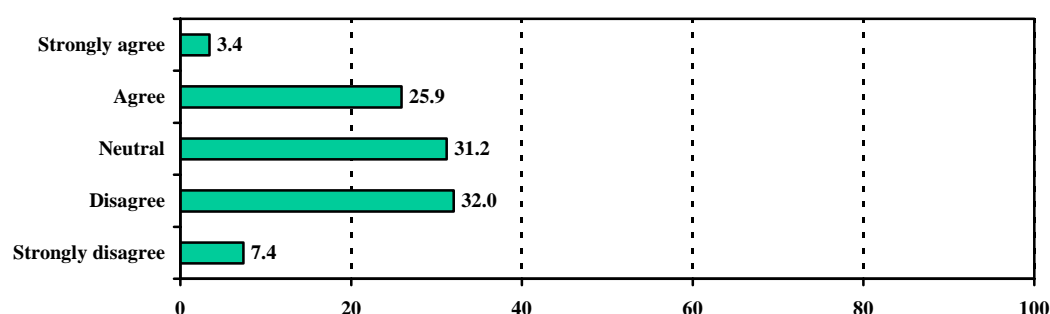
Answering a question about what career the students would like to pursue, a group of students said that they would like to continue their education: “*I strongly wish to go on studying economics*“ and “*I wanted to do a PhD in economics – now I'm not so sure as economics is very, very hard (though it's still great)*” Talking about their course students said “*I find economics as a subject highly interesting, and find that generally the things I learn stimulate me mentally.*”

### Postgraduates

Postgraduate courses have stimulated more enthusiasm for further learning than undergraduate ones, with 65.9% of students agreeing with the statement. There were differences in answers to this question according to the age of the students. Mature students were more positive in their answer, with nearly six out of seven of those older than 26 agreeing with it, while for the younger ones this figure is three out of five.

## Question 13 It is always easy to know the standard of work expected.

### Undergraduates



The students were not so certain about statement 13, 'It is always easy to know the standard of work expected': 39.4% of them disagreed, 31.2% were neutral and 29.3% agreed with it. Greater clarity here by departments, which might involve more individual support, could help students to appreciate the standard required of them and to achieve better results. The results are similar to the 2002 Survey, when 37.0% agreed with the statement.

Mature students tend to be more positive regarding this issue: 43.3% of those older than 26 agreed with it, comparing to 28.4% of those from 18–20 age group. If a student's first language was not English they were less negative towards this statement: 29.1% of them tend to disagree with it, comparing to 42.4% of native English speakers.

Some of the students are very positive about work standards: *"Assessment is clearly set out and easy to understand what you need to do"*, while others at the same time are not happy at all: *"I feel that it is important to provide stricter guidelines on marking exam scripts, so students can gain a better insight into what is expected of them"*, *"It's really hard to know what is expected of you, especially when it comes to applications in economics. I think the staff should strive to make students know what exactly is expected of them"* and *"We don't know what is expected of us and are not informed about administration we have to complete on time."*

### Postgraduates

Postgraduate students seemed to understand the standard of work expected of them even less than undergraduates: half of them disagree with the statement, and nearly one third were neutral. It could be advisable for departments to pay more attention to explaining to students what standard of work is expected from them. This is especially so where student groups are large.













































































































































