Valuing the Foundation Degree and the HNC
Observations of former students regarding the value of their courses

Report of a Pilot Study
commissioned by the
Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network

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The views in this Report are those of the author
and do not necessarily reflect those of YHELLEN
Valuing the FD and the HNC

Introduction

Relatively little is known about the impact of foundation degrees on students’ workplaces – not least, because of the relative recency of the introduction of the qualification and the technical difficulty of retaining contact with past students (especially where there is no tradition of maintaining such contact with alumni). In late 2008 the Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network [YHELLN] convened a meeting of member representatives to explore the possibility of running a pilot study designed to make an initial foray into the issue of the extent to which engagement in a foundation degree course\(^1\) (full-time or part-time) had influenced individuals and their workplaces. The target group would be students who had completed a foundation degree within the preceding three years (striking a balance between the length of time since their course had concluded and the risk of attenuation of contact between institution and former student), and who were in employment.

Whilst the primary focus of interest would be on the impact of foundation degree courses, there would be an opportunity to extend the study to HNCs. With the HNC qualification having existed for considerably longer, and hence having the advantages of being well-understood, there would be an opportunity to compare results from the two groups of ex-students. The sampling of former students would inevitably be opportunistic (it being a matter of which students chose to respond to the invitation), and probably biased towards those who had a strong ‘message’ that they wished to convey. The HNC ex-students cannot be seen as forming a control group in the experimental design sense, but the contrast with the former foundation degree students might offer prompts towards the enhancement of the student experience in either or both types of course.

The main project outcomes were anticipated to be:

- A greater understanding of the students’ educational experiences and of how the students viewed the relevance of their studies to the workplace after a period of time since completing their courses
- The identification of aspects of foundation degrees (in particular) where further development might be profitable.

Method

The survey was based upon a survey of part-time students that had recently been conducted by Yorke et al (2008). Following a meeting of potential participant institutions that was convened at the YHELLN offices, drafts of the survey were circulated for comment, and a number of the resulting suggestions were incorporated into the final version. There was insufficient time to pilot the developed survey: however, many of the items had previously been field-tested by Yorke et al (2008) and had proved robust.

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\(^1\) The word ‘course’ has been used throughout the body of this report since most of the questions to former students used this word rather than ‘programme’.
The survey consisted of 33 Likert-type items that invited responses on a scale running from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’; 20 demographic questions (where appropriate, with space for free responses); and a final set of 7 open-ended questions, the most important of which asked about the best and worst aspects of their course and about the personal and workplace benefits that had occurred. One of the open-ended questions offered respondents the opportunity to comment at greater length on their experience. The survey is provided in Appendix A.

The four institutions involved in this pilot project circulated to the target students an invitation (electronic or paper) to complete the survey, and an electronic link was provided to the survey which was mounted on SurveyMonkey. Where it proved necessary to mail letters to former students, YHELLN contributed towards the cost. The survey was conducted in the light of the recommendations for practice provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2004), and a guarantee was provided that the anonymity of individuals and institutions would be preserved in any reporting of the outcomes.

Results

Fifty-five valid responses were received, from students who had studied at four institutions affiliated to YHELLN. Thirty-six were from former foundation degree students and 19 from former HNC students. In the tabulations that follow, missing data in responses mean that the total numbers are not necessarily identical to the gross numbers of respondents.

The results are too unevenly distributed and the numbers are far too small for meaningful analysis at the level of the institution, and in this report analyses are limited to the two different types of qualification. The interpretation of the results needs to be undertaken with considerable caution, since some kinds of course are specific to particular institutions and in consequence the results may be skewed.

Source of data

The bulk of the responses came from two of the YHELLN member institutions. All of the HNC responses came from one institution, and the types of course are not disaggregated in the following two tables in order to respect institutional anonymity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>N responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bishop Burton College</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Riding College</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire Coast College</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subject area of study

The respondents’ subject areas of study were as below. The ‘Other’ category included Agriculture and other aspects of land use (3); the food industry (1); and sports (1). One respondent did not say what subject area they had studied.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject area</th>
<th>N responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animal-related</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business &amp; Logistics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative Media</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering &amp; Technologies</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment-related</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health &amp; Social care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Mode of study

The responses from the foundation degree students were roughly evenly divided between full-time and part-time. Since the HNC is a part-time qualification, the single response claiming to be full-time is probably an aberration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main mode of study</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distance learning or on-line</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No main mode</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background to entry

As would be expected, almost all of the HNC students had entered their course from employment. The origins of the foundation degree students were less homogeneous.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Entered course from…</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School or College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Valuing the FD and the HNC

Age on entry

The ‘school or college’ origin of the substantial minority of foundation degree students is reflected in the age-profile of the entrants. Apart from this group, the entry profile is fairly flat across the whole age-range save for the HNC respondents, none of whom was over the age of 50.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age on entry</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 or less</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-35</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-40</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-45</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-50</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-55</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56-60</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender

There was a fairly even split as regards gender.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Disability

None of the 36 FD respondents indicated that they had declared a disability. One of the 19 HNC respondents had made a declaration.

Ethnicity

All of the 55 respondents said that they were white British. This broadly reflects the demographic character of the areas served by the participating institutions, though Yorkshire and Humberside in general have significant ethnic minorities.

Occupation

The occupational background of both groups of respondents tended towards the managerial or professional.
Valuing the FD and the HNC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Managerial or professional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine supervisory etc</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term unemployed or never worked</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure or not fitting a stated category</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dependants

Most of the respondents did not have a responsibility for dependants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsible for dependants?</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Previous experience of higher education

A majority of each group of respondents claimed to have had previous experience of higher education (whether or not this had resulted in a qualification)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Previous experience of HE?</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Why undertake this part-time study?

The reasons for undertaking the foundation degree or HNC are mainly those of individuals seeking to advantage themselves in some way (not necessarily job-related), rather than being those of employing organisations. Whilst this is understandable in the case of entrants direct from school or college (10 foundation degree and 1 HNC), it is perhaps surprising given the expectation that both qualifications are intended to be strongly employment-related.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer asked me to apply</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve performance in current job</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for promotion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for career switch</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal satisfaction</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Who chose the course of study?

The self-orientation of the choice is demonstrated clearly in the responses to the question of who chose the course of study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who chose</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + person senior in the employing organisation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Person senior in the employing organisation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was the source of funding for the course fees?

However, employers’ interests were more apparent in respect of the HNC respondents, where nearly half said that their employer had funded their tuition fees. Even if the foundation degree students who had entered direct from school or college are discounted, the involvement of employers in the funding of tuition fees for foundation degrees does not seem particularly high. The Local Authority grants received by both sets of respondents were scattered across a number of subject areas and not, as might be assumed, particularly focused on Education-related courses.

The five HNC respondents who reported that they were the sole source of funding for their fees came from the seven who had studied in the area of Engineering & Technologies. There was no such unevenness in the responses from those who had taken a foundation degree. (It should be noted that Individual Learning Accounts are no longer available.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Employer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Grant</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Local Authority Grant</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Individual Learning Account</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What was the source of funding for relevant ancillary expenditure?

Ancillary expenses were almost always met by the students themselves.
Valuing the FD and the HNC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Employer</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Authority Grant</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Local Authority Grant</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self + Employer + Local Authority Grant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Computer availability at home

Modern educational courses typically incorporate the use of computers for a variety of purposes, and the assumption tends to be made that students nowadays have a computer available to them at home (and/or at work). The survey conducted by Yorke et al (2008) showed that a small minority might be disadvantaged by inadequate access to a computer. Two of the foundation degree students (neither of them having been unemployed on entry to their course) may have been disadvantaged in this way, since institutional computers are at times subject to an excess of demand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home and/or work computer?</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefit of the course in the workplace

Data from the 21 foundation degree students and 18 HNC students who had entered their course from employment show that a large majority of the latter had found their studies to have been beneficial to their workplace. The foundation degree students’ experience in this respect was more evenly divided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit to workplace?</th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further engagement with higher education

Roughly half of each group of respondents indicated that they had engaged further with higher education (e.g. by taking a bachelor’s degree) since completing their foundation degree or HNC.
Further engagement with HE?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>FD</th>
<th>HNC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Aspects of the student experience

The responses from the 33 Likert-type items were ‘collapsed’ into eight groups (see below). The number of responses was too small to do this statistically, and so groupings that had been found to be stable in other surveys were used as the basis for the present arrangement (though some items were new, and had to be allocated on content grounds).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item group</th>
<th>FD Mean</th>
<th>HNC Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of the student experience (9 items)</td>
<td>3.45</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback on achievements (3 items)</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of resources (4 items)</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal benefit (4 items)</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coping (8 items)</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>3.46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social engagement (3 items)</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>3.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer interest (1 item)</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Would recommend course (1 item)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All items were scored (on a scale of 1 to 5) such that high numerical ratings corresponded with a favourable view of the aspect of the course being considered. The small and probably biased sample of responses means that the interpretations that follow have to be treated with considerable caution. Small differences, therefore, cannot be invested with significance.

The general picture painted by the respondents is positive, whether they were taking a foundation degree or an HNC. However, the positivity is stronger from HNC students than from foundation degree students where matters relating to the provision made by institutions are concerned. The same applies to the question of whether they would recommend their course to a friend. One might surmise that the differences reflect the case that, for these particular foundation degree students, the courses were new, different, and involved arrangements with employers that differed from what had previously been established practice. On the other hand, the foundation degree students appear to be testifying to a relatively stronger social dimension to their courses.

It is perhaps surprising that both groups of respondents point to the expression by employers of a relatively lukewarm interest in their progress. Both types of course are intended in their different ways to respond to the needs of employers. There are echoes here of a similar kind of finding from a larger survey of part-time foundation degree
Valuing the FD and the HNC students (Yorke and Longden, forthcoming). With various governmental exhortations for a stronger link between employers and higher education (e.g. Leitch, 2006; BIS, 2009) this may be a matter that merits further attention.

In their own words

The survey asked respondents to indicate fairly briefly their reactions to four main open-ended questions in addition to responding to the structured questions. The issues covered in these four questions were:

- The best aspects of their course experience
- The worst aspects of their course experience
- Ways in which they had benefited personally from the course
- Ways in which their workplace had benefited from their studies.

Most of the respondents provided comments. About half of the respondents offered a more extensive comment than was expected from the four questions listed above. A selection of these comments is provided in the following subsections of this report. There is no claim that they are representative, but they do provide an illumination (sometimes quite vividly) to the points that have emerged from the survey as a whole.

The comments often ranged widely across issues of significance to the respondents and, instead of simply quoting responses in full, the responses have been disaggregated and grouped according to a number of themes that emerged when the comments were examined. Some respondents, therefore, are represented by more than a single quotation from what was, for them, a single response to a question.

Minor typographic and grammatical errors have been tidied up, out of respect for those who took the trouble to fill in the survey and who may well have been in a hurry, setting other things aside to respond. None of the quotations that follow has been altered in respect of its sense.

There was relatively little difference between the themes emerging from the responses from the former foundation degree and HNC students, save where a few of the former had felt themselves to have been guinea pigs for what was, when they enrolled, a completely new kind of course:

We were the 1st people to ever do this degree so all the mistakes were made on us! (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)

When issues have been expressed to the provider around consistency, [we] have been told continually that we are the test group, [the] first group to be delivered to. Don't feel that is a good enough reason as payment for course, effort etc. (Female, 31-35, Education FD)

[As] the Foundation Degree Course was relatively new we all thought that we were the test pilots for the course. (Male, Over 60, Animal-related FD)
Learning and studying

Thirty-one respondents across both course types (23 foundation degree, 8 HNC) mentioned, with varying degrees of explicitness, learning or studying as one of the best aspects of their experience.

- Wide range of learning allowed me to choose the projects that were right for me. Supportive tutors who tried to keep lessons interesting and helpful. Good amount of resources e.g. computers, cameras etc. (Male, 25 or less, Creative Media FD)
- Learning to consider situations / equipment from a different point of view and analyse the effects they have. (Male, 25 or less, Engineering & Technologies FD)
- Encouraged me to read round the subject. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)
- Learning from dedicated experts in the field of conservation. (Female, 26-20, Environment FD)
- I found that I learnt new things but at a rate that I could understand. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)
- Researching into new areas I had not thought of before. Learning to be academic and not practical. (Male, 41-45, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

However, the transition into higher education proved a challenge for one respondent:

- From a personal perspective, not having gone on to further education after school (and I think I was the only one on the course in this situation that stayed past week 3) I feel that a slightly more in-depth induction would have been very beneficial. I did feel quite overwhelmed in the first year as everything was so new to me, where as my peers seemed to have much more insight as to what to expect and how to deal with things. Referencing, for example, was totally alien and it took me a lot longer to work out what to do. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)

and challenge of this kind is likely to be more common than a single quotation might suggest.

The social dimension of their course experience was mentioned positively, in one way or another, by 20 respondents (14 foundation degree, 6 HNC).

- Group work, a new experience for me and thoroughly enjoyable. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)
- Interaction with other students in a similar working environment, but different company. (Male, 25 or less, Engineering & Technologies FD)
- Meeting and interacting with new people, finding new ways of being creative with flowers and plants which I have already been involved with and reawakening my interest in art, sculpture and art history. (Female, 46-50, Creative Media FD)
- Made some absolutely fantastic friends. The support from each other has been wonderful. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)
- Interaction between fellow students. (Female, 41-45, Education HNC)
- Met many great like minded people. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)
- Making new friends. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)
Valuing the FD and the HNC

However, coping with group-work can be problematic:

The amount of group work as a mode of assessment is difficult when attending evening sessions and when most assignments are due in around the holiday periods (Xmas/Easter etc) and people have other commitments. (Female, 26-30, Business & Logistics HNC)

One respondent noted an issue picked up in an earlier study of part-time students’ experience – that of infilling on to a (presumably) full-time foundation degree course (see Yorke et al, 2008):

Feel like an add on as a part time student in a very small group. (Female, 31-35, Education FD)

Negativities

A few students commented negatively on aspects of provision.

The bunching of assessment demands is a well-known problem in higher education, and is exacerbated in modular schemes and is a particular problem for the part-time student.

Towards the latter end of the course the assignments were very large and approx 3 were due in at roughly the same time. Very difficult to manage when working full time. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)

Some perceived weaknesses in teaching and learning may be related to staffing matters, which are covered in a separate subsection below.

Overworked staff not providing adequate teaching or returning assignments for months, by which time the comments were pointless as further assignments had been submitted. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)

Lack of communication from head tutor, including next to no tutorials, going missing for hours on end, not giving constructive criticism, and being precious about the practical information given out, such as names of suppliers etc. (Female, 46-50, Creative Media FD)

Disorganised lectures at times. (Male, 26-30, Business & Logistics FD)

A couple of respondents experienced difficulties with on-line learning:

I found the on-line parts of the course the least rewarding. Even though I could arrange with my fellow students to go on-line at an agreed time to ‘discuss’ work, I still felt somewhat ‘cut off’. (Female, 51-55, Education FD)

Sometimes difficult to ask questions online - fear of being ridiculed. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

One had to take more dramatic action than would normally be expected in order to acquire the work-experience necessary for their foundation degree:

Couldn’t get a work based learning placement, had to set up my own business to provide it. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)
Valuing the FD and the HNC

There appeared, for two different students, to have been issues of respect that should have been addressed:

Some tutors treat me like a child as I was the youngest on the course. (Female, 25 or less, Health & Social Care HNC)

Other students […] often disrupted lessons by turning up late or just behaving inappropriately. (Male, 25 or less, Creative Media FD)

and one reported disillusion with a promise that seems not to have been kept (though the issue of organisation may have played a part in her decision not to go further in higher education):

We were promised that the Honours Degree would run in the year after the Foundation Degree finished but due to poor administration this didn't happen. I am put off going back now to complete my honours degree due to the poor running of the course when I was there. Other students feel the same and many students dropped out during the time I was there for similar reasons. (Female, 36-40, ‘Other’ FD)

Tutorial and other support

The stimulation of learning could be markedly enhanced by tutorial support, as evidenced by the following comment:

The practical sessions under the guidance of an experienced tutor who understood the problems encountered and could guide in the right direction. The College notes were a great backup, which gave more time to listen to the tutor. (Male, Over 60, Animal-related FD)

Successive QAA reports have pointed to feedback as being the aspect of the student experience most in need of development, so it is particularly rewarding when comments such as the following are made:

The feedback given from assessments was great easy to read and understand. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

However, some students had not had such a good experience of feedback:

Poor assignment feedback. (Male, 26-30, Business & Logistics FD)

Poor feedback from tutors. (Male, 46-50, Environment FD)

As was found in the study by Yorke et al (2008), not every part-time student feels that they have a fair deal from the institution

As a part-time mature student there didn’t seem to be the support that there was for full-time students. Only being at college for a few hours once a week we were never too sure where to go for advice and information.

I felt left out of the college life. Decisions affecting my degree were made without consultation and during working hours so I could not be involved.

(Both quotations from Female, 26-30, Environment FD)

As a P/T student I felt my needs not met as much as if I had been a full time student. (Male, 46-50, Environment FD)
Valuing the FD and the HNC

and opportunities can be limited in respect of those attending in the evening:

Limited library opening times. Limited food options in the evenings. (Female, 26-30, Business & Logistics HNC)

Course organisation

Course organisation emerges as an issue in surveys only when it is perceived to be less than good. Surveys always tend to accentuate the negative on such topics. A lack of comment regarding course organisation implies that things are running reasonably well. The difficulties associated with an innovatory course were noted earlier, and are echoed in the following comments:

Poor course organisation - it was the first year the course ran. (Female, 36-40, ‘Other’ FD)

The initial HNC course was much better than the foundation degree one – better organised and greater thought [given] to time management. This is key to a part time student. (Male, 26-30, ‘Other’ FD)

For part-time students particularly, consideration needs to be given to the way in which the demands of teaching and assessment are scheduled. The data in Appendix B show that it is in respect of course organisation that the disparity between students’ experiences on the two types of course is most marked (the mean rating for the foundation degree was 2.65 compared with a figure of 3.63 for the HNC).

A number of testimonies to poor organisation were received, amongst them the following:

Work submitted lost by the college. Very very disorganised, some tutors not very helpful. (Male, 46-50, Environment FD)

At times the administration of the course was poor. (Male, 26-30, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

Wasn’t always that organised. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)

Lack of information. (Male, 26-30, Business & Logistics FD)

However, a couple of respondents appear to have made the most of their courses despite some serious criticisms.

It was intellectually challenging and great fun, despite poor organisation, administration and tutorial staff turnover. (Male, Over 60, Animal-related FD)

Notwithstanding the earlier negative comments, I have gone on to convert my FdSc into a BSc(Hons) at the University of Hull. I do feel uncomfortable about this litany of dissatisfaction but I feel I must tell it as I found it. Any of my co-students from the course would, I am sure, concur with the views I have expressed. (Male, 51-55, Animal-related FD)

Staffing issues

A few respondents from one institution observed that the teaching provision for their course had been adversely affected by a lack of institutional commitment to their subject
Valuing the FD and the HNC

area and the consequent reduction in staffing. In order to sustain the commitment of the survey to institutional and individual anonymity, no supporting quotations are included. However, apart from this particular instance others elsewhere remarked on the deleterious effect of staffing changes:

Changes in course leaders and some tutors very uninspiring and inexperienced. (Female, 31-35, Education FD)

There were several staff changes in a couple of subject areas and as a consequence the teaching suffered. Those two subjects were the two I did worst in, in essays. (Female, 36-40, ‘Other’ FD)

Turn over of staff. (Male, 26-30, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

We had a high turnover of lecturers and lost some of the best people before the course finished. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)

**Personal benefit**

The benefit felt by students came through as a strong theme in this and previous surveys (e.g. Yorke and Longden, forthcoming). It is implicit in a number of comments on self-development that the personal benefit carried over into the workplace.

(a) **Self-development**

Self-development (most frequently expressed in terms of self-confidence) was a significant theme to emerge from the comments regarding the best aspects of the students’ experiences.

Completing the foundation degree has made me more confident. (Female, 41-45, ‘Other’ FD)

Set up my own [...] business to cover the work based learning requirement. Gained confidence in my own abilities. Made some excellent friends and still maintain a strong professional network with them from all over the UK and abroad. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)

Being more confident to speak out about key issues and know what I’m talking about (Female, 26-30, Business & Logistics FD)

Gained confidence in doing presentations, so speaking out loud to an audience. (Female, 25 or less, Creative Media FD)

Gaining confidence in my abilities. (Female, 26-20, Environment FD)

More experienced, more confident in approaching design jobs. (Female, 36-40, ‘Other’ FD)

Built up my confidence and self esteem. [...] I was taken more seriously at work. (Female, 31-35, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

Increased confidence. (Male, 26-30, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

For one respondent, success was rewarding:

Sense of achievement when passing assignments and the HNC overall. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)
Another respondent wrote, slightly paradoxically, that whilst they had found no direct benefit the course had stimulated interest.

The course itself does not benefit me particularly outside work, but I am now interested and do read up on things that I did on the course in my own time. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

From an educational perspective, this reads like a success! A different former HNC student noted that their course had had spin-off value at home:

Mend computers for my family. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

(b) Academic and practical benefit

Academic and practical benefits are the intention of foundation degree and HNC courses, and may be taken as read unless probed more deeply than a relatively short questionnaire can do. A few comments nevertheless pointed towards such benefits.

Gave me confidence in the subject. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

Broaden[ed] my knowledge, skills and gained a qualification. (Female, 31-35, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

Getting back in to academic learning. […] Gaining knowledge in business environment. Practising presentations. (Female, 25 or less, Business & Logistics HNC)

Passing on of good practice. (Female, 41-45, Education HNC)

Juggling

It is well-known that one of the biggest challenges for part-time students is finding ways of balancing competing commitments in what are frequently very busy lives.

Finding time to complete all necessary works & research at the same time as working shifts and completing other non-work activities. (Male, 25 or less, Engineering & Technologies FD)

Having to use all holidays to attend block weeks. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

However, part-time study may be the only way in which some people can develop their careers. The following comment on the advantages of taking a part-time course is typical of those made by respondents to other surveys (see, for example, Yorke and Longden, forthcoming):

Being able to study part-time alongside working, I would not have been able to change my career if not for this. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)
Valuing the FD and the HNC

Work-related benefits

With students having completed their courses at college and being in employment, they have the advantage of a reasonable amount of time, post-course, to make a judgement on the value of their studies for the workplace.

Some mentioned that they had been able to apply in the workplace what they had learned:

- Many of the techniques/rules in design I was taught have applied to my current line of work. (Male, 25 or less, Creative Media FD)
- I understand the processes and procedures in greater detail. I am also using my qualifications as a means of gaining more experience within my current employment. (Female, 41-45, ‘Other’ FD)
- I learnt new skills, and discovered other software that was available. I have used some of the skills I picked up presenting my end of course assignment. (Male, 46-50, Engineering & Technologies HNC)
- Directly applied skills learnt on course at work. […] Qualification assists with career progression. (Male, 26-30, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

Others had advanced their careers, through promotion…

- Covered my manager’s job whilst she was on maternity leave and promoted to supervisor in department restructure whilst studying for my degree. (Female, 26-30, Business & Logistics HNC)
- It improved my job prospects in ICT and also enabled me to teach higher level ICT. (Female, 31-35, Engineering & Technologies HNC)
- I gained promotion at work and now have my own department. (Female, 36-40, Business & Logistics HNC)
- Assisted when I applied for another role at technical grade as opposed to manual. (Male, 25 or less, Engineering & Technologies FD)

… and/or some kind of occupational shift:

- The course helped me change career and opened my eyes to the other conservation options out there. It has also helped me move up the ladder in my career. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)
- The course did help me identify a new career path and has definitely been instrumental in helping me pursue it. (Female, 26-30, Environment FD)
- It has helped me to go on and do a BA Hons and qualify as a teacher. (Female, 25 or less, Education FD)
- Ended up with my own business and have so much work I have to turn it away. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)
- I have been able to go into my chosen profession immediately after finishing my Bachelor’s Degree at a pay grade I am happy with. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)
- Setting up own garden design business – would have helped more if more info had been given on setting up a business not just drawing. (Male, 26-30, ‘Other’ FD)
- I am now in a successful career in conservation thanks to my qualification and networking. (Female, 26-20, Environment FD)
The work I was in before was totally different. I have now launched my own company because of the knowledge and confidence gained from my studies. (Female, 31-35, Animal-related FD)

A small number of respondents felt that they had not benefited from the course they followed:

I feel I could be doing what I am doing now without having taken the course. (Female, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

No significant benefit, I was already familiar with any useful content on the course. (Male, 26-30, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

There has been no benefit. (Male, 31-35, Engineering & Technologies HNC)

One observed that practical experience could carry greater weight in the field than academic qualifications:

I have found that employers in this industry prefer practical paid/voluntary experience rather than someone with a degree/foundation degree. Further discussions required between employers/universities as to required standards/qualifications of students learning when leaving university. (Male, 36-40, Environment FD)

One former student had, arguably, undervalued the experience of their foundation degree since it is likely to have been of generic benefit to their career path:

Not benefited much as have progressed to university and I am now studying for a degree in biomedical science so much of the content of the course is not relevant however it did give me a basic understanding of some scientific principles. (Male, 25 or less, Animal-related FD)

Another had been encouraged by their employer down a path that they felt was inappropriate to their personal development:

I already have a BA Hons degree. I wanted to progress onto a Master’s programme but my employer encouraged me to take an HNC in Business to support my job role, I don’t really feel the course has had any benefit or was really of relevance to my work. (Female, 26-30, Business & Logistics HNC)

Taken in the round, the balance of comments on the benefit of study for the workplace is quite strongly positive, though it is debatable whether the perceived workplace-related benefits were always those envisaged at the outset of the students’ courses. At a time of economic turbulence, this perhaps should not be a surprise.

Overall judgements

Some of the earlier quotations in this report have already pointed to the benefits that had accrued from students’ courses. Two respondents wrote at greater length about the outcomes from their foundation degree courses:
Since starting the course which was over 3 years P/T, I have changed employment. The FD may have helped me with the job I have now, it has certainly helped myself with all the different subjects that were covered. [...] The whole of the course was very good, it covered a lot of ground and I am really pleased with what I have achieved. (Male, 46-50, Environment FD)

I found this an excellent way of progressing my achievements as I had practical examples while at work to use for the studies I was completing. Also, I didn’t have lectures and assignments full time which is something I didn’t enjoy and find I get distracted whilst completing. I would definitely consider another course of this type. (Male, 25 or less, Engineering & Technologies FD)

Commentary

Two considerations bearing on this study need to be reiterated. First, it was a pilot study which made an initial foray into difficult research territory – difficult because of the problems inherent in making contact with students after they have completed their courses. The difficulty is exacerbated when electronic communication is not possible, students have moved house and/or job, and so on. Nowadays, institutions are much more aware of the desirability of retaining contact, and record systems are reflecting this. The second consideration is that, for this sample of respondents, foundation degrees had been newly introduced as a qualification and institutions, employers and the students themselves were having to come to terms with the implications, such as the appropriateness for individual students of course choice and changes in role-relationships. Any negativities in this report that relate to foundation degrees need to be viewed in the light of their novelty and the consequent likelihood of teething problems.

A further point needs to be made. Some of the issues that attracted critical comment from the former students (for example, feedback) are common across all higher education, and are not limited to foundation degrees or HNCs. This report has to be read in the wider context of provision of higher education courses.

In comparison with the response from the HNC respondents, the lower level of positivity expressed by the foundation degree respondents regarding aspects of teaching and learning is perhaps a reflection of the newness of that type of course for that particular group. The findings may simply be ‘of their time’ and of limited current relevance. However, the stronger mean score for ‘Social engagement’ hints that the teaching methods in use may have involved the students in a greater amount of collaborative or ‘active’ learning.

For both groups of respondents, the stimulation of studying was apparent in both the responses to the Likert items and the free-response comments. A minority, though, had not found their studies to have been what they wanted.

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2 It should nevertheless be noted that their mean scores on the Likert items were above the mid-point of the scale.
The relationship between teachers and learners comes through as an important aspect of both types of course, sometimes explicitly, as in direct comments quoted above, and sometimes more implicitly, where aspects of perceived practice point to varying levels of commitment by staff to students. A number of studies of ‘the student experience’ and of retention have pointed to the importance of a high degree of staff commitment to student development. A particular pedagogic point here is the provision of feedback which tends generally to attract lower student ratings in higher education. Part of the problem may be in a view of assessment as an activity that comes at the end of a unit of study, rather than as one which forms part of the to-and-fro of teaching. Evidence from schools, but with some from higher education, points to the high value of formative assessment for student learning (Black and Wiliam, 1998). Put bluntly, formative assessment (if done well) ‘works’.

The development of self-confidence on the part of students is once again evidenced in this study. The curricular focus on learning outcomes, prevalent in higher education, distracts to some extent from the importance of personal development. Yet enhanced self-confidence, sense of self-efficacy, and so on are attributes that have a high probability of being enduring, with consequent benefit to the individual, to organisations in which they are engaged, and to the broader society. A related issue is the importance placed by both sets of respondents on meeting others with similar professional interests and on establishing friendships: these offer the prospect of mutual support and encouragement, and can be an invaluable source of support when adversity strikes. If the pedagogic approaches in use foster a range of opportunities for personal growth, they are likely to do the students a long-lasting service.

Many of the respondents testified to the work-related benefits stemming from their studies. Since both types of qualification are employment-oriented, this should occasion no surprise. However, it is useful to have evidence (albeit relatively slender given the size of the study) that those who participated in these forms of higher education had gained significantly from their experience, whether with their current employer or by some kind of career switch.

What was surprising was the relatively low level of employer engagement in the students’ professional development although there was a rather higher level of employer engagement when it came to funding tuition fees. Most of those who responded indicated that they themselves had chosen the course of study, and a substantial proportion indicated that their workplace had gained from their developing expertise. The recent policy emphasis on employer engagement may however be having an influence in respect of current foundation degree and HNC students’ development of work-related capabilities.

**Summing up**

There is much to be celebrated in the evidence collected in this study. With a few exceptions, the respondents were broadly happy with the education that they had
received, and felt that they had benefited from it in various ways. There are, as noted at various points in this report, hints as to where pedagogic practice could possibly be enhanced. An aspect of these employment-oriented courses that may need greater attention is the extent to which employers engage with their employees’ development.

References


Acknowledgements

Thanks go to all those involved, in one way or another, in encouraging former students to respond to the survey and, of course, to the respondents themselves.

Thanks also to YHELLLN for funding the study.
Appendix A: The survey questionnaire

[This contains all the questions that were asked, though the format is somewhat different from that used by SurveyMonkey]

YHELLN Survey of HNC & Foundation Degree Graduates

Surprisingly little is known about the usefulness of gaining an HNC or a foundation degree for employment and for life in general. This survey is being conducted through the Yorkshire and Humber East Lifelong Learning Network’s constituent institutions, and aims to provide YHELLN (and others interested in such courses) with information that will help in the design of future courses.

The data collected by this survey will be encrypted for security.

Sections A and B are quick to complete, since they mainly involve clicking on buttons or boxes. Section C, which is composed of six open-response questions, will take as long as you are prepared to give it.

There may be a few questions that you cannot answer, or choose not to answer (and it is possible that a few of the questions will not fit your circumstances): if so, simply leave them and move on to the next.

Section A: Aspects of your experience as a part-time student

Items 1 to 33 invite you to give a quick response to the respective statements. Your responses to this section will help to build up a ‘broad-brush’ picture of ‘the part-time student experience’ on HNCs and Foundation Degrees.

Simply click on the appropriate button: if you want to alter your response, click on another button.

[These 33 items had six categories for responding: strongly agree; agree on balance; neutral; disagree on balance; strongly disagree; not applicable or not sure.]

1. Staff made it clear from the start what they expected from students
2. The teaching on my course showed me what I needed to do to be successful in my studies
3. My course was well organised administratively
4. I was satisfied with the quality of the teaching on my course
5. I got what I expected to get from my course
6. I was able to contact academic staff when I needed to
7. I was satisfied with the level of tutorial support on my course
8. The criteria used in assessing work were made clear to me
9. The way in which course assessments (assignments, exams, etc) were scheduled caused problems for me
10. I received detailed comments on the work I submitted for assessment
11. Feedback on my work was prompt
12. Feedback on my work helped me in my learning
13. I found my course intellectually stimulating
14. I didn’t do the background reading expected of me
15. I found it difficult to balance academic and other commitments
16. I discussed academic work with fellow students outside timetabled sessions (by one means or another)
17. Academic work at this level was harder than I had expected it to be
18. I coped satisfactorily with my academic workload
19. I was unable to attend some formally timetabled sessions because of other demands on my time
20. My institution’s student support services were sufficient for my needs
21. The library provision was good enough for my needs
22. I was able to access general computing resources at the institution when I needed to
23. The institutional catering facilities were adequate for my needs
24. I worried about financing my studies
25. I felt that I belonged to an academic grouping within this institution
26. I made at least one close friend whilst studying on my course
27. I found it difficult to study in my home
28. My course (HNC or foundation degree) has been beneficial to my career
29. My employer took an interest in my progress on the course (HNC or foundation degree)
30. I gained in confidence as a consequence of taking the course
31. I am using the knowledge and skills gained through my course (HNC or foundation degree) in my workplace
32. My course has given me improved job prospects
33. I would recommend my course to a friend

Section B: About your background

HNC and Foundation degree graduates vary widely in their background characteristics and in the types of course they have studied – you will probably appreciate this from the questions that follow. If our analyses are to be really useful, we need to subdivide the responses in various ways. This is why the following 20 personal background questions are being asked. It will be particularly helpful if you respond to these as well as to those that you have already seen, but it is entirely up to you whether you choose to respond to any particular item.
1. Which kind of course did you take?
   - HNC
   - Foundation Degree

2. Where did you enter your course from?
   - Direct from school or college
   - From employment
   - From being unemployed

3. At which institution did you study for your HNC or foundation degree?
   [Drop-down list provided]

4. Under which one of the following broad subject areas of study would you place your course? (If you are unsure, click on ‘Other’ and indicate the subject discipline below.)
   - Health & Social Care
   - Engineering & Technologies
   - Construction
   - Business and Logistics
   - Creative Media
   - Education
   - Other
   Please briefly specify ‘Other’ [text box provided]

5. What was your main mode of studying on your course?
   - Full-time
   - Part-time
   - On-line or distance learning
   - No main mode, but a significant mixture of modes
   If a significant mixture of modes, please indicate briefly [text box provided]

6. Approximately what was your age when you started studying for your HNC or foundation degree?
   - 25 or less
   - 26-30
   - 31-35
   - 36-40
   - 41-45
   - 46-50
   - 51-55
   - 56-60
   - Over

7. What is your gender?
   - Male
8. Which of the following broad ethnic groupings would you place yourself in?
- White British
- Black British
- Asian British
- White other than British
- Black other than British
- Asian other than British
- Chinese
- Other
If ‘Other’, please specify [text box provided]

9. Did you declare a disability to the institution at which you studied for your HNC or foundation degree?
- Yes
- No

10. Which one of the following most closely describes your occupational background? (If you are under 25 years of age, please interpret this question in terms of your family background, giving only the higher-level occupation if, for example, parents differ in this respect.)
- Managerial or professional occupation
- Intermediate occupation (e.g. administrative role; running small business; self-employment)
- Relatively routine supervisory, technical, service or manual occupation
- Long-term unemployment or Never worked
- Not sure or Other, not easily categorised as one of the above

11. Did you have a responsibility to care for dependants whilst studying for your HNC or foundation degree?
- Yes
- No
12. What was the source of funding for the course tuition fees for your HNC or foundation degree studies?
(Click on more than one box if appropriate)
- Self
- Employer
- Local Authority Grant
- Individual Learning Account
- Career Development Loan
- Other
If ‘Other’, please specify [text box provided]

13. What was the source of funding for additional expenses such as travel, books, equipment and consumables?
(Click on more than one box if appropriate)
- Self
- Employer
- Local Authority Grant
- Individual Learning Account
- Career Development Loan
- Other
If ‘Other’, please specify [text box provided]

14. Before you started on your HNC or foundation degree studies, had you previously taken a course in higher education (i.e. above A level), even if you didn’t finish it)?
- Yes
- No

15. Which one of the following most closely fitted your reason(s) for taking up your HNC or foundation degree course?
- Personal satisfaction
- Improving my capability in my current employment
- Preparation for promotion
- Preparation for career switch
- My employer asked me to apply
- Other
If ‘Other’, please specify [text box provided]
16. Did you, whilst studying for your HNC or foundation degree, have the use of a computer at home or at work to access learning resources?
- Yes
- No

17. If you were in regular employment when studying for your HNC or foundation degree, did your employer allow you paid time off work to fulfil the requirements of your course (e.g. to attend taught sessions; to complete assessments)?
- Yes
- No
- The question does not apply to me

18. Who was responsible for choosing the course you were studying?
- Myself only
- Someone senior to me in my workplace
- Someone senior in my workplace and I jointly

19. If you were employed before you started your course, did you find that the course benefited your work?
- Yes
- No
- Not sure

20. Have you gone on to higher-level study in higher education (e.g. to a bachelor’s degree course), following your HNC or foundation degree?
- Yes
- No

Section C: Open response items

The first six questions in this (the final) section offer the opportunity to give more detail about your experiences on your HNC or foundation degree course. We hope that you will do this, since previous surveys have shown that open-response questions have been much more richly illuminating than ‘tick-box’ items can ever be. [Text boxes provided for responses.]
1. What were the best aspects of your experience as an HNC or foundation degree student?  
(Please list up to three aspects, using up to 100 words)

2. What have been the worst aspects of your experience as an HNC or foundation degree student?  
(Please list up to three aspects, using up to 100 words)

3. If your course has been of benefit to you as regards work (now and/or in the future), in what way(s) have you benefited?

4. If your course has been of benefit to you outside work, in what way(s) have you benefited?

5. A relatively short questionnaire cannot cover everything. Has this questionnaire left out any important aspects of the experience of being an HNC or foundation degree student? If so, please note them below, again using up to 100 words.

6. If you would like to comment at greater length about your experience as an HNC or foundation degree student, please use the space below.

7. As with part-time students’ experience of HNC and Foundation Degree programmes, there is very little known about how employers benefit from their employees’ part-time study. If resources permit, YHELNN would like to survey employers about this. Making contact with employers is often difficult, and we hope that you will be willing to help us by giving your e-mail contact details in the box below, so that we can ask you to put YHELNN in touch with your employer. Providing your e-mail address is, of course, entirely voluntary.
Appendix B

Detailed statistics from the Likert items (the items are presented in a shortened form here: for the full wording, see Appendix A).

<table>
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<th>Quality of the student experience (9 items)</th>
<th>FD Mean Nmax=34</th>
<th>HNC Mean Nmax=19</th>
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<tr>
<td>Expectations made clear</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching pointed towards what needed</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>4.11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course well organised</td>
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<td>3.63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Satisfied with teaching quality</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>3.83</td>
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<td>Got what expected from course</td>
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<td>Could contact academics</td>
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<td>Satisfied with tutorial support</td>
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<td>Assessment criteria clear</td>
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<th>Feedback on achievements (3 items)</th>
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<tr>
<th>Coping (8 items)</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment schedule caused problems</td>
<td>3.38</td>
<td>3.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Didn't do background reading</td>
<td>3.85</td>
<td>3.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to balance commitments</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coped with academic workload</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missed some timetabled sessions</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worried about finance</td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>3.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to study at home</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic work harder than expected</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>3.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Provision of resources (4 items)</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student support was sufficient</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library good enough</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>3.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Able to access computers</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>3.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional catering was adequate</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>3.75</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social engagement (3 items)</th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Discussed work with fellow students</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>3.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt belonged to an academic group</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>3.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made at least 1 close friend</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>3.74</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal benefit (4 items)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Course benefited career</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gained in confidence</td>
<td>3.91</td>
<td>4.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using knowledge etc at work</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>3.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course improved job prospects</td>
<td>3.55</td>
<td>3.53</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employer interest (1 item)</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer took interest in my progress</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.28</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would recommend course</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.89</td>
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