



# **National Economics Students Survey 2008 Report**



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We would also like to thank Narzanin Massoumi, who helped us with the qualitative data analyses.

Dr. Inna Pomorina prepared this report with the support of the whole Economics Network team.

## **Executive summary**

In 2008, the Economics Network of the Higher Education Academy carried out its fourth survey of Economics students, covering both undergraduates and postgraduates. This is the executive summary of the report.

### **Purpose of the study**

The survey was conducted online, as part of the Economics Network's ongoing research programme into teaching and learning in Economics. Questions from our previous 2006 survey were used with a new added section "About your previous learning experience".

The survey aimed to provide valuable information on students' perceptions of studying economics, including identifying strengths and weaknesses in the learning and teaching of economics. Results from the previous surveys were used in running departmental and national workshops and to inform curricula development in the departments.

### **Profile of survey respondents**

More than 2000 students from 68 departments took part in the survey, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Of the respondents:

- 54.6% were male and 45.4% were female;
- 80.0% started their courses under the age of 21;
- 68.2% stated that English is their first language;
- 67.9% have A-level in Maths;
- 60.5% have A-level in Economics;
- 82.6% stated that Economics was their first choice.

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

### **Methods of analysis**

Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions were examined using standard statistical methods. Differences in responses were examined by gender, age of entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as the first language and choice of course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels were discussed.

Responses to each of the qualitative questions were coded and aggregated for analysis using NVivo software. In the report, for illustrative purposes we include graphs, which were based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency and typical quotes from students' responses.

### **Responses to individual questions**

In many ways results of the survey were similar to the 2006 findings but there were some noticeable changes: more courses are making use of Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs); more students experience interactive forms of seminars/tutorials/classes, such as games and simulations; and more group-work projects and group assessment are being used in Economics degrees.

### **Previous learning experience**

Before starting on their current course 73.0% of respondents studied in the UK. Those new to UK came mostly from China, Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, India and the USA (in descending order). Students mention the good reputation of UK universities, the high quality of education, the country itself and the English language as the strongest factors in their decision to come to the UK.

Comparing their current course with their previous learning experience, nearly two-thirds of the respondents found contact with lecturers to be either different or very different; more than half found teaching methods, student support, e-learning and the use of IT to be different or very different; and more than a third found assessment to be different or very different.

Responses about previous learning experiences differed between those who came from abroad and those who had studied in the UK. Starting a university course was a big change for all respondents, but particularly for international students who also have to adjust to another country.

The majority of respondents (64.6%) agree that they were adequately prepared for their current course; and studying on it has met expectations for three-quarters of students.

### **Maths and Stats**

More than half of the respondents found the teaching of Maths and Stats on their course to be very good or mostly good; though one in seven regard it as not very good or poor. Two-thirds of respondents found the content of the degree to be largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right.

### **Teaching and assessment**

When asked how their course differs from their expectations, students mentioned the level of Maths, course content and its relevance to the real world, the level of teaching and support for students.

Respondents were asked to indicate how useful they found different types of teaching in supporting their learning. More than half rated the following as either useful or very useful:

- lectures, small classes and seminars,
- assigned reading,
- materials posted by the lecturer on the course's VLE,
- feedback on submitted work,
- working informally with other students,
- preparing for exams and tests.

The less-used learning activities that more than a third of respondents had not encountered include:

- workshops or classes (of over 25 students),
- group-work projects,
- online learning using economics software,
- online questions and tests (not assessed),
- communication tools in the course VLE.

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, the vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. Despite the popularity of classroom experiments, games,

simulations and role-plays in seminars with those who experience them, 75.7% rarely or never have them. Nearly half rarely or never have individual student presentations. In both cases, however, more students experienced these activities than in 2006.

A majority found that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. As part of their assessed coursework, the majority of respondents were given essays to be completed in their own time, while those assessment types that respondents rarely or never experienced included essays done in class (85.3%), online assessment (69.3%) and group-work projects (45.8%). These percentages, however, are lower than in 2006.

An even bigger majority of respondents than in 2006 were on a course that makes use of a VLE – 73.7% compared to 67.0%. Almost all their comments either described VLEs positively or complained that they are underused.

Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course.

### **Students' comments to open-ended questions**

- *Best aspects of the course:* the quality of teaching, the choices and flexibility of the programmes and modules, and the career prospects.
- *Most useful seminar activities:* the interactive and practical activities in the seminar. Also found to be useful were group exercises and pre-prepared problem sets, mini-lectures, presentations and discussions, and working in small groups.
- *Ways to improve seminar activities:* by making them more interactive with more space for questions, meeting more frequently in smaller classes and better trained tutors.
- *Ways to improve teaching Maths and Stats:* by checking on prior knowledge, tutors being more sensitive to students' learning needs, by increasing number of workshop-style classes, more problem-based learning.
- *Ways to improve assessment:* more frequent and continuous testing so that there is less reliance on the final exam, more independent coursework, more practice exams, by getting feedback from work handed in and doing more essays.
- *Economics software and its usefulness:* 25% said that they did not use any software, or were not aware of doing so. Software identified by respondents include: Stata, EVIEWS, Microfit, SPSS, WinEcon and Minitab.
- *Effectiveness of VLEs:* they are very effective tools and comments are positive, although some do suggest that they are not used enough.
- *Their future career:* the majority aspire towards a finance-related career, including investment banking, insurance, accountancy or economics – or were undecided.
- *Skills they developed:* were mainly divided between academic, interpersonal and practical.
- *Aspects of the course that they don't like:* students identified teaching quality or certain lecturers and/or tutors, assessment processes, Maths, the content and structure of the course.
- *Aspects that could be improved:* quality of teaching, particularly of Maths; also the amount of contact time.

- *How the course has changed them:* answers to this question were overwhelmingly positive mainly covering how it helped them with careers, perceptions of the world, and knowledge and understanding.
- *In five years' time:* working in the banking or financial sector, for example as an investment banker or accountant; pursuing further study; or working in a business-related occupation.
- *Any other comment:* generally positive – most comments were about how they enjoyed the course overall or giving thanks for the opportunity to participate in the survey.

## **Conclusions**

As in the previous surveys, we were impressed by the maturity of students' comments and by their awareness of teaching and learning issues in economics. Finding out about their previous learning experience will allow us to provide better support to new students through our website *WhyStudyEconomics.ac.uk* and develop new resources for lecturers teaching international students.

Comparing results with previous years' allows us to follow the changing picture of studying economics in UK HE and better target our support to lecturers. In some cases, students' suggestions for improvements in the way courses are run, such as smaller class sizes or more contact time, would require extra resources. In other cases, however, their suggestions could be achieved through relatively small changes in practice, such as ways of using VLEs, classroom activities or teaching styles. The Economics Network is very happy to support lecturers in making changes.

The report also includes Appendices with the Economics Network Student Questionnaire and comparative data from BOS for 2006 and 2008 surveys.

## **Purpose of the study**

Following the success of our previous surveys and as part of our research programme into teaching and learning in Economics, the Economics Network has conducted its fourth national online Economics student's survey in February–April 2008. The results of the Students Survey provide us with an inside view of what is really going on in teaching and learning of Economics in UK HE. This survey is part of a comprehensive research programme, which aims to better understand the needs of our different stakeholders, including students, lecturers, alumni and employers.

Survey reports for each participating department play an important role in departmental planning and curriculum development. Economics Network has been asked by some departments to run workshops in the areas of teaching that students have identified to be in need of improvement. We always 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.

Questions from our previous 2006 survey were used with a new added section "About your previous learning experience". Finding out about the previous learning experience of the respondents will allow us to provide students with better support through our websites *Why study economics?* and *Studying economics* and develop new resources for lecturers teaching international students.

More than 2000 from 68 departments took part in the survey, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Some of the departments which previously actively participated in the survey decided not to take part in it this year due to other commitments. There is a big discrepancy in the number of replies from different departments, ranging from 97 respondents to below 10.

The survey was run online, as in previous years, using Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) system (<http://www.survey.bristol.ac.uk/>).

As with all our previous students' surveys this one focuses on students' perceptions of studying Economics and not on any specific course or module. Respondents were asked to think back over the time they spent at university and either to rate their agreement or disagreement on a five- or three-point scale with various statements regarding their learning experiences or to answer open-ended questions. For some forms of activities, that were not available to big groups of students, we consider looking at the relative usefulness of this activity to them.

In order to ensure the validity of responses, students were asked to submit their e-mail addresses to participate in the prize draw and duplicate entries were excluded.

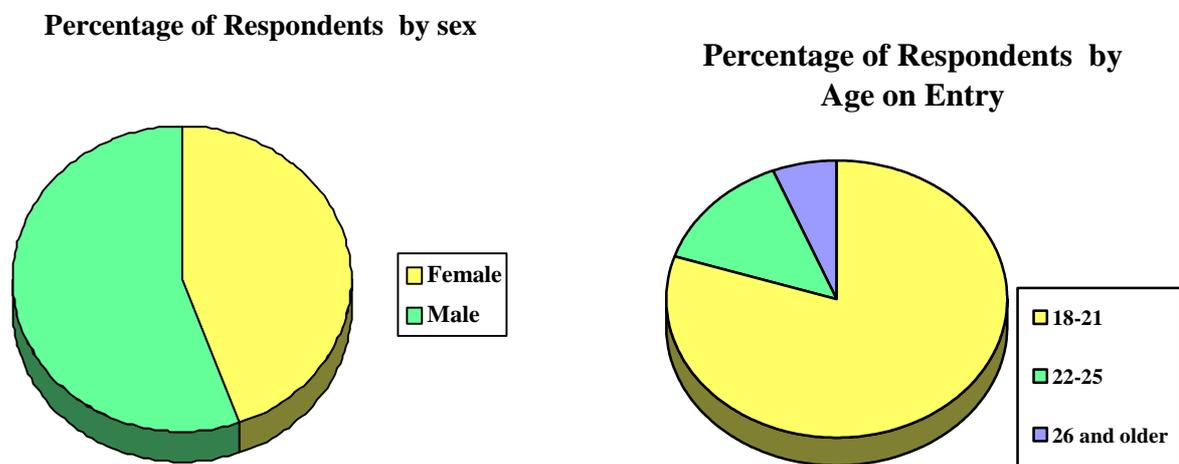
The survey, as with all our surveys, was intended as an observational study and not as a controlled experiment. The respondents did not constitute a random sample of all Economics students in the UK, but a self-selected group. As a result, their views may not fully reflect the opinions of the entire student population. Despite the self-selection, 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.

The main value of the survey lies in the long term, as the findings were compared to the results of the past surveys. Comparing results with the previous years allows us to follow the changing picture of studying economics in UK HE and better target our support to lecturers. No comparisons were made between different institutions, as there are too many variable factors to make such comparisons meaningful.

## Section 1: About you – Profile of survey respondents

A total of 2021 students took part in the survey. These were full-time Economics students (1838 undergraduates and 183 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 previous surveys and from the HESA publication, *Students in Higher Education Institutions in 2006/07* (<http://www.hesa.ac.uk/holisdocs/pubinfo/stud.htm>).

Of our survey respondents 45.4% were female (Figure 1), which is similar to the previous surveys, while among Economics students in general this percentage is lower at 29.0%. The larger proportion of female respondents to our surveys than in the HESA data is consistent with our previous findings and the widely reported survey research findings (8) that females are more likely than males to answer questionnaires.

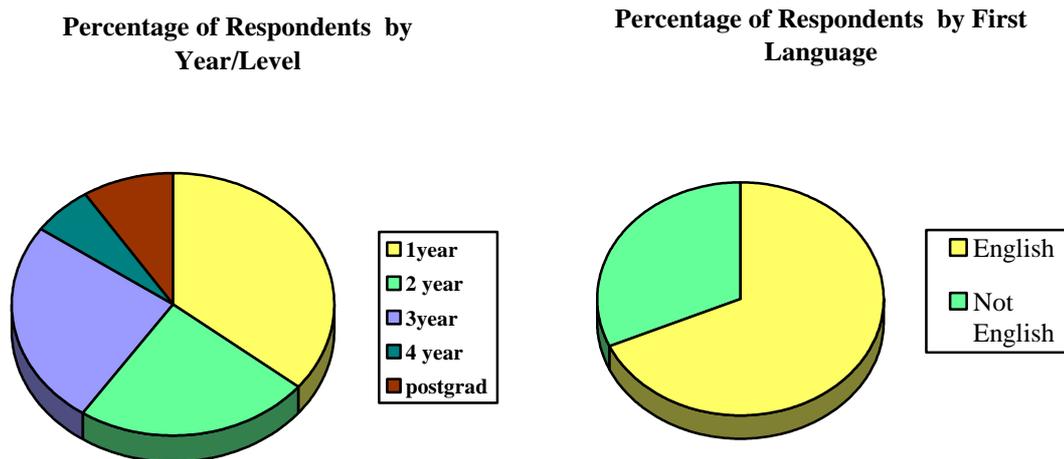


**Figure 1** Characteristics of respondents: sex and age on degree entry

Eighty per cent of survey participants were under the age of 21, similar to their proportion in the general population of Economics graduates (Figure 1). There were 14% in the 22–25 age group and 6% were older than 26, which is similar to the 2006 survey results. Age has become a statistically significant factor in respondents' replies to many questions, as in 2006, and we organised interviews with mature students in order to explain some of the findings.

A question of year/level was included in the survey. Among the respondents 36.0% stated that they were in their first year, 23.6% in the second, 25.3% in the third, 6.1% in the fourth and 9.1% were postgraduates. In the first two surveys (before NSS) students were nearly equally divided between the years of undergraduate study. This year, as in 2006, due to other commitments of some departments the survey was distributed among their first-year students only, hence the larger number of replies from the first years.

We included the question of English as first language in the survey, as it was an important variable that influences students' experiences of studying Economics. It may not just be language knowledge itself, but also educational background that is a factor, as students for whom English is not their first language could have school training that differs from those in the UK. Among all the respondents English was a first language for 68.2%, which was higher than in previous surveys (see Figure 2). There are no national statistics regarding this question. The closest match is the domicile of students. According to HESA data, 61.5% of Economics students come from the UK and presumably have English as their first language.



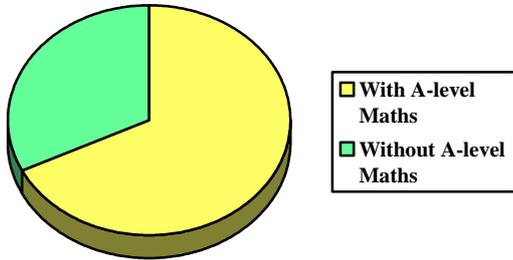
**Figure 2** Characteristics of respondents: year/level and first language

This year we also asked those students for whom English was not their first language if it had affected their learning. A majority of 60.0% said that it has not really affected them, while 7.0% said that they were very much affected and 33.0% said that it affected them in some way. The majority of the comments were by those who were either not affected or affected in some way: “To some extent, yes. It doesn't affect my understanding, but when it comes to asking questions and writing essays, I do have some problems. In a past exam, I thought I have done well, but in the end I got 69 marks, far below than I expected, I suspect that it was somehow related to my poor English expression ability”; “At the beginning of the course it was difficult to grasp more technical and academic terms, but I would not see that as a long term problem”; “At the very beginning I wasn't particularly an expert in finding my way. It wasn't only due to the fact that I was studying in the language which wasn't my native but also due to the fact that I went to Uni in the first place”. Some students commented on difficulty in writing essays – “essay writing during the first year was a little difficult” – which may be taken into consideration by departments when providing additional support for students who are not English native speakers.

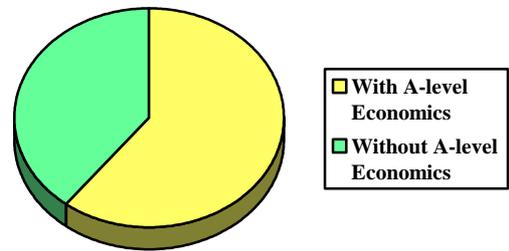
Other factors that should be taken into consideration when talking about students' experiences are whether they have taken A-levels at school in Mathematics and/or Economics and whether taking this course was their first choice (see Figure 3).

The results were as follows: among all the respondents, 67.9% had an A-level in Maths, while 60.6% had an A-level in Economics (similar to the previous surveys). As for the choice of degree, 81.2% stated that Economics was their first choice (it was 77.4% and 78.5% in previous surveys).

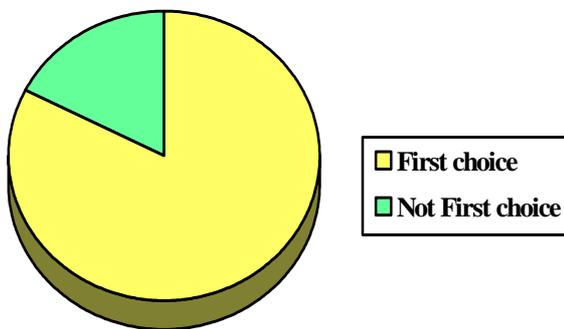
Percentage of Respondents by A-level Maths



Percentage of Respondents by A-level Economics



Percentage of Respondents According to First Choice of Course



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

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 our survey work.

We have also not included in the survey questions regarding the facilities provided by the universities. Although various facilities, especially library and computing services, 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

Our respondents were dominantly male, aged from 18 to 21, with A-levels in Maths and Economics, with English as their first language and Economics being their first choice of course. Nearly three-quarters have previously studied in the UK. Comparing their current course with previous learning experiences respondents mention independent learning, larger groups, less interaction and less contact time. Studying this degree course has met expectations for three-quarters of respondents. When asked how the course differs from their expectations, students mentioned level of Maths, course content and its relevance to the real world, level of teaching and support for students.

Respondents were asked to indicate how useful they found different types of teaching in supporting their learning. More than half rate as useful and very useful: lectures; small classes and seminars; assigned reading; materials posted by lecturers on the course's Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs); feedback on submitted work; working informally with other students; and preparing for exams and tests. The less-used learning activities, that more than a third of respondents had not encountered, include workshops or classes (of over 25 students), group work projects, online learning using economics software, online questions and tests (not assessed), and communication tools in the course VLE.

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, a vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. At the same time more than three-quarters rarely or never have games, simulations or role-play in seminars, and nearly half rarely or never have individual student presentations.

More than half of the respondents found the teaching of Maths and Stats on their course very good and mostly good, though about a third of them responded that some is good and some not so good.

The majority of respondents found the content of the degree largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right. Likewise, the majority found that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. Respondents reported that they are frequently assessed by doing essays in their own time, while the following are rarely or never used: essays done in class (85.3%), online assessment (69.3%) and group work projects (45.8%).

The majority of respondents (73.70%) study on a course that makes use of a VLE. Almost all their comments either described VLEs positively or complained that they are underused.

Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course.

Unless specifically mentioned, in this report the term "Most useful" is used for both "Very useful" and "Useful" answers and the term "Least useful" for "Of some use" and "Of little use" answers. Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions have been examined using standard statistical methods. Differences in responses have been considered with respect to gender, age on entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as a first language and choice of the course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels are discussed. The report includes graphs of the percentage frequency of students'

replies. Responses to each of the qualitative questions are coded and aggregated for analyses using N-Vivo software. (We are grateful to Narzanin Massoumi for her help in coding students' answers and preparing a report on qualitative data.) In the report, for illustrative purposes, we included graphs, which are based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency, and typical quotes from students' responses.

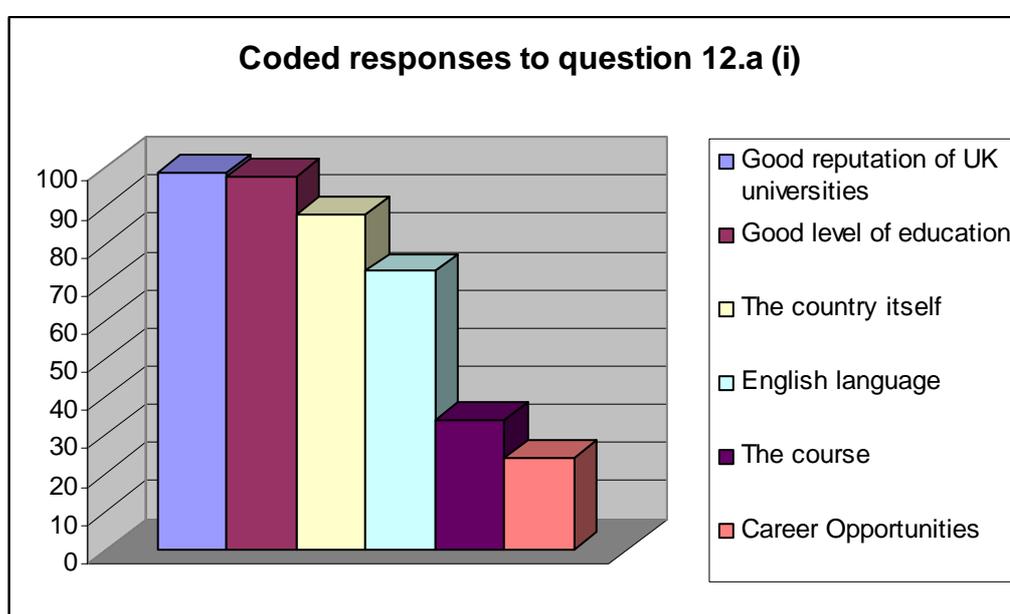
## Section 2: About your previous learning experience

### Q12 Before starting on this course did you study in the UK?

#### Q12.a If no, where did you study?

Slightly less than three-quarters of respondents answer “Yes” to this question ( 73.0%), while the rest studied in other countries. When asked where did they study previously students mentioned China, Germany, France, Poland, the USA, Lithuania, Greece, India and Singapore in descending order. Among other countries mentioned more than once were Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Pakistan, Italy, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hong Kong, Ireland, Malaysia, Sweden, Thailand, Russia.

#### Q12a.i If no, what factors were the strongest in influencing your decision to come to the UK?



There were 339 responses to this question. The main themes that were identified from this question were: the good reputation and international recognition of UK universities; and the high quality of education delivered. English language played an important role in students’ decision to study in the UK. Other factors that played an important role were the desire to come to the UK itself, the particular course available and the career opportunities in the UK.

The international reputation and prestige of UK institutions was important in informing many of their decision to study in the UK: “The opportunity to study at a prestigious institution of international repute, and the promise of intellectual stimulation” and “I wanted to be part of one of the most appreciated educational systems in the developed world”. This was also aided by their view that they would be gaining an “outstanding level of education” and a chance to “master the language to perfection”.

The desire to come to the UK was also an important factor, although the reasons for this were diverse, including a general pursuit of new experiences, opportunities for networking, family members already resided in the country or a

particular interest in the culture: “chance to live in London, family and friends here, masters degrees that only take one year (as opposed to two in the US), SOAS reputation as liberally minded”; “I love the way how people think”; “I have always loved the British culture, history and the English language. So for me it was the only place where I wanted to study”; “To experience new life”; “I love to travel and I think that such a challenge like studying in a different country will help me improve myself greatly”.

The course itself did play an import role for some, although this for many was related to the length of the course rather than course content. Many referred to the fact that a masters course could be achieved in one year as opposed to two in the US or other parts of Europe: “The masters programmes which are on average one year courses instead of the two-year standards in continental Europe”; It's a one-year Masters degree that combines development studies with economics., so saved me from having to do two Masters or just having to pick one field”.

Finally, career opportunities for graduates in the UK was an important factor for many, and in these cases the qualification was seen as a stepping stone towards furthering a career within the UK: “As UK is very good prospect of further study for career ahead and very well opportunity to work full time in particular field.”

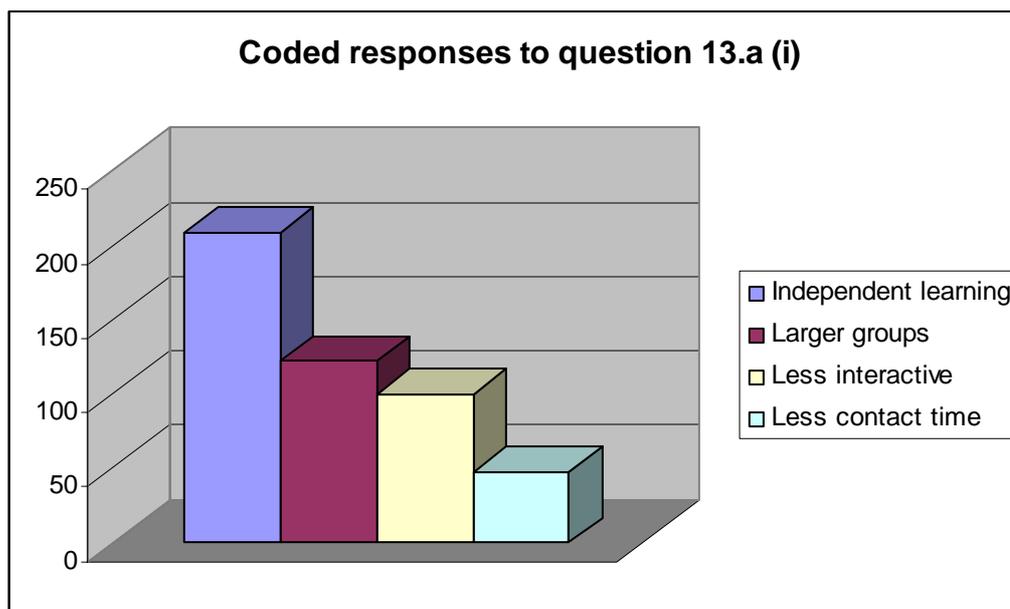
### **Q13. How does studying on your current course differ from previous learning experience?**

This question consists of five sections: teaching method, assessment, contact with lecturers, e-learning and use of IT, and student support. Each section has two parts: quantitative and qualitative. For the quantitative part respondents were asked to use a number key to assess the difference between their current course and their previous learning experience: 1 – Very similar; 2 – Similar; 3 – Some similar, some different; 4 – Different; 5 – Very different. For the qualitative part they were asked to provide details to their answers (this was an optional part and not everyone answered it). Below is the analysis of the students’ answers by section.

#### **Q13.a Teaching method**

For the majority (57.1%) teaching method was different and very different in the university, than the one they were used to before. Only one in seven saw it as a similar or very similar experience – with the rest (28.1%) saying that some aspects were similar, and some different.

We asked respondents to provide details to their answers.



There were 699 responses to this question. The comments the students make does depend on what their previous learning experience was. Nevertheless, for most, particularly in comparison to school, the main difference is related to the increased independent learning or “self-learning” required: “More independent, less spoon-fed”; “Self motivation is key. The correct teaching and the tools are available but you have to make the most of it. At A-level, teachers guided you through every piece of work”.

For some students, this independent learning style is very positive because it allows choice and freedom to be critical: “Allowed more individual freedom in attendance and you are allowed to challenge what you are told if it can be backed with evidence”; “Much more preferable. Enjoy reading to learn rather than being force fed”.

For others, however, this makes learning difficult as they feel they are not being taught: “We were 'spoon fed' but now at university it's very much independent learning. Most lecturers I have are not very effective 'teachers' they know what they are talking about, but are unable to teach it to us very well”; “Nothing is explained anymore!!!”; “If you miss something the lecturer says, it is PURELY DOWN TO YOU to gain understanding”.

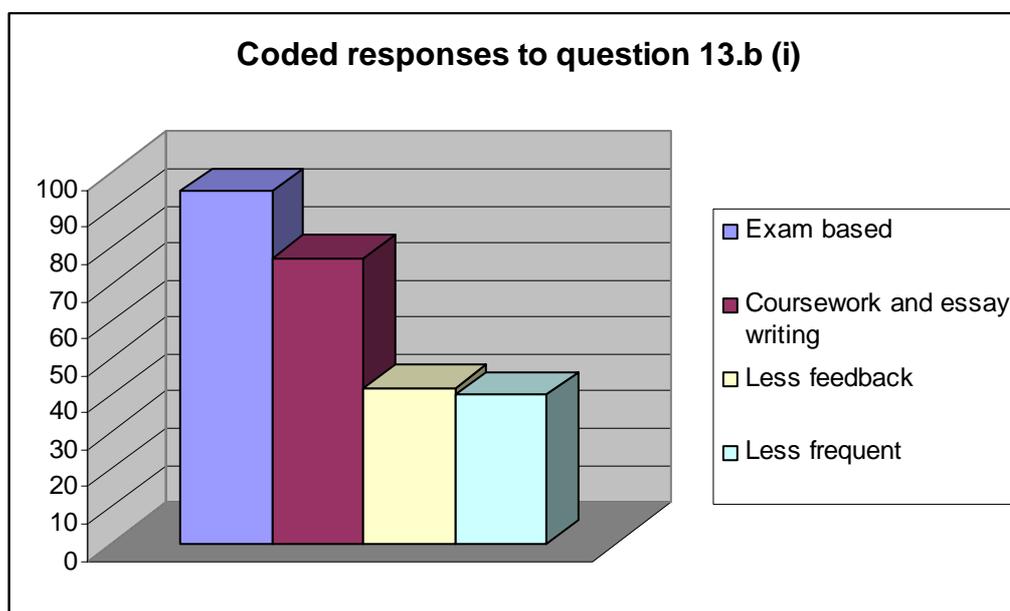
The other main themes that were identified among the responses were the larger groups and lectures that students were not used to. For most the lecture style of teaching was not a productive way of learning as it was less interactive and allowed little room for asking questions: “Lectures are obviously in front of far more people than at school, therefore there is less emphasis on asking questions when stuck”; “Personally, I feel that lectures are not very productive as more often than not there is little opportunity for questions, and the subject matter is covered at much too fast a pace”; “The classes here are very large, as compared to those I've been to before, and sometimes it is difficult to follow a some students do not respect others and make noise”.

Many comments also refer to the teaching method being impersonal and even dull: “In university you are talked at whereas in college you are talked to. Unless you are in a small tutorial in university there is no dialogue between you and the lecturer

and you remain a nameless face in the crowd”; “The teaching is very authoritarian and it seems that they expect us to know everything, because one lecture covers so much. The way of teaching also makes Economics seem very uninteresting. Some lecturers also simply read off a PowerPoint which is available online anyway which is why many people do not bother to come to lectures”.

### Q13.b Assessment

As for the assessment, more than a third of respondents (34.5%) found it similar or very similar to their previous experience, which is just slightly less than 37.3% who found it different and very different. Respondents provided details to their answers.

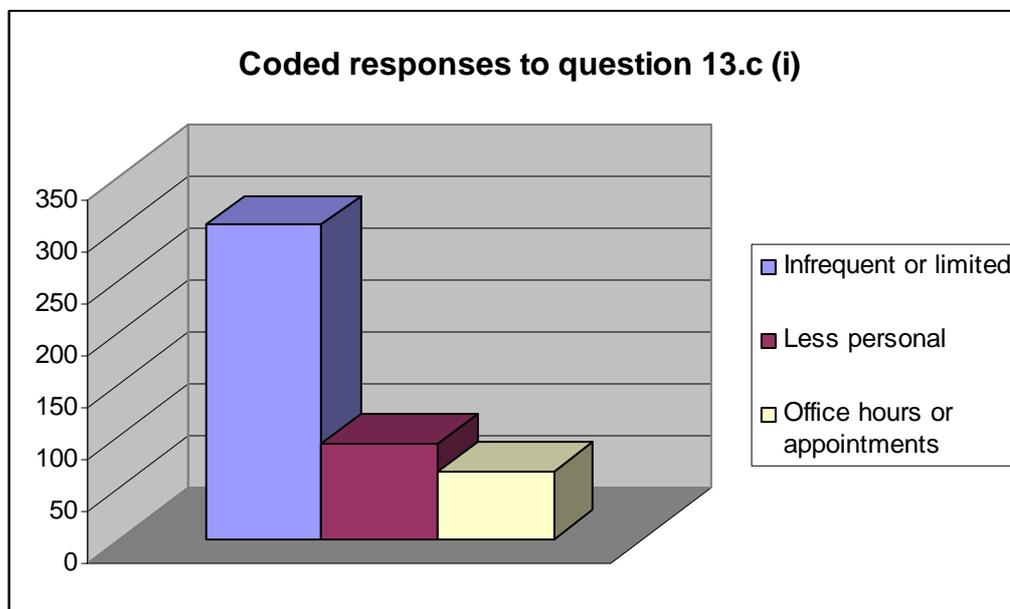


There were 600 responses to this question. Again, the responses very much depended on what their previous learning experiences were: as a result the responses were mixed, with some stressing the increase in assessed coursework. However, the majority of the students commented on the lack of continuous assessment and the degree to which it was weighted on the final exams: “Far less coursework and continuous assessment than at A-level”; “Heaviest weight on the final examination and with graded assignments”; “Grade completely dependent on final exam, which I had never previously experienced”; “Too much focus on final exam”. For some this was very stressful: “Used to have two or more exams per semester per course; now it's only one per year for each course! And all at the same time. Back home exams were spread over time, which was much less stressful”.

There were many comments about the infrequency with which students were assessed and the lack of feedback they received, and they felt that this left them ignorant as to their progress: “Once a term tutor assessment. Our weekly assignments that we hand in don't contribute towards anything. They don't even give a good hint of how the student will do in the final exams since they are based on learning the material while the exams are all about applying the knowledge”; “Often very little feedback given on assessed work, which makes it difficult to know how to improve”.

### Q13.c Contact with lecturers

Contact with lecturers was very different and different for nearly two-thirds (65.2%) of respondents. Only one in seven saw it as similar and very similar to their previous learning experience. Students provided details to their answers.



There were 668 responses to this question. Again, the responses depended on their previous learning experience. Those comparing UK study to that in other countries tended to conclude that contact with lecturers was “better contact in the UK” and they are seen as more friendly and approachable: “I feel much more able to approach lecturers, go and see them. They are very friendly and approachable”; “It is easier to be in touch with lecturers. In comparison to Polish teachers, British are more friendly and available”.

However, for the vast majority, who were comparing contact with their relationship with school/college teachers, said that contact was limited, infrequent and insufficient: “Other than teaching the course, very little contact”; “Very difficult to get any one-on-one contact”; “Virtually impossible to get any contact with lecturers due to the massive size of courses”.

For many, the office hours or having to make appointments was new to them, which they generally saw as inflexible: “Very hard to get in touch with lecturers, you either have to jump on them at the end of the lecture or make an appointment to see them rather than them having an open door policy as I have previously enjoyed in school/college”; “Less opportunity to speak to lecturers – not always possible to talk at the end of the lecture and sometimes office hours are inconvenient”; “No effort made of communication between lecturers and students. Can only visit them in their ‘appropriate’ office hours”; “There is less contact, even though there are available office hours. It is more of a personal choice that is seen as quite imposing due to unsocial attitude of the majority of lecturers”.

This can make it an impersonal relationship: “We need an appointment here to be in touch with a lecturer, and it is very difficult for the lecturer to recognise his

students”; “Not a personal relationship like college lecturers they don't know our names!”

For some it was difficult to make appointments or arrange to meet with the lecturers as they were unapproachable or arrogant: “Lecturers are much more uncooperative and less willing to help. They see their main reason for being here as research and teaching and helping is more of a hassle”; “The ability to speak to lecturers and seminar staff out of lecture time is very poor – lecturers are often loathe to speak to undergraduates”; “Lecturers give off a superior attitude and some are less approachable compared to teachers whom you are in close contact with in classrooms back in A-level”.

However, many did mention that e-mail contact was useful and that if approached lecturers did tend to be helpful, although they did say that the onus was on the student and not the lecturer to get in contact: “You can talk to lecturers if you make the effort to go and see them”; “Much more up to the student to challenge and ask questions outside of the assigned lecture time”.

### **Q13.d E-learning and use of IT**

E-learning and use of IT in the current course was different and very different for half of the respondents (51.3%), while it was similar and very similar for a quarter of them (25.4%) and some similar, some different for the rest.

The details were provided by 581 respondents. The majority of the comments on e-learning and use of IT were positive and the respondents said that there was more use of computers compared to previous learning experiences, although this obviously depended on what those previous experiences were: for example, “The IT and e-learning facilities at the University of Sussex are very good. In Bulgaria there was no e-learning.”

There were main areas identified where the students thought the e-learning had improved in comparison to previous learning experience: communication; accessing materials; and computer facilities.

Comments about communication included: “I think it is excellent over here, in our country we still rely on chalk and board. Also I like the system of checking e-mails and replying to them daily which is not there in our country”; “There is also much more communication through e-mail generally”.

Typical comments about accessing materials and resources: “Lots of resources available through virtual learning environment here, but before there was nothing like that”; “The use of the internet for notes and other resources is far better than in schools, there is much more available and it is easy to access”.

Students said of the computing facilities: “Computing facilities here are excellent. Computer lab sessions are very helpful as is WebCT.”

Only a very small minority refer to the use of economics software packages, which is welcomed by those who are being taught to use them, although some do not feel they have enough of it: “Much greater emphasis on IT than previously, being taught various new pieces of software”; “The department is really backwards in terms of the application of technology to our learning. We are not being taught how to use any of the software which students in our field are expected to be competent in”.

### **Q13.e Student support**

Slightly less than half of the respondents (46.8%) found student support in their current course different and very different from their previous experience, while one in five saw it as very similar and similar.

The details were provided by 533 respondents. Like all the other questions in this section, the way in which the respondents viewed the student support was dependent on what they were comparing it to. Those comparing student support to that in other countries, said that there was “very good student support in the UK”; “In the UK, students are treated with better respect”; “Students get much more support in the UK while students in Lithuania have to solve problems on their own”; “Student support is far more superior to that which I experienced at home”.

For those comparing student support to a school environment the comments were more mixed, although overall most felt that student support had a better infrastructure at university even if it was less personal: “There is a more developed and open infrastructure at uni”; “Previously much more personal. However LSE Support is excellent.”

In particular, students said that the support in non-academic areas was generally very good compared to previous experiences: “Different channels of student support, many more and different reasons for it”; “It is better in fact in terms of opportunities for engaging in extra-curricular activities and personal development through seminars and training opportunities”; “Find student support vastly superior, with an excellent support network for academic/non-academic issues”; “Strong in e.g. financial, psychological, housing factors etc.”; “We had a counsellor etc. at college but I think here we are provided with more support; with a nightline and also peer support groups”.

However, some said that although support is available it has to be sought out: “Much less available than at school. Have to seek support services far more proactively than at school”; “You will get help if you ask for it, but otherwise you are left to your own devices. Teachers should take a more active role in ensuring their students are learning”.

### **Q14 Do you think your previous learning experience prepared you for your current study?**

The majority of respondents (64.6%) agreed that they were adequately prepared for their current course, while a quarter thought that they were very well prepared and only one in 10 replied that they were “not at all” prepared by their previous learning experience.

Only some (114) of the respondents provided comments to their answer. Many of them felt unprepared by their A-level experience to attend university: “A-level studying is NOT a preparation at all. At A-level you are given the notes, given the work and always in contact with teachers. You come here and that has all gone, you are on your own. This would be ok but only if A-level had prepared you more for it. A serious change in how A-level programmes are delivered is required”; “At school, especially the school I was at, the teachers guided us for everything and we had no freedom (we weren't even allowed to cross the road to go to the shop during break!). However, academically school prepared me well”.

Even those who went to college were not happy with preparation for university. Among the comments: “Attending college allowed me to adjust to managing my own time and attendance and only going into college for classes, much like university. However, it didn't prepare me for the amount of reading I would be required to do, or university level essay-writing skills, which took a bit of trial-and-error to get right after I started university! I also found A-level study focused on more interesting subjects than university level. I didn't realise quite how theory-based university study would be!”

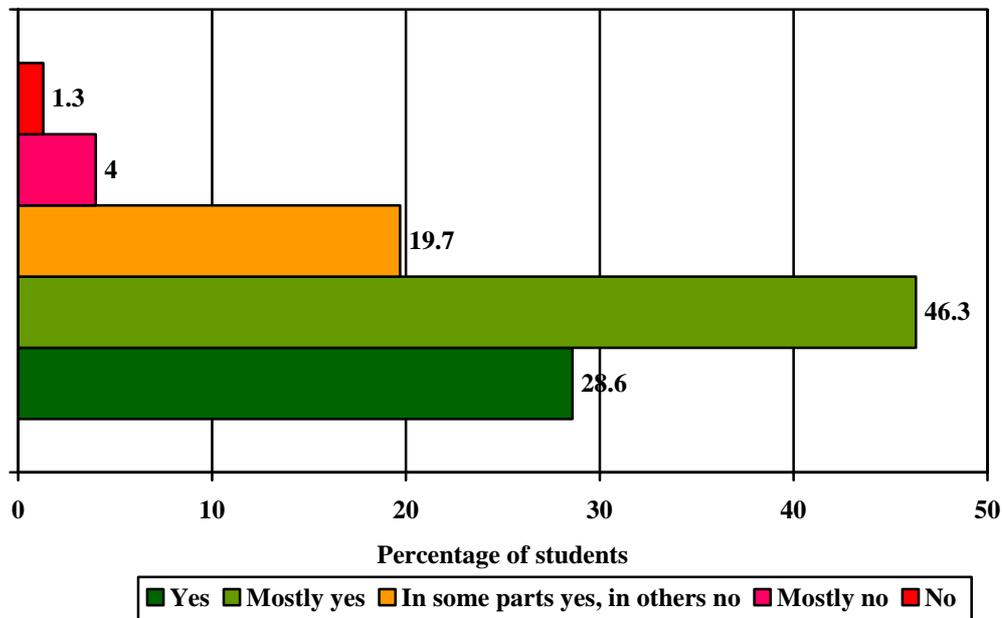
Some of the respondents noted that they were not expecting their degree to be so mathematical: “Degree studies in economics are much more mathematical than I have ever experienced. Something I was not prepared for and didn't even realise until I started taking the course.”

Many students are also pointing to the difference between school/college and university life: “Fitting into university life was much harder and different compared to school”; “I think the biggest challenge is having the self motivation to keep on top of things yourself, without teachers or anyone pushing you to do your best”; “Going to university is inevitably a challenge. The adoption of independent study takes time”.

International students, who previously study in their home country, point to the difficulties of adjusting to study abroad: “I have studied in Poland and the system is quite similar, however it is different to study abroad and in the beginning it is difficult to find yourself in such a new situation”; “Learning experiences have not prepared me for the teaching and assessment style used in the UK as it differs very much from the system I am used to. The only place I could draw from was my working experience”; “In terms of mathematics I was prepared much better than my UK counterparts – otherwise in terms of presentations it was quite problematic for me to speak in front of people. Also I had hardly any experience with essay writing, which resulted in several bad marks at the beginning of my course”.

### Section 3: About your degree course

#### Q15 Has studying this degree course met your expectations?



Students were asked about their expectations of the whole degree course. As data shows, for nearly three-quarters (74.9%) of respondents the degree course has met their expectations. This figure was much lower in the previous surveys – 58.5% in 2002 and 55.1% in 2004 – but slightly higher in 2006 – 75.4%. At the same time, for every fifth of students their expectations were met in some part only. There were differences in the responses due to age and year of study.

Mature students, who started their degree course at the age of 26+ and who may have given more thought to the selection of their degree course, gave more positive replies to the question: 36.4% compared to 28.6% or 25.9% in other age groups. At the same time they also contained a bigger group that did not have their expectations met at all: 9.1% compared to 6.8% or 4.7%.

As the level of study increase the greater proportion of students see their expectations met. At the same time a greater proportion also see their expectations not met at all – from 0.4% to 3.3%.

We asked students who didn't answer positively to this question to explain in what ways the course differed from their expectations.

#### Q15.a Expectations – If you didn't answer yes, please explain in what ways it differs from your expectations

There were only 414 replies to this question. Most comments about whether the course met students' expectations were very similar to those in the 2006 survey. Overall, most students commented on how they had expected a higher level from the

course. The main themes that were identified were: quality of teaching, contact hours and feedback, course content and structure, and relevance to the real world.

The standard and quality of teaching had disappointed many students: “The standard is almost universally lower than I had anticipated it would be”; Lecturing generally of a poorer quality than expected”; “Teaching quality does not always meet a basic standard. Inadequate coaching on using STATA”; “The quality of teaching is much worse than I expected”.

The respondents commented on how they had expected both more direct contact and more frequent contact with lecturers and teachers, including feedback on their work: “Expected more direct contact with lecturers and tutors, as well as more enthusiasm from other students taking the course”; “Few contact hours, not intellectually challenging”; “I probably expected a little more feedback or chances to hand in work that wouldn't be marked to get feedback on. It is often a case of here are the lectures, now do the exam”.

For many, they thought that it would be more demanding and challenging, and that they would have learnt more: “Expected it to be harder and challenging. It seems as if universities in the UK are preparing students mainly for a professional life. If someone likes to pursue an academic career I wonder whether my programme is appropriate. In particular I expected it to be more technical and challenging, especially since it is a postgrad degree. At this stage I believe the curriculum should be taken onto a next, higher level”; “I expected the course to be more in depth and demanding”; “Have not learned as much as I expected. The course covers a wide range of areas but may be too general sometimes”.

For many the content of the courses was not as they expected and they felt that it was not well structured or organised: “Compared to expectations, faculty members are less eminent, teaching is of poorer quality and the structure of the course is of poorer quality”; “Facilities, department organisation, staff and support were a major disappointment”; “Terrible and very disorganised”.

Another aspect that failed to meet the expectations were the level of applied or “real life” focus of the course. The students felt that the course was too theoretical, and for many, too mathematical, claiming that it did not prepare them well for the future world of work: “I would have appreciated learning more about current real-life debates in economics, even if that would have implied a heavier workload”; “I don't really feel as though I'm gaining a comprehensive understanding of the economy, and am not sure how applicable much of the theory studied is”; “Was expecting more practising, more 'on the job' learning rather than just sticking to classroom and black boards”; “All textbook theory, no real world scenarios or analysis at university level – it is much duller to study at university level and a lot more difficult to stay focused and motivated because it is so theory based – and also more difficult to revise”; “The courses are mostly ONLY mathematics and thus we lose the real feel for the economic-side of the subject – i.e. the application of the mathematics to real life economics”; “I find that having real-world examples makes learning easier than learning from lecture notes and textbooks”; “I feel that the course content could be based more around real-life occurrences, for example looking more at the current economic environment”; “I expected all professors to provide a linkage between the theoretical models and some element in the real life economy that we are trying to explain. More applied approach”.

The expectations of the mathematical aspect of the course very much depended on whether or not students had studied Maths A-level. For those who had not, it was very difficult: “Initially far too mathematical, very little real-life application”; “The formal content in my course was harder than expected considering a Maths A-level was not actually required”; “Had a pre-requisite of grade B GCSE Maths. I found Maths for Economists very difficult and believe you really do need A-level not to struggle”.

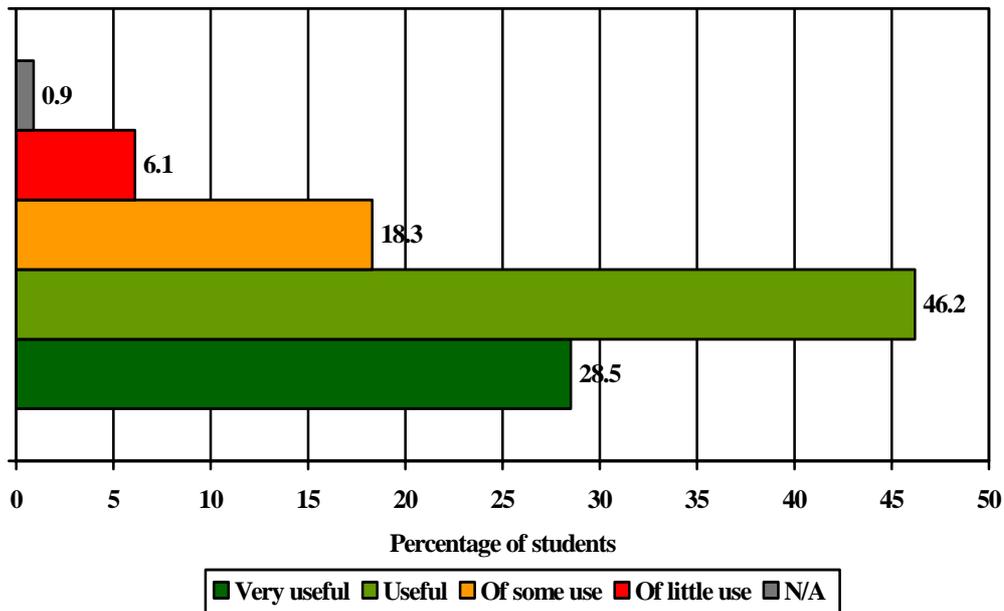
Whereas for those who had studied Maths there was not enough: “I think the level of math taught is not high enough. I had all the Math in school already and feel that a deeper knowledge of Math and Statistics would benefit my studies and would make it easier for lecturers to teach. A Math and Statistics course should be compulsory for every level of study.”

**Q16 Please indicate how useful you have found each of these in supporting your learning**

We asked students to assess how various existing teaching practices support their learning. Teaching practices included: lectures, small classes or seminars (up to 20 students), workshops or classes (over 25 students), lecture office hours, clinics or one-to-one tutorials, assigned reading, other reading, group work projects, set preparatory work for seminars, essays, online learning using the Web, online learning using Economics software, online questions and tests (not assessed), materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs or websites, communication tools in course VLEs, feedback on submitted work, preparing for exams and/or tests, and working informally with other students. Each teaching practice was rated as “Very useful”, “Useful”, “Of some use”, “Of little use”, and “N/A – do not have this in my degree”.

Respondents were also encouraged to leave their comments about each type of practice. As teaching practice is different in each year of study year/level of study, we anticipated that it would be a statistically significant factor for all types of practices and it was, as in the 2006 survey. The rest of the dependent variables were also statistically significant for one or more of the questions, again similar to the 2006 survey results. Their analyses will allow us to provide better-targeted support to the departments.

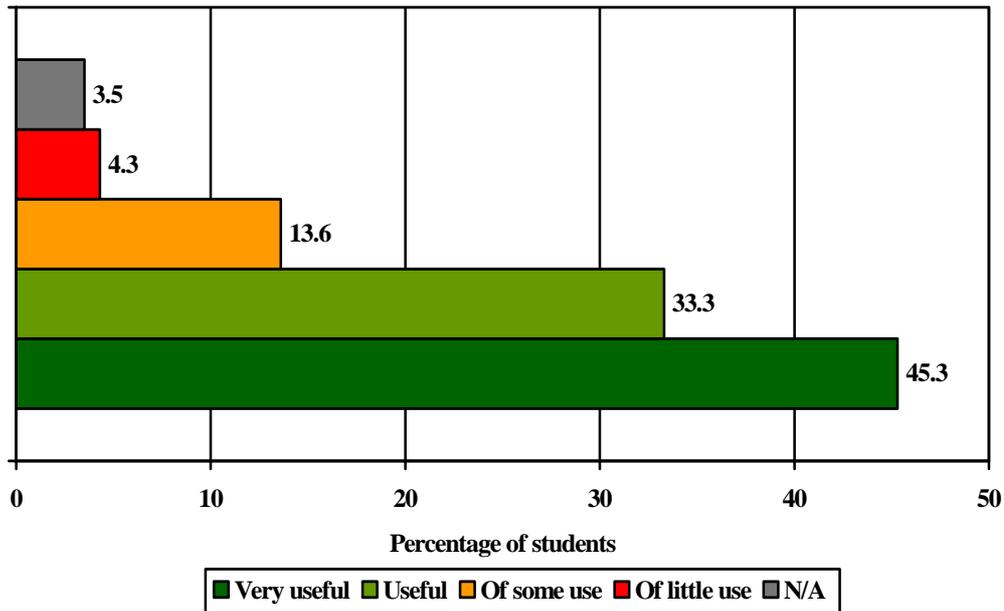
### Q16.a. Lectures



Nearly three-quarters (74.7%) of the respondents find their lectures “Useful” and “Very useful”. There are differences in the responses due to gender, age and year of studies. As in 2006, more females (31.2%) find lectures very useful than males (26.2%) and a higher percentage of male students (7.5%) find them of little use than females (4.5%). Larger group of mature students found lectures useful than the younger ones – 81.0% and 73.1% respectively. As for the year/level of study, the more students study, the more they see their lectures as useful.

In their comments students stress that the usefulness of a lecture to them depended very much on the qualities of the lecturer: “They are only useful if the lecturer is good, otherwise the lectures are not worth going”, “Hugely dependent on the lecturer involved”.

**Q16.b. Small classes or seminars (up to 20 students)**



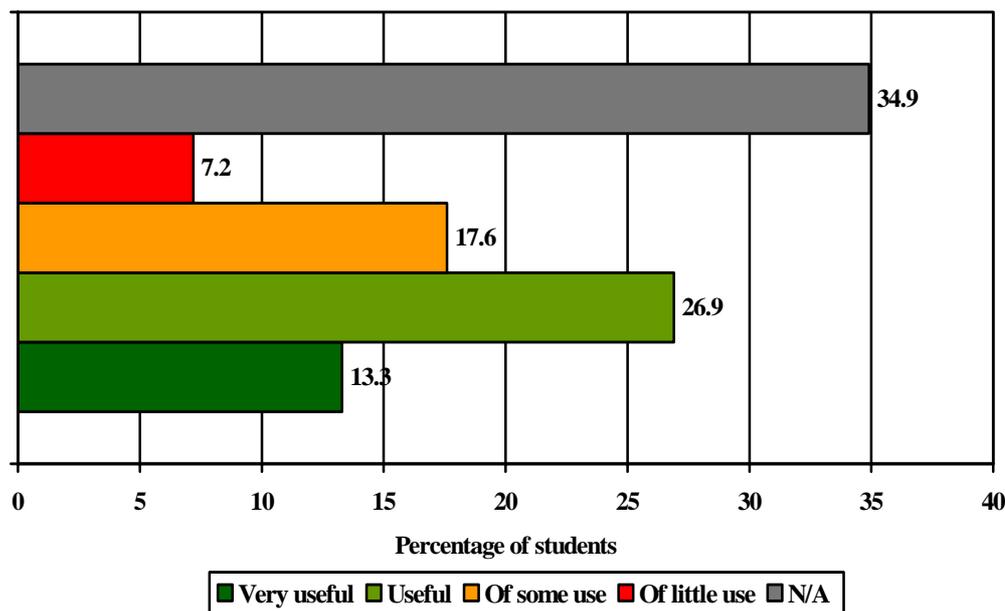
Similar to lectures, more than three-quarters of respondents (78.6%) find small class teaching “Useful” and “Very useful”. There are differences in the responses due to age and year of study.

As for the year/level of study, the more students study, the more they see small classes as useful.

Younger students find small classes more useful than mature students: 79.8% and 69.4% respectively.

Students’ comments about small classes were largely associated with the tutor: “It depends on the class – some are very useful, usually better when the lecturer takes the class as opposed to a teaching assistant”; “It depends on your tutor – some tutors have been really helpful, others have been very shy and made the groups quite awkward feeling and not very useful.”

### Q16.c. Workshops or classes (over 25 students)



More than a third of respondents do not have workshops or classes with over 25 students. Among those who have workshops, views on the usefulness of this form of teaching varied, with the majority of 33.4% finding them useful, while 25.8% reporting only “some” or “little” use in them.

There were differences in students’ opinions due to their gender, age, first language, A-level Maths and first choice of degree.

Workshops were unavailable to more than half of first-year students, but only to 21.1% of the fourth-year students. Students of the second year form the biggest group that find workshops useful – 40.3%.

Students in the 22–25 age group were more likely to find workshops useful: 39.0% of them did, compared to 32.2% of the 18–22 age group and 35.1% of the 26 and older age group.

Students with a first choice in Economics find workshops less useful for learning than those for whom it was not their first choice – 32.6% versus 38.4%.

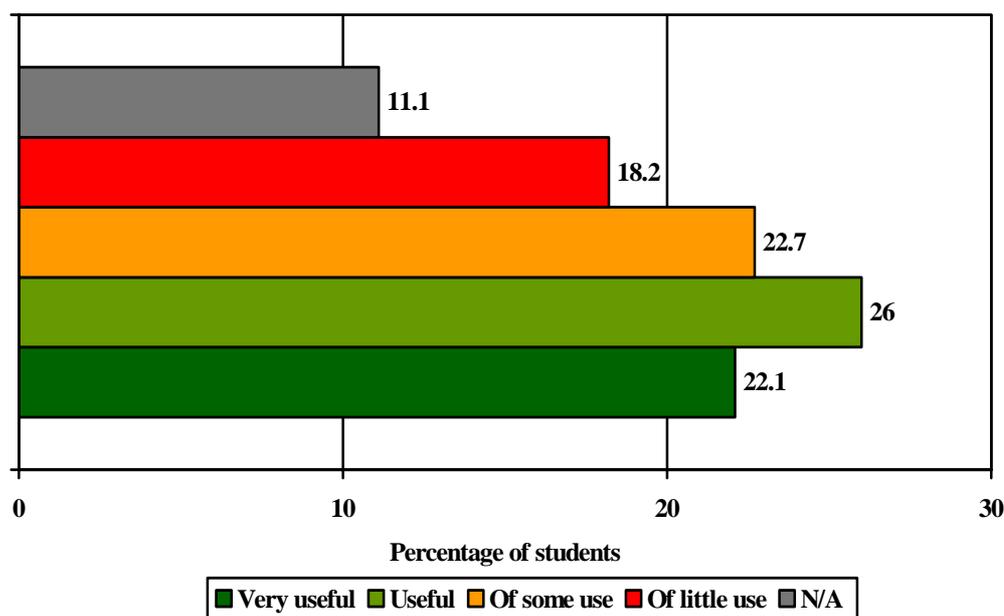
Workshops were more useful to students with A-level Maths, than for those without: 35.9% and 29.3% respectively.

More males than females find workshops of little use: 9.3% versus 4.5%.

Fewer students with English as a first language find workshops useful than students for whom it was not their first language – 31.5% compared to 38.9%.

In their remarks students point out that although workshops are a “great thing to have”, this “varies between modules” and is especially good for “revision classes in particular”.

#### Q16.d. Lecturers' office hours or clinics or one-to-one tutorials



Less than half of all students (43.7%) find lecturers' office hours, clinics or one-to-one tutorials useful. Nearly one-fifth of the respondents find them of little use and 12.7% do not have this option available to them, which is rather alarming.

There are differences in students' perceptions of usefulness for learning due to year of study, age, English as a second language and A-levels in Economics. Students of the third and fourth year are the ones that find lecturers' office hours, etc. most useful – 52.8% (third year), 58.9% (fourth year) – while students of the first year find them less useful (35.1%).

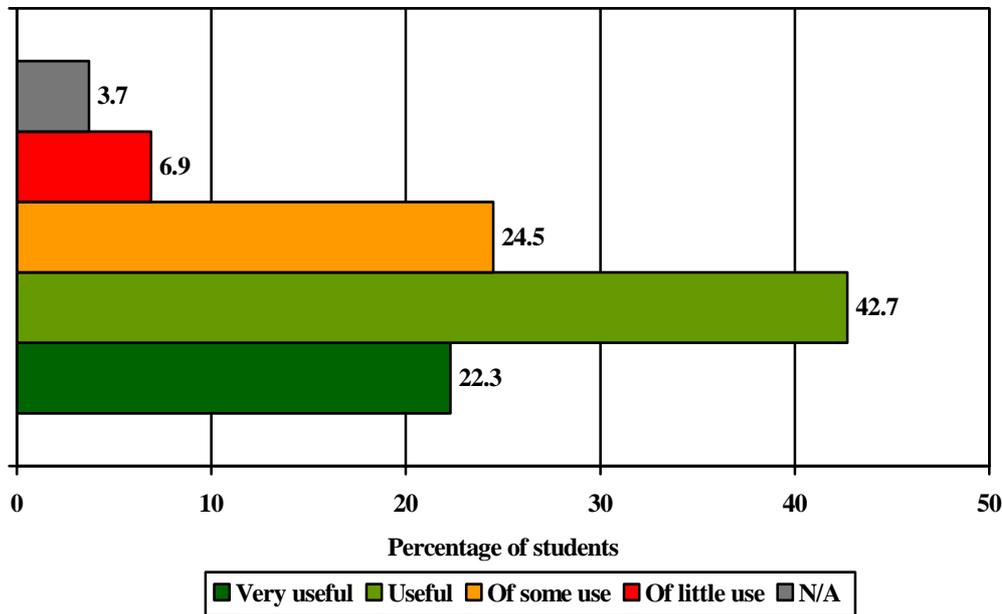
Half of the students in the 22–25 age group find lecturers' office hours, etc. most useful, compared to 43.0% of 18–21 year olds and 43.6% of the 26+ age group, while this option was unavailable to 25.6% of the older group of students, compared to 10.2% of 18–21 year olds and 11.4% of 22–25 year olds.

Non-English native speakers found office hours more useful than native speakers: 51.2% and 46.7% respectively.

Lecturers' office hours were seen as of little use to students who have A-levels in Economics, than to those students who did not – 21.4% and 17.7% respectively.

Comments left by students were similar to the ones left in 2006. They could be divided into two groups. The first group is left by those who still have not used this teaching practice due to various reasons: “Do not have time to see them as their office hours are during other lectures”; “I have not used office hours, I'm shy”; “I've never used this facility, but I can imagine it would be very useful if I was experiencing difficulties”. The second group of comments are left by students who have negative experiences with the facility due to the limited offered time: “Of little use: lecturers hardly ever there when they say they are and some are of little use when they are”; “Some lecturers have limited office hours or do not reply to email thus making it difficult to get extra help”

### Q16.e. Assigned reading



More than two-thirds of respondents find assigned reading useful to their learning.

There were differences in students' perceptions due to their year of study, age and English as a first language.

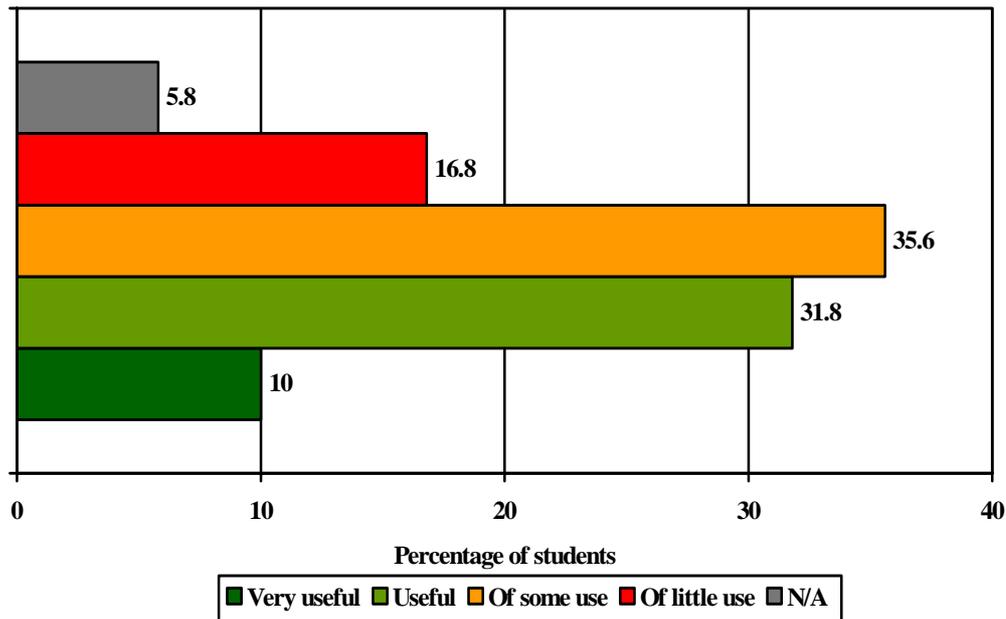
Larger groups of mature students found assigned reading useful: 74.4% compared to 63.0% of those under 25.

Students at the higher year/level were most positive about it than students at the lower year/level.

Non-English speakers found assigned reading more useful than English speakers: 69.2% and 63.0% respectively.

In their comments students stress that usefulness of assigned reading depends on the topic, tutor and nature of the reading: "Depends on the topic, tutor and the nature of the reading. It has been very useful at times, and not at all at other times." Some students express frustration about reading: "We were expected to have read 100 pages before we were even told about the readings and which book to get. That's frustrating"; "Useful but far too much is expected".

### Q16.f Other reading



Although the response to this question in general is positive (two-fifths of the respondents found it useful) the biggest group of respondents (35.6%) found this type of learning only “of some use”.

There were differences in students’ answers due to their year of study, first language and age.

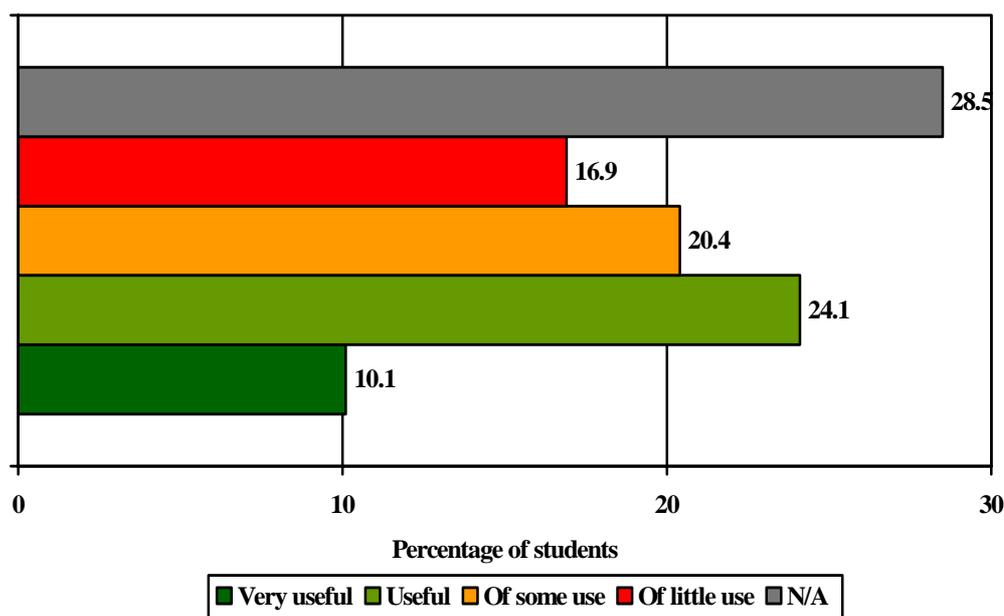
Similarly to the assigned reading, non-English speakers found other reading more useful than English speakers: 48.0% and 39.0% respectively.

Also, postgraduates see more use in other reading – 50.7% comparing to 37.2% of first year students.

Older students have a more positive attitude towards other reading: 63.6% of students aged 26 and older find it useful, compared to 38.1% of the 18–21 year group.

The majority of comments came from students who do not do reading due to various reasons: “Don’t really do other reading – no time”; “Personally interesting, but sometimes of little use to the course”; “Hard to find stuff in library”.

### Q16.g. Group work projects



Group work projects were not used to any great extent as nearly a third of the respondents reply that it was not available to them. At the same time more than half of those who have used group work in their learning find it useful.

There were differences in respondents' attitudes due to their year of study, age, A-level Maths and first language.

The higher the year/level of study the more use respondents see in group work: only 8.0% of respondents in the third or fourth year see little use in it, compared to 35.0% of first-year students.

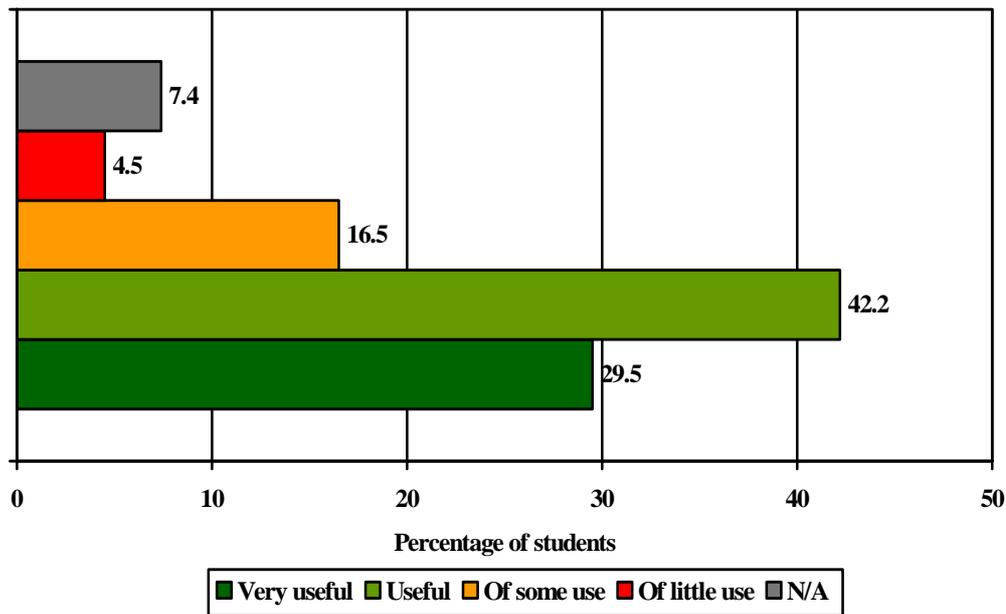
Although students of all ages found group work equally useful, a higher proportion of mature students did not have it as part of their degree: 43.0% of mature students compared to 26.8% of younger students.

Students who did not have an A-level in Maths were more positive about group work than those without a Maths A-level: 37.1% versus 33.1%.

Non-English speakers found group work more useful than native English speakers: 40.8% and 31.2% respectively.

In their comments students stress both the pros and cons of group work: "Group work I agree with strongly, but the method by which it is marked I do not agree with. Everybody is in a different mind frame when at university and therefore this affects how hard they work. If my marks depend on someone else's efforts this always generates misalignments of interests"; "Group projects always lead to someone letting the group down"; "It is useful but I do not like the idea that my mark is partly determined by the work of others"; "Useful: however always depending on how good your group is".

**Q16.h. Set preparatory work for seminars (e.g. problem sets)**



A large majority (71.7%) of students find this type of learning useful, although it was not available to 7.4% of respondents.

There were differences in students' answers due to their year of study, first language, age and A-levels in Economics.

Students of the higher year/level found set prep work more useful than students of the lower year/level, but the usefulness of it falls at postgraduate level.

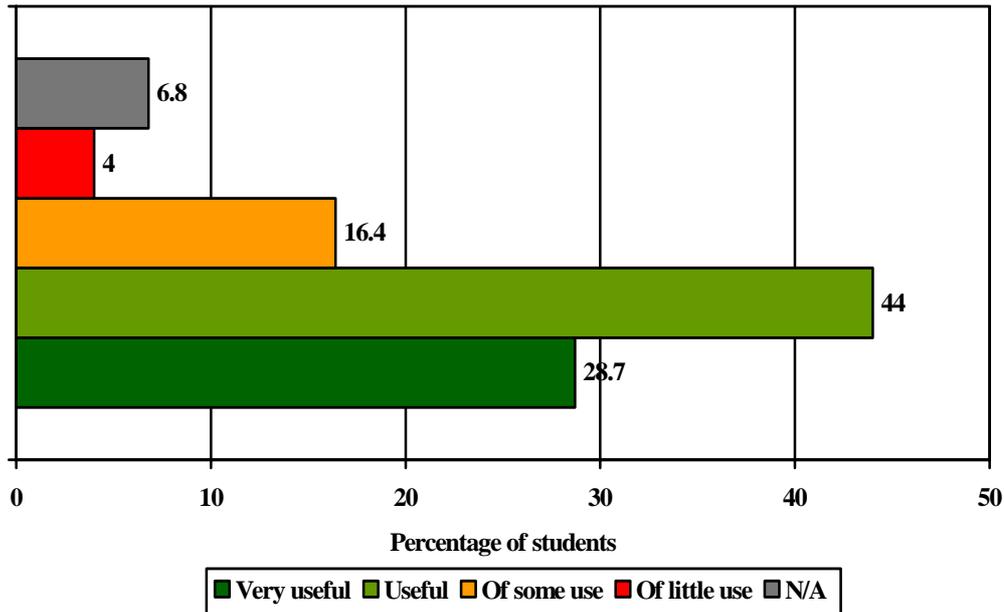
Larger groups of younger students found set prep work more useful than more mature students: 78.3% and 66.1% respectively.

Those with A-levels in Economics were more positive than those without: 30.6% and 27.9% respectively find set prep work very useful.

Students with English as a first language were more positive about set prep work than the rest: 73.9% of them find it useful compared to 66.7%.

In their remarks students stress the usefulness of this kind of work: "Good preparation for work."

### Q16.i. Essays



Nearly three-quarters of respondents found essays useful.

There were differences in students' answers due to their year of study and age.

As students progress to the higher year/level more of them found essays useful until they reach postgraduate level, when the value of essays fall.

Similar to the 2006 results, essays remains less available to the mature respondents, compared to 18–21 year olds: 17.4% and 5.5% respectively. Younger students found essays more useful than mature students: 73.5% and 71.1%.

In their comments many students complained that essays were either not available to them or that the feedback was not given: “No feedback unless it’s part of the module so no point in doing them”; “They are a method of assessment for me, rather than a way of learning, as no feedback is given”. Other comments include: “Sometimes very useful, sometimes not at all depending on the module and essay title”; “All non-assessed”. Some complain that they have too much of them – “I study economics and 90% of my coursework is writing essays, no maths needed! Should be mostly maths ” – while others regret that they don’t have many – “Useful, but very rarely used.”

## Q16.j.–16.n. Online learning

The next five questions were dedicated to various types of online learning. There are many similarities in the way students answer this group of questions. Their replies were also similar to the responses from the 2006 survey.

Many forms of online learning are still unavailable to big groups of students: thus every sixth respondent did not have available online learning using the Web and more than a third of respondents did not have available online learning using Economics software and online questions and tests (not assessed).

Use of VLEs is spread more widely: less than one in 12 respondents did not have materials posted by lecturers on course VLEs or websites (that was one in 10 in 2006).

At the same time VLEs are still not used interactively: communication tools (e.g. discussion boards) are not available to 27.8% of respondents.

More than half of those who have these forms of online learning available to them find them useful, with the exception of communication tools in course VLEs where the majority of 42.7% find them of some or little use.

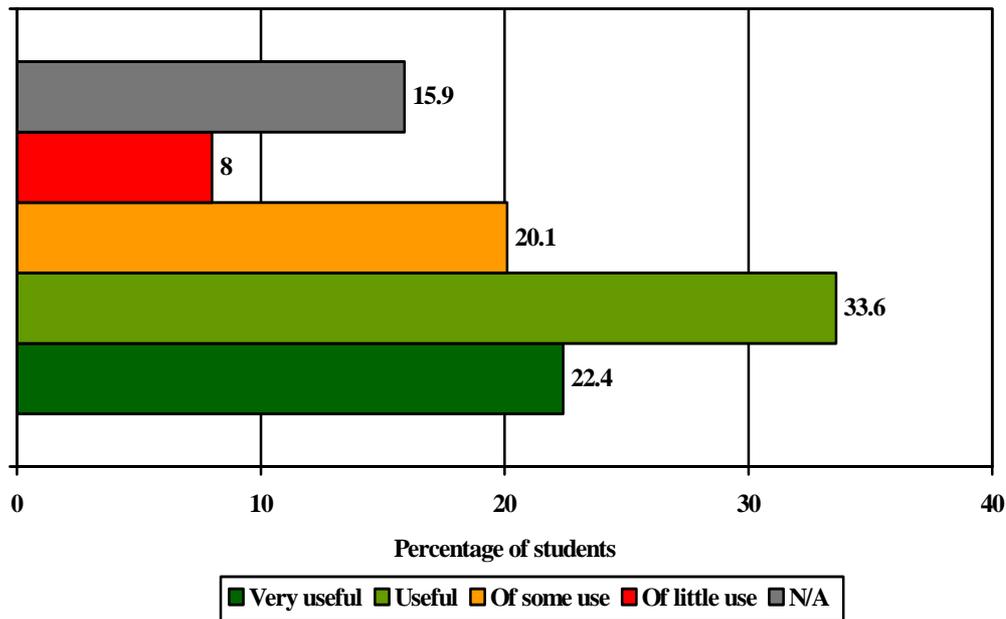
Among the factors that affected students' replies were year of study, age and gender, choice of degree and first language. The most striking differences, as in 2006, were due to the age factor. The differences in availability of 'Online learning using the Web' and 'Materials posted by lecturer on VLEs' to the mature students of 26 years and older are nearly as twice as much as for the rest of the age groups and demanded further investigation. Our presumption was that the availability of computers to mature students, as well as confidence in their use, causes those differences. We interviewed some of the mature students and their replies were in agreement with our perceptions.

In 2008 we saw a positive change in the attitude of mature students to the use of communication tools and Economics software in their course.

Materials posted on a VLE or departmental website are available to students if they know where to look for them, but if they are not computer literate they will not be aware of these resources. Departments ought to consider how the above-mentioned factors affect the learning possibilities of their mature students. *Internet Economist*, an online tutorial provided by the Economics Network may help develop students' skills and confidence with online resources:

<http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/he/tutorial/economist>.

### Q16.j. Online learning using the Web

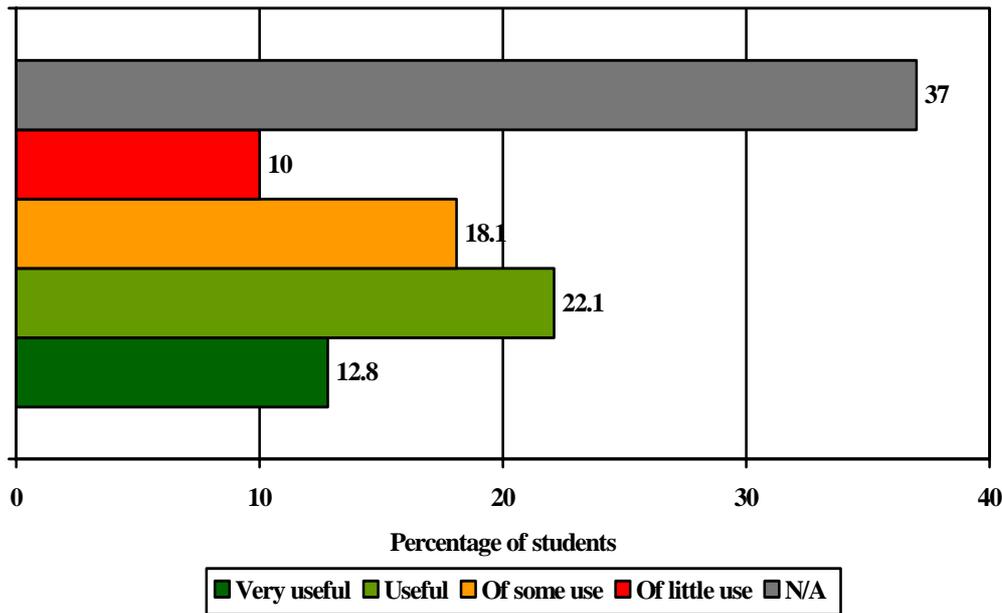


More than half of all respondents (56.0%) found online learning using the Web useful. There were differences in students' replies due to the year of study and age, first language and A-level Maths. Most positive about online learning were first and fourth year students – 53.9% and 53.4% respectively (or 66.3% and 68.6% of those who were offered that type of learning). Two out of five postgraduates find it useful, although this number grows to more than three out of five if availability is taken.

Differences in students' perceptions of online learning due to their age are mainly concerned with the availability of these types of activities. As previously discussed the non-availability of online learning using the Web for the mature group of students of 26 and older is double that (35.9%) of other age groups. Even those who have it available were the least positive about online learning among all age groups – 57.7% compared to 63.9% of 18–21 year olds and 60.7% of 22–25 year olds. Younger students are more accustomed to the use of computers in their everyday life and see online learning as an essential part of it, while it could be a struggle for mature students due to the factors discussed above.

Among the students' comments were: "Don't have time to use online for studying except looking for journals"; "Little used (webCT), except for articles". Many stress that this type of learning is not available in their course.

### Q16.k. Online learning using Economics software



Online learning using Economics software was not available to two out of five respondents. Among those who have it available, the majority consider it to be useful (34.9%) while others see in it only some or little use (28.1%). Statistically significant factors for this question were year of study, age and first language.

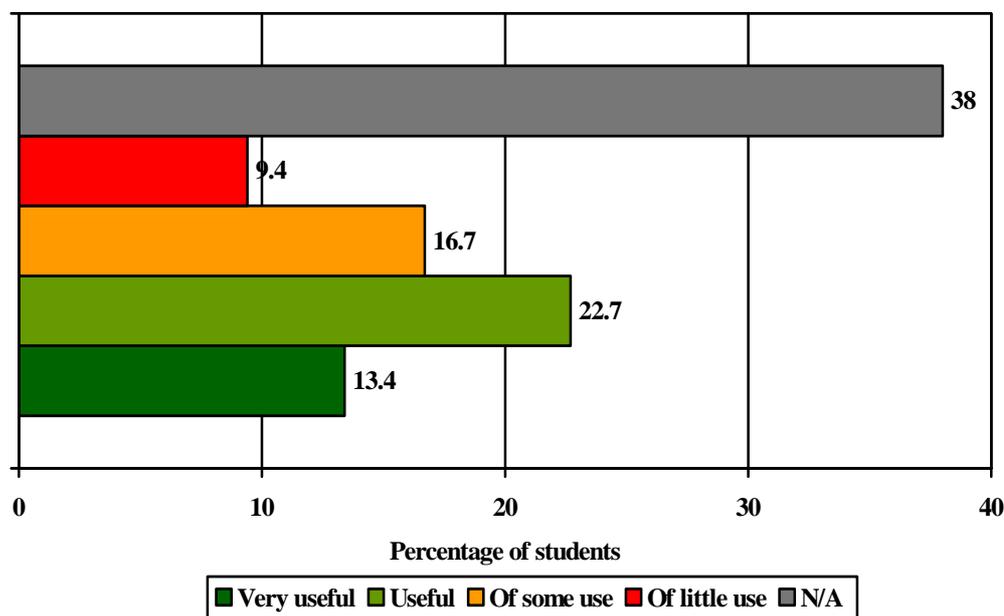
Non-English speakers were more positive about software than those for whom English was their first language: 41.6% versus 31.8%.

Most positive about the use of software were mature students who started university at 26 or older: 43.8% of them find it useful compared to 33.3% of 18–21 year olds.

In the comments many students point to the lack of availability of this type of activity to them: “If it was available, I was not aware of it, but would have been interested”; “Do not have this in my degree: didn't know such a thing existed”; “Very basic use of two old programs for econometrics should use it more extensively to provide useful knowledge”; “More economic software could be used to help learning”.

The survey also included open-ended questions Q24 and Q24.a. regarding the type of Economics software being used in degrees and asks students to comment about its usefulness. Comments are analysed later in the report.

### Q16.I. Online questions and tests (not assessed)



Non-assessed online questions and tests were unavailable to 38.0% of respondents, which is an improvement – in 2006 they were unavailable to 41.3%. At the same time, the majority of those who are offered online tests find them useful (36.1%).

There were differences in the answers to this question due to year of study, age, first choice and A-level Maths. Online questions and tests were more available to the students in year one and two, who feel most positive about them. This type of learning was available to only 37.7% of postgraduates and they were less positive about its usefulness.

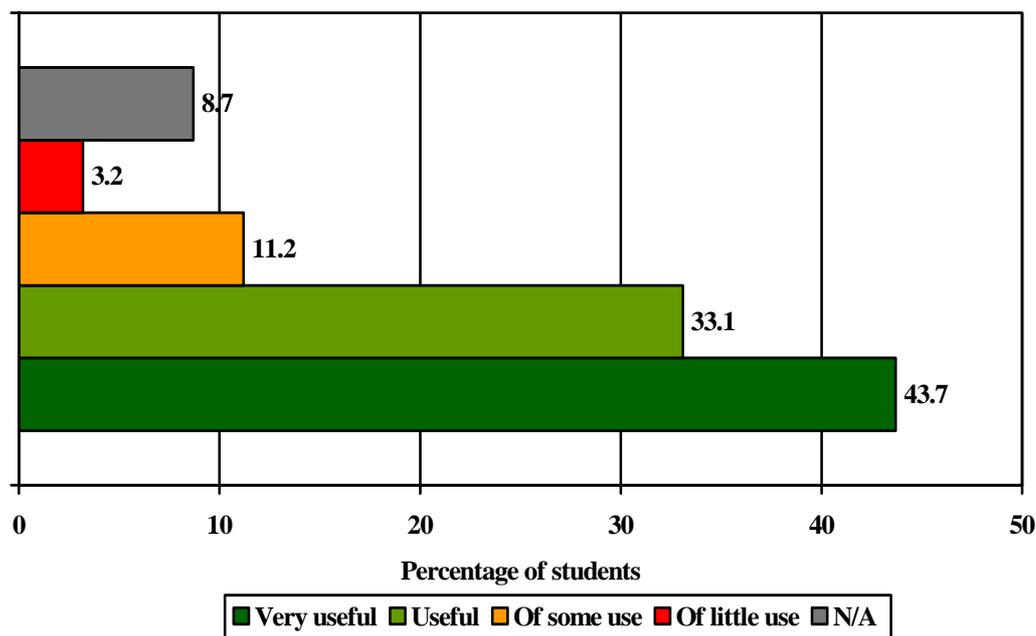
Those who did not have A-level Maths found online tests more useful than those who have it: 40.0% and 34.2% respectively.

Younger students found them more useful than mature students: 37.1% compared to 30.5%. At the same time more than half (52.7%) of the mature students did not have them in their degree course compared to 35.5% of younger students.

Students for whom this course was their first choice found online tests more useful: 37.0% compared to 31.6% of those for whom it was not their first choice.

Students left very positive comments if they have this facility in their course: “Best part of the whole course”; “Only did this in the first year, it was very useful. I do not know why they stopped it”; “Would have been very useful”.

**Q16.m. Materials posted by lecturer on course VLEs (such as Blackboard or WebCT) or website**



Materials posted by lecturers on course VLEs or websites are available to 91.3% of respondents, which is higher than in 2006 (90.2%). At the same time only 71.6% of respondents replied in Q25 that their degree course makes use of VLEs, so we can presume that the remaining 19.7% use only materials posted by lecturers on websites. More than three-quarters of students (76.8%) found these resources useful. There are differences in students’ replies due to their year of study, age, first language and A-level in Economics.

Most positive about VLEs were students from year one and the least positive were post graduate students. The non-availability of VLEs doubles to 18.0% for postgraduate students.

Larger group of younger students consider it useful: 76.9% and 70.2%. If we take into consideration that 19.1% of mature students did not have the facility on their course, compared to only 7.5% of younger ones, then the perception of usefulness will become equal. We have previously discussed the possible reasons for this difference in availability.

Although nearly equal groups of students found VLEs useful, more of the non-English speakers found them very useful: 46.1% and 42.6% respectively.

Students who do not have an A-level in Economics found VLEs more useful than those who did: 79.2% and 75.4% respectively.

In their comments to this question students mostly complain that not all lecturers use VLEs or website: “Would be useful if they were easily accessible – these formats change rapidly and are extremely user-unfriendly”; “Very useful, makes it always accessible. But it’s really annoying when lectures do not bother uploading the lecture notes”; “Lecturers do not really do this. When they do it is useful”. Additional students’ comments on the usefulness of VLEs will be discussed later in the report.

### Q16.n. Communication tools (e.g. discussion board) in course VLEs

Communication tools in course VLEs were not available to more than a quarter of all respondents. Those who have them available do not find them particularly useful: two out of five find them only of some or little use. At the same time many students complain about the lack of interactivity in online learning.

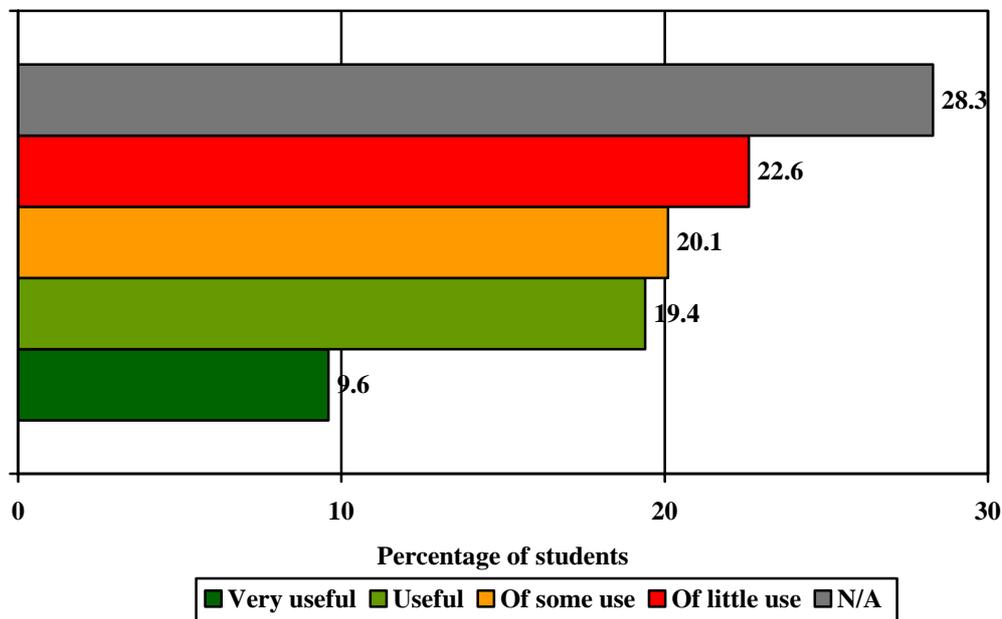
There were differences in students' attitudes due to their year of study, first language, A-level Maths and age.

Communication tools were more available to students in years one and two and unavailable to two-fifths of postgraduates: 24.8% and 42.1% respectively.

Non-English speakers found communication tools more useful than English speakers: 32.9% and 27.3% respectively.

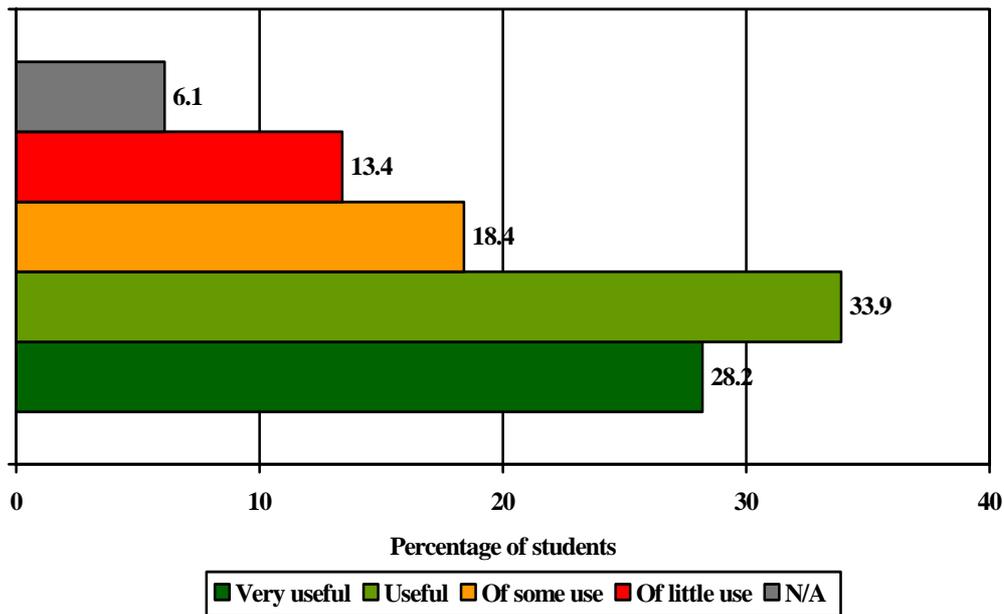
Those, who did not have A-level Maths found communication tools more useful than those who have it: 33.3% and 27.0% respectively.

Communication tools were unavailable to the larger groups of mature students of 26 and older (39.7%) than to the younger ones (26.8%). Mature students are also a bigger proportion of those who find them useful – 32.3% compared to 28.5% of the younger ones. This is different to the situation in 2006 when the majority of mature students did not find them useful.



In their comments students either complain about the way communication tools are used, or complain that they are not available to them: “Can’t use this option, can only access material from lecturers”; “Students are unwilling to participate because we are able to communicate on a daily basis in lectures/seminars. For long-distance courses I imagine it would be very useful”.

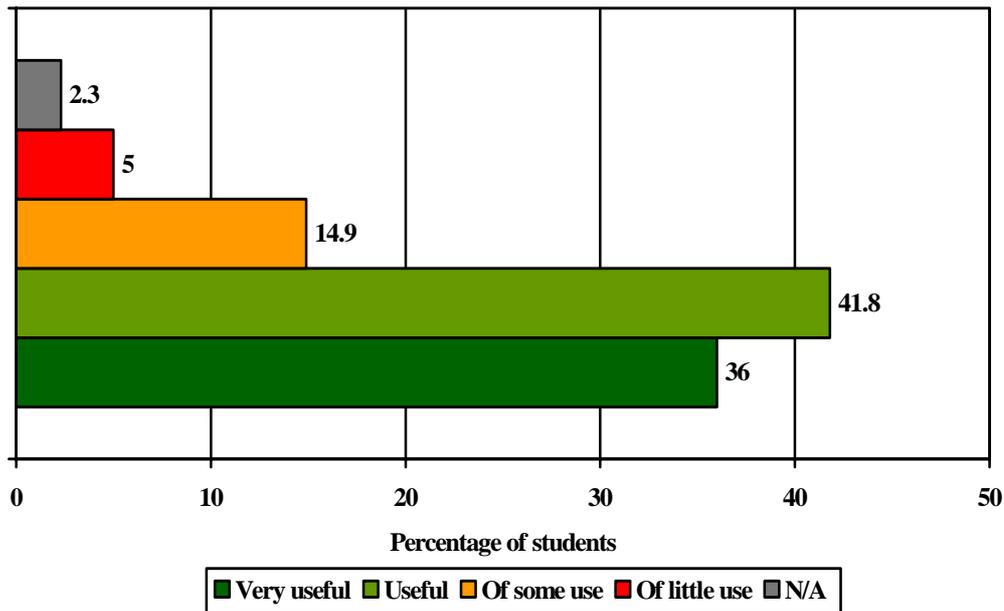
### Q16.o. Feedback on submitted work



More than three out of five respondents found feedback useful, although one in eight feel that it is of little use to them. None of the factors was statistically significant for this question.

In their comments students expressed their dissatisfaction with the quantity and quality of feedback: “I would have loved a lot more feedback and criticism specifically about my own assignments rather than discussing them in groups”; “Highly poor at my university, you have to chase lecturers for feedback. Personally feedback is one of the most important elements to improving”; “Depends on my teacher, some give really good useful feedback others don’t”; “If the lecturers give feedback one-to-one, it is very useful; just to give classification is useless”; “Normally received too late to be of any help”; “We rarely get any feedback on our submitted work”; “Very little feedback received through all courses”.

### Q16.p. Preparing for exams and/or tests



More than three-quarters of respondents find preparation for exams and tests useful. There were differences in students' answers due to the year of study, first choice, age and A-level Economics.

Students studying at the higher level found more use in preparing for exams and/or tests than those in the first or second year.

Students with their first choice degree in Economics found it more useful than the others: 78.3% and 75.5% respectively.

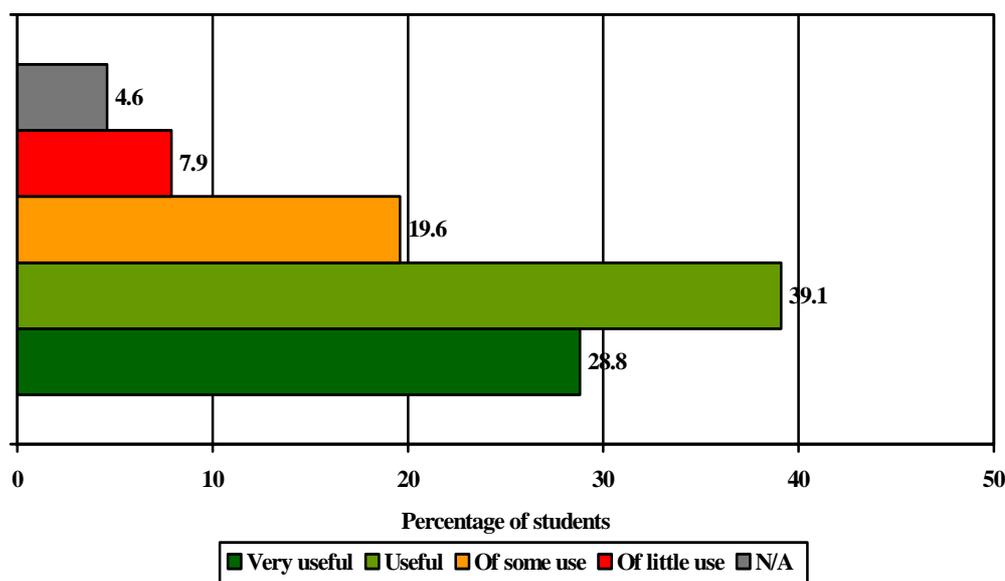
Younger students of 18–21 were most positive about preparation: 78.3% of them find it useful, compared to 66.1% of the older ones.

Those without A-level Economics were more positive about usefulness of preparation for exams.

In their comments students stress again the difference in usefulness of this type of learning based on the quality of lecturers: "Once again some lecturers were very good with this, holding revision classes and answering emails, other did not really seem to care about it"; "Little help from some tutors".

Students complain about "Very little exam preparation help provided"; "Very little of revision classes held".

### Q16.q. Working informally with other students



The vast majority of students (67.9%) find working informally with other students useful for their learning. There were differences in students' answers due to the year of study, age, A-level Maths and first language.

The more students study, the more use they see in informal work with other students: if in the first year 23.1% found it very useful, then in the third and fourth years already 33.2% found it very useful.

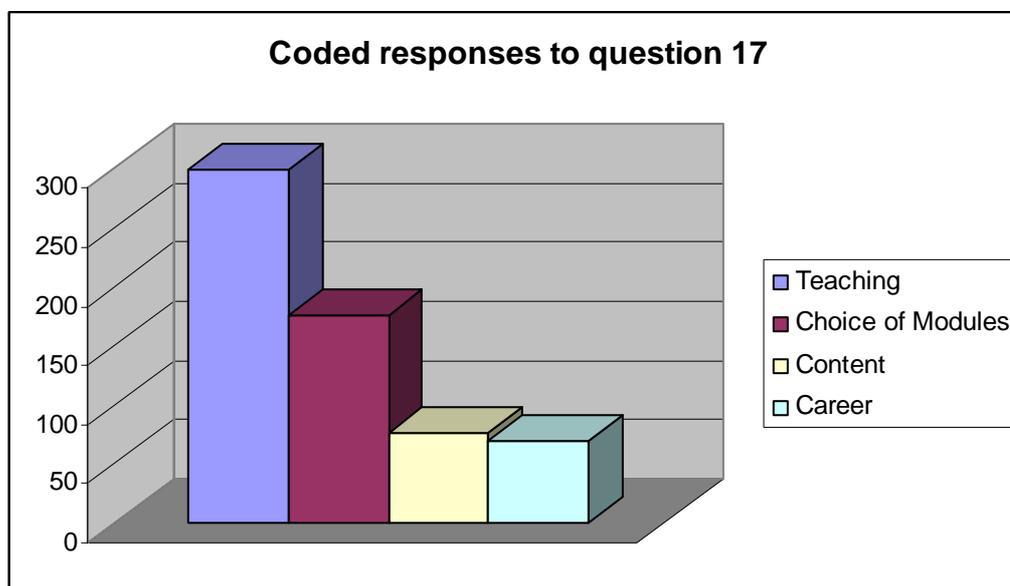
Larger groups of younger students found working informally useful – 69.1% and 59.5% – but at the same time, similarly to 2006 results, mature students of 26 years and older have three times less possibilities than others to work informally with other students (12.4% of them mark it as N/A, compared to 4.1% of younger ones).

Students with English as their first language found it easier to communicate with other students and hence probably regard this activity as more useful than students with other first languages: 70.6% compared to 62.0% find this activity useful.

Students who have A-level Maths were more positive about working informally with other students: 30.7% found this very useful compared to 24.7% of those without A-level Maths.

Students' comments on working together include: "Life-saving"; "Seems that English system is very individualistic"; "The best way to work I find is to work with others"; "University has done very little to promote this".

**Q17 Please identify the best one or two aspects of your degree course and say why**



All respondents answered this question. Many of the comments were similar to those made in the 2006 survey, although the emphasis may have changed. The most frequently mentioned best aspects of the course were: the quality of teaching, the choices and flexibility of the courses and modules, and career prospects.

For students the quality of teaching was one of the best aspects for a number of reasons. This included the informative nature of lectures and material, the inspiration gained from being taught by people who were leading figures in their field with a genuine passion for the subject, and finally, that it is made relevant to the real world: “The lectures are probably one of the best parts because they are very informative and they give you additional material that isn’t on the lecture notes”; “Some of my lecturers are very passionate about their subjects and it’s so relevant to everyday life”; “The opportunity to learn from lecturers who are leading figures in their academic field”; “Enthusiastic lecturers; when a lecturer shows genuine passion for what he/she is teaching, it gives one an incentive to learn what they are teaching”; “Lecturers – very enthusiastic, made subject interesting relating to everyday life”; “Lecturer is very friendly and very nice to people, that makes student wants to learn rather than have to learn. Second, the teaching and tutorial material is very related to the real world”.

A second important theme identified was the choice and variety of modules available, many commented on how the choice and flexibility meant that they were free to study what they were interested: “Flexibility to choose modules, meaning I can specialise my degree if I want to”; “Flexibility – I can study a range of politics, economics and language modules as well as business modules if I desired”; “Wide coverage in economics and allowed choice of optional units to suit personal interests”; “Great structure; 1st and 2nd year provide essential economic knowledge and skills while in 3rd year each student could choose a 'specialisation'”; “Modules – big

variety, can satisfy different interests”; “Freedom to choose your own areas of research in politics”.

This along with the content of the course was one of the best aspects. Students comments included: “I love the subject”; “Interesting and challenging subject matter”; “The subject that I study fascinates me. I am really enjoying learning more about it”.

Learning skills and preparing for a future career was another important theme that was frequently mentioned by the students. These comments were both positive and negative. For those who were positive, it was the nature of the course that helped develop particular skills that would be useful for their future career: “Modules – big variety, can satisfy different interests. Placement – very good preparation for the final year and future”; “Very challenging. Good for getting a job”; “It meets the demand of the industry and gives students tools, which in future could be used to develop in professional life”; “Very close to what it takes in the real job and extremely practical”.

For others, it was negative in the sense that they seemed to suggest that the only thing that was good about their degree is that it would help them get a job: “It will hopefully lead to a decent job, that’s why I’m taking it. This is what I remind myself of when I’m in a Development of Economic Thought lecture; “Only because it’s for my future”.

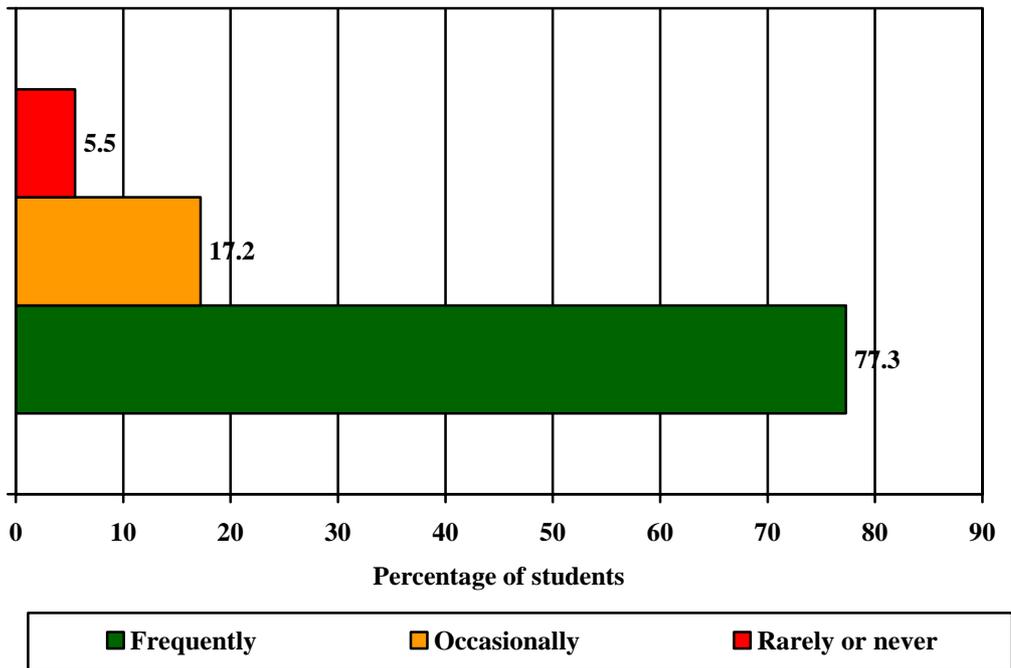
Finally, the social aspect of the degree was mentioned by a significant number of respondents as one of the best aspects, this included meeting new people, particularly students with similar interests and of high calibre, as well as having a good relationship with lecturers and tutors: “Meeting people with similar interests to myself and finding out more information about the type of things I am studying”; “Meet different people from all over the world, being independent”; “The good relationship between lecturers and students and the possibility to meet very diverse and interesting people”; “Meeting international students and learning more about other cultures”.

### **Q18. Activities in seminars/tutorials/small classes**

In order to better understand students’ perceptions of their learning it is important to know what kinds of activities are available to them in seminars/tutorials/small classes. In the questions that follow we ask students to rank the frequency of the suggested activities on a three-point scale: “Frequently”, “Occasionally” and “Rarely or never”. As teaching practice varies in different years of study we also look at students replies according to their year in HE.

The two most frequent activities used in seminars/tutorials/small classes, as in the 2006 results, were going through pre-prepared problem sets of worksheets (77.3%) and working through questions given out in seminars as a whole group (41.9%). At the same time, the rarest activities were games, experiments and role-play (rarely or never used by 75.7%, which is lower than 81.9% in 2006). In questions Q19 and Q19a we asked students to comment on the types of activities they find most useful and also to suggest one or two ways in which seminars could be improved.

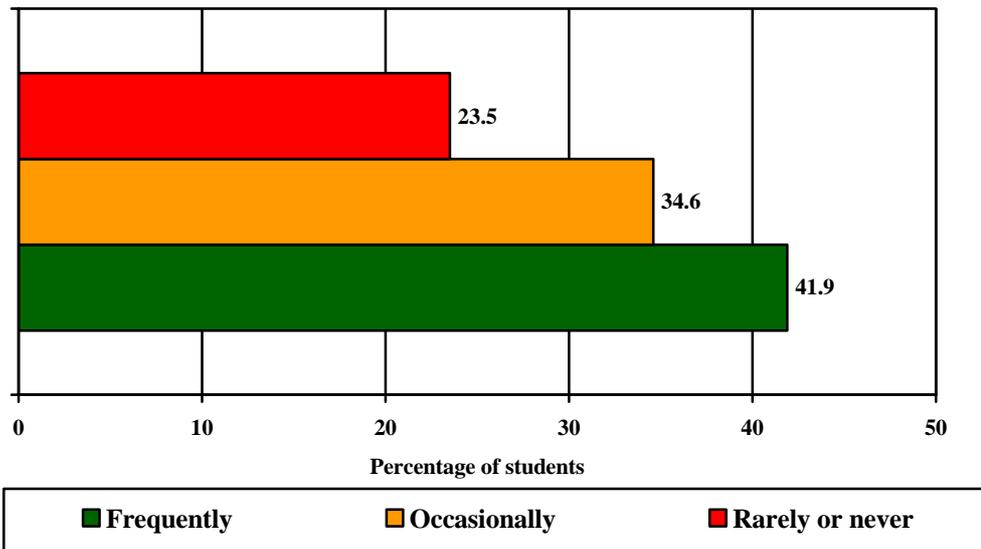
**Q18.a. Going through pre-prepared problem sets of worksheets**



This is the most often used activity in seminars for all students. More than three-quarters of all respondents experienced this activity frequently, although it varies in different years of study: ranging from 81.8% in year two to 62.3% for postgraduates.

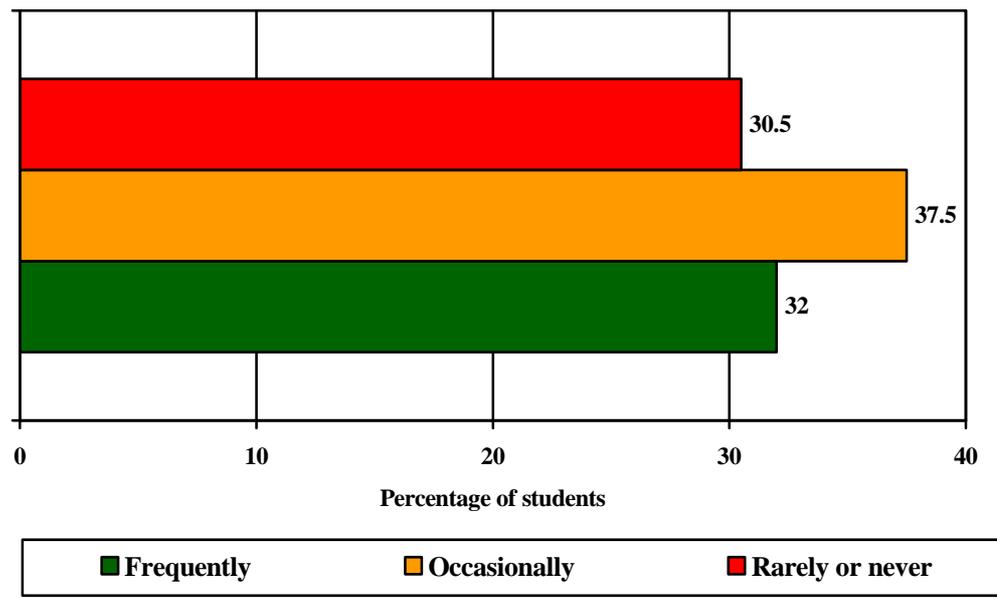
In their replies to the next question (Q19) students commented on the usefulness of this activity: “Pre-prepared problems allow me to revise necessary topics and reassess any weak areas”; “Pre-prepared problems – makes you do reading before”; “Pre set questions being explained”.

**Q18.b. Working through questions given out in seminar as a whole group**



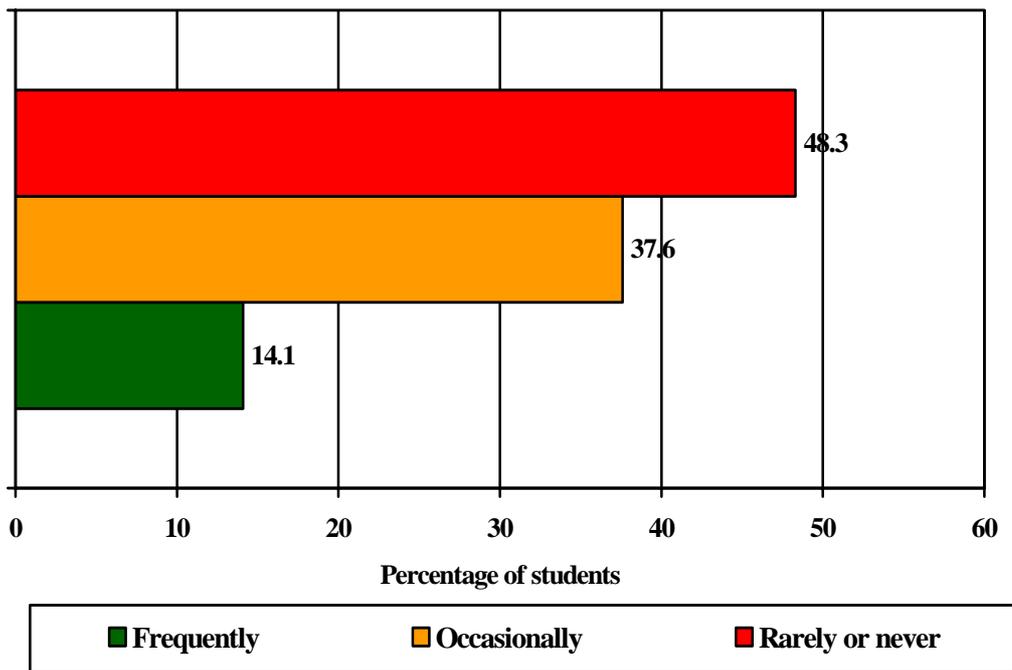
This is the second often-used activity in seminars. It is used frequently by 41.9% of all respondents. Its use varied in different years of study: 45.7% of the first-year students reply that they work through questions given out in seminar as whole group frequently, this number decreases with each year to 30.6% for postgraduates. Among the students' comments are: "Working through questions in a group and being able to talk it through with the lecturer/ tutor as well"; "Working through questions in groups and hearing what people have to say".

**Q18.c. Working through questions given out in seminars in small groups**



Nearly a third of all respondents (32.0%) frequently work through questions given out in seminars in small groups. This number increases slightly to 33.7% in year three and four and decreases to 26.2% for postgraduates (which is twice as much as postgraduate respondents mention it in 2006). Students' comments include: "I like working together in groups of 3 or 4 and discussing problems and then presenting answers back to the rest of the class"; "Working through set questions in small groups – share ideas".

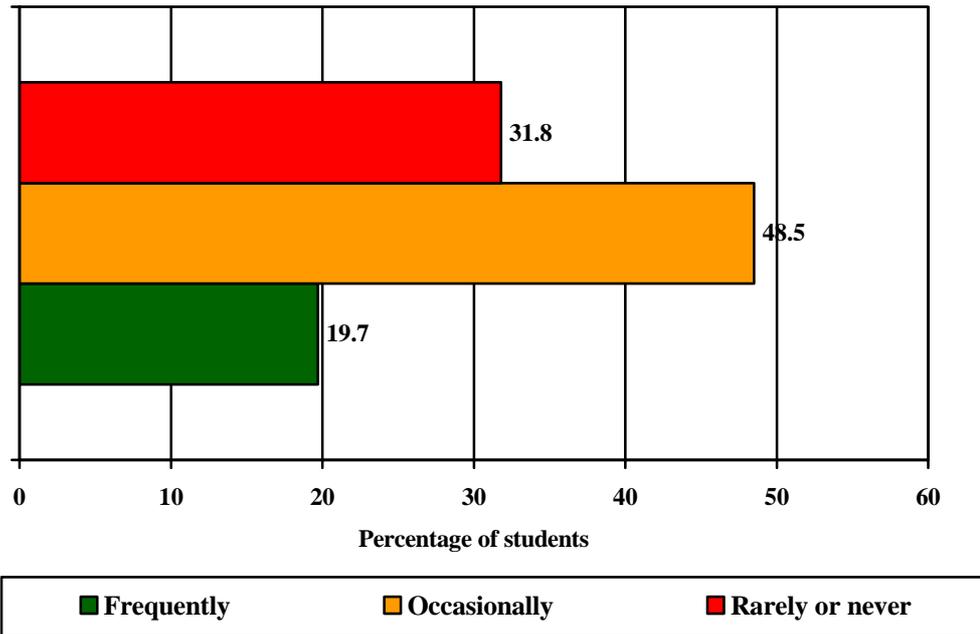
**Q18.d. Individual presentations of papers**



Nearly half of all respondents rarely or never have individual presentations of papers during seminars/tutorials/small classes (48.3%). Use of this activity varied in different years, with the tendency being opposite to Q18.b or Q18.c: it is used frequently only by 11.4% of respondents in year one but by 25.7% of postgraduates.

Respondents highly value the use of presentations: "I like presentation of homework by students"; "Presentation and Discussion Forum helps you develop your skills"; "Presentations by fellow students are great!"

### Q18.e. Mini-lecture by tutor

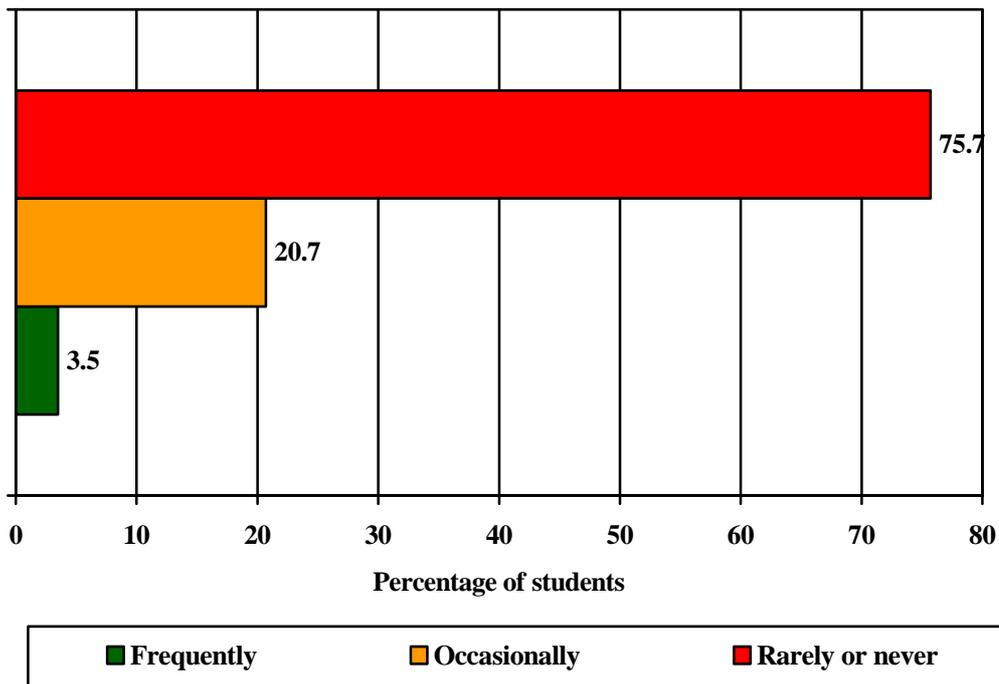


Less than one in five respondents frequently have mini-lectures by tutors in small classes. Nearly a half has them occasionally.

There is a difference in the way mini-lectures are used in classes. More than half of students in years three and four have them to some extent (53.6%) – this number was much higher in 2006 at about 75.0%. Use of mini-lectures is lower for students in year one (47.8% have them in 2008, while it was 62.0% in 2006) and two (47.6% compared to 63.2% in 2006) and goes down to 39.9% for postgraduates (54.2% in 2006).

Students left the following comments: “Mini-lecture by tutor (enabled us to ask questions which we may previously hadn't the chance to”); “Mini-lecture especially when applying equations to the theory”; “Mini-lectures by tutor with adequate and relevant handouts given out”.

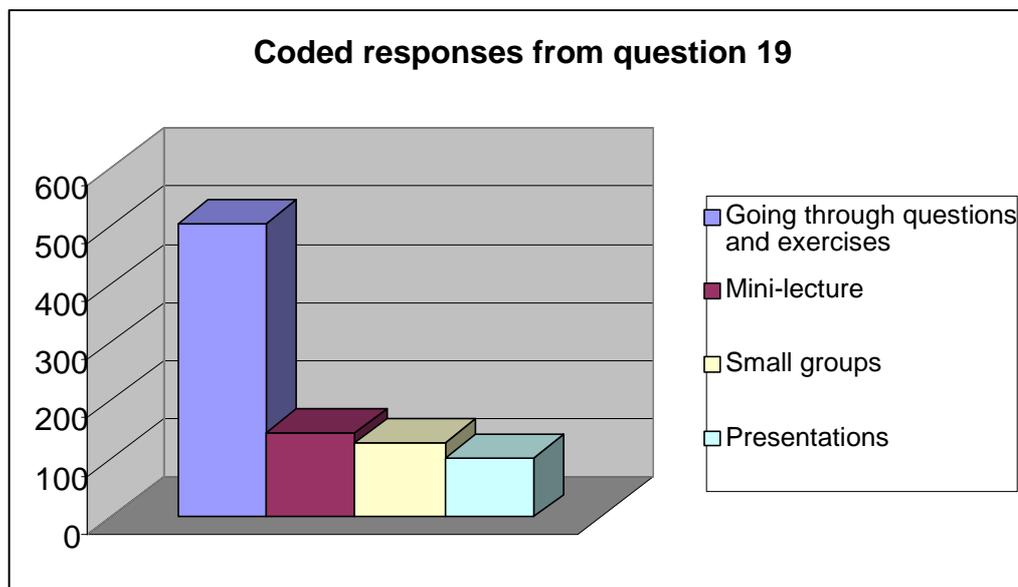
**Q18.f. Games, experiments, role-play**



Unfortunately lecturers do not frequently use games and simulations. More than three out of four students rarely or never have games, experiments and role-play in their classes. Those who have them rated them highly: “I think games or experiments could be useful in understanding concepts better”; “Games and experiments because their interactive basis helps learning become much easier”.

The Economics Network provides resources and workshops to departments that are interested in introducing games, simulations and role-play to students.

**Q19. What types of seminar activities have you found to be most useful?**



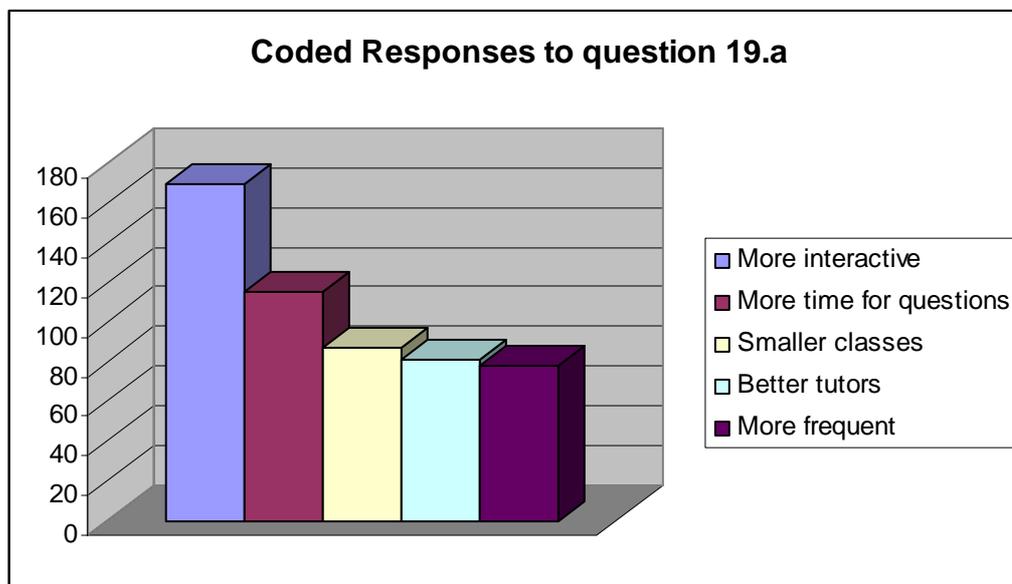
All respondents answered this question. From their answers it appears that the students seem to find the interactive and practical activities in the seminar useful. Most frequently mentioned were group exercises and pre-prepared problem sets, mini-lectures, presentations and discussions, and working in small groups.

Most frequently, mentioned of all these were the exercise and problem sets and going through questions: “Going through exercises”; “Going through the tutorial questions and the tutor explaining the basic concepts”; “Going through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets”; “Doing questions and then going through answers”; “Working through questions in seminar”; “Pre-prepared problem sets”.

Many also commented on the usefulness of mini lectures by the tutor as this seemed to be an opportunity to ask questions, where they had not had a chance to do so before: “Mini-lectures and seminar handouts (obviously, with prior preparation from student's side)”; “Mini-lecture by tutor, basically to improve the understanding of the topic and openness of students to question any concepts not grasped in lectures or readings”; “Mini-lecture by tutor enabled us to ask questions which we may previously didn't have the chance to”; “Working through questions in small groups”.

For similar reasons, students frequently commented on the usefulness of presentations and discussions, particularly when student led: “Individual presentations and mini discussions in small groups, immediate feedback from seminar tutors”; “Presentations and working through questions given out in seminar as whole group”; “Discussions following presentations, guided by the lecturer”; “Presentations, debates”; “Interaction with other students”; “Class discussion methods of learning”; “More class interaction allows for better understanding”; “Discussion of topics, being student led”; “Discussion around the lecture topic and presentations by other students”; “Discussion of essays prepared by students”.

**Q19.a Name one or two ways in which the seminar could be improved?**



There were 834 responses to this question. The students suggest improving the seminar by making them more interactive with more space for questions, meeting more frequently in smaller classes and better-trained tutors.

The methods of teaching come under particular criticism, and many students comment on the need to improve the quality of teaching by having better qualified

teachers or lecturers leading the seminars. They criticised the PhD students and teaching assistant for poor grasp of English and low quality of teaching: “Having tutors who are more supportive and better at teaching when students struggle to understand”; “To be honest, I think the only improvement is to make sure that tutors are completely capable of teaching students! I had one Maths tutor last semester and I was left feeling much more confused after the tutorials than beforehand”; “If the lecturers took more classes instead of relying on TAs/postgrads”; “The tutors could be better selected, many of them have basic, or hard to understand English. Most of them are PhD students, so have no knowledge or understanding of how to teach!”; “How the problems relate to the lecture and application the real world. Lecturer should monitor the teaching assistant (TA) by attending some of the classes without prior informing the TA”; “The PhD students assigned to give seminars are often international students whose linguistic skills are often lacking. Use of more understandable English by the tutors would make seminars far more useful. They can be a little useless when the group cannot understand the tutor and the tutor cannot understand the students when questions are raised”; “The standard of teaching could be improved. Many seminar teachers are postgraduate students who are teaching purely for the money are not good teachers”.

Some suggest that this could be improved by training the teachers: “Seminar teachers should be given more teacher training so that they can lead classes. They should also be given more support by the lecturers/prepare more for classes so that they know the topics they covering properly.”

Students comment on how the seminar could be improved by being more interactive with greater student involvement and opportunity to ask and work through questions together: “The teaching is not particularly innovative and thus I have not been exposed to a variety of learning methods. I find classes dominated by a small number of individuals and feel the tutors/lecturers could do more to involve more students in discussions. Greater use of small group discussions, games, worksheets and so on would be useful to keep everyone included and active, and to ensure that students keep up with the work on an ongoing basis. Tutors themselves often dominate class time, rather than facilitating discussion amongst students. I feel this should be reined in, in order to allow for a more student centred approach.”

The students suggest that the seminars need more interaction between the students and tutors, more interaction amongst students themselves, by “making everyone contribute” even if some are reluctant to participate: “More interaction between student and tutor maybe?”; “More interactivity, making students talk more in classes, and making classes less like lectures, or less like automated voice readings of the solutions pages. Making us do group work, or collective problem solving, small presentations or class discussions”; “More group interaction rather than listening to class teacher throughout the session”; “More encouragement for students to participate when they are reluctant”; “They could be more interactive, explain more rather than simply write the answers on the board, help the weakest students, not just the strongest”.

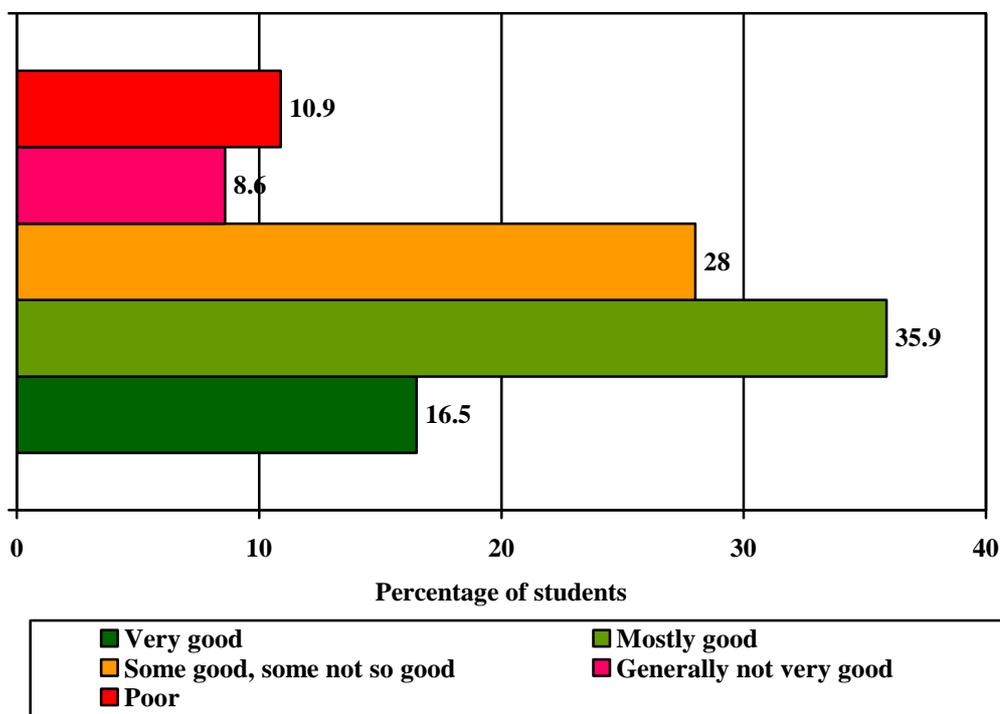
For many this can be achieved by smaller seminars: “Smaller groups so that it is more interactive”; “By ensuring that everyone comes prepared and is therefore able to contribute to discussion. Having smaller seminar groups – frequently overcrowded and too many people to feel comfortable to talk”.

For many the techniques of teaching could be made more imaginative and innovative with the use of role-plays and games: “Games, experiments and role-play sounds like fun!” This, they suggest, can be useful for relating the knowledge and theory to the real world: “More use of role-play, to put into perspective the real economic world.”

Some students make suggestions for making changes to the structure or purpose of seminars; these suggestions include making the content more relevant to the exam, integrating the lecture and seminars more, and more problem-solving problems: “Help us prepare for exams, e.g how to answer exam questions, what they expect of us, model answers to show how to achieve best grade”; “More questions relating to exam style questions which can be discussed”; “I think seminars should go over past exam questions. For example looking at the content, which should go into them. I know this would be difficult when the whole syllabus hasn't been covered, but certainly towards the end when more topics have been covered and we would be in a position to attempt a question. I think this would encourage students to look at their notes week on week, and then we would be far more prepared going into the exam”; “More information given shows how work in tutorials is linked with lectures’ focus on exam style questions or exam topics”; “More problem-solving questions and exam-related problems”.

Finally, some students express the need for increased feedback within the seminar: “More feedback on answering questions”; “Better feedback, clearer structure”.

**Q20. How effective have you found the teaching of Maths and Stats on your course?**



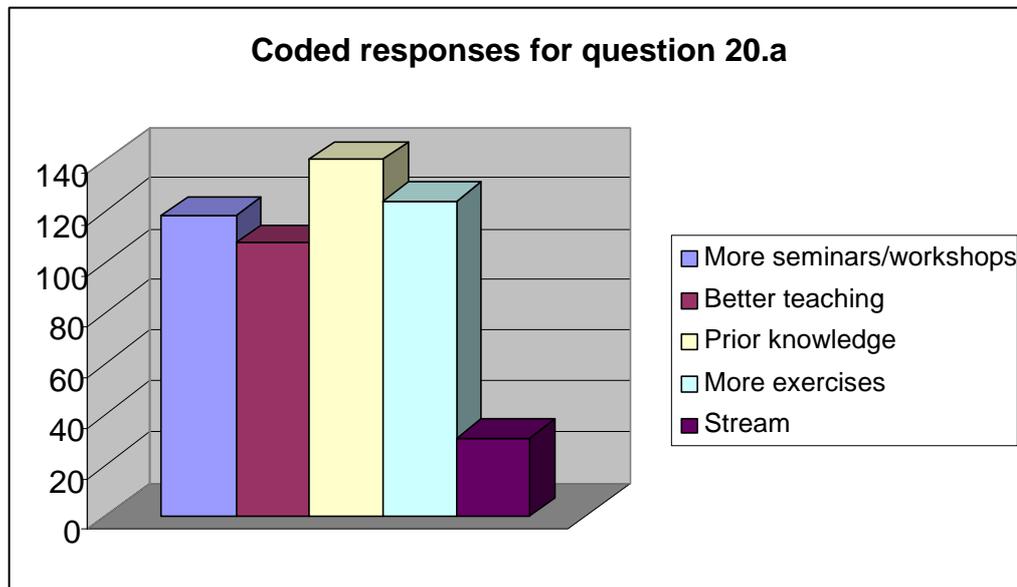
The issue of teaching Maths and Stats for Economics students continues to be a controversial one. About half of the respondents found the teaching of Maths and Stats on their course to be good, though the other half is split between “some good, some not so good” (28.0%) with one in 10 perceive it to be “poor” and one in 12 to be “generally not very good”. The results are very much similar to the 2006 survey.

Factors that were statistically significant for this question were A-level in Maths and Economics. Students who had A-level Maths were more positive about its teaching in the course: 55.0% found it good and very good, compared to 46.9% of those without A-level Maths. This is understandable, as they came better prepared for the course and needed less support. Similarly for students with A-level Economics: those who have done it before were more positive than those who hadn’t – 53.8% and 50.5% respectively.

Students stated same problems with the teaching of Maths, as in 2006: bad teaching, lack of differentiation between students with and without A-levels in Maths and inadequate support. Students commented: “Poor: little one-on-one time is given to some very abstract concepts”; “The lectures themselves are poor but the material and lecture notes are useful”; “First year Stats was not enjoyable though because of the material and the method the lecturer was teaching it in”; “Core Maths was good, but Stats was bad, mainly due to a very poor lecturer”; “I took Maths and Stats with the Maths department rather than the Economics department, as I’ve got A-level Maths”.

Some students even mention that they didn’t have Maths in their course: “I have no taught element in my programme”; “I do not have Maths in my degree”.

## Q20.a How could the teaching of Maths and Stats be improved?



There were 859 responses to this question. The majority of the students express their concern about the teaching of Maths and Stats on their course. The main themes identified were the assumption of prior knowledge, the poor quality of teaching, not enough seminars or workshop style classes, and expressing the need to include more problem-based learning.

With regards to the quality of teaching, although this was a concern of many of the students, it did not come up as often as in the 2006 survey. Typical comments about the quality of teaching related to the teachers being dull and uninteresting, making it difficult for them to motivate themselves: “The teaching style can be more lively”; It depends on the lecturer, if he is not interested then the students tend to not understand as well. Same for seminars”; “Primarily the lecturer I had for half the Maths course was possibly the most dull and uninteresting lecturer ever, thus made the course hardly worth turning up for as you never learnt anything anyway as he literally just read the slides”; “Employing tutors who enjoy teaching rather than economics students who really couldn’t care less whether or not you learn”.

The students comment on how they resent the lack of teaching skills that the lecturers have, and are in need of “better didactic qualities” rather than simply reading off slides: “Employ lecturers that can speak English to an acceptable standard and who have a good ability to actually teach – at present all that is being done is that they read off the slides word for word. I could do that in my own time from Blackboard”; “The key problem here is the same with a lot of all lectures. The lecturers are not teachers, so they often struggle to fully pass along the knowledge they want to teach. I would say that it should be necessary for lecturers to undergo some greater level of teacher training to improve their effectiveness”.

Students complain that they cannot often understand the lecturers or tutors because of their accents or poor use of English: “On a personal level, I did at times struggle with some of the foreign accents of the various foreign lecturers”; “Better

teaching especially use of English language!"; "The lecturers must be able to SPEAK ENGLISH CLEARLY!"

One of the main concerns of the students is the prior assumption of knowledge in the teaching, typical comments include: "Stop assuming we know everything!!"; "Teach Maths as if you were trying to teach aliens who have no prior knowledge of the subject, not like students are maths professors!!!"

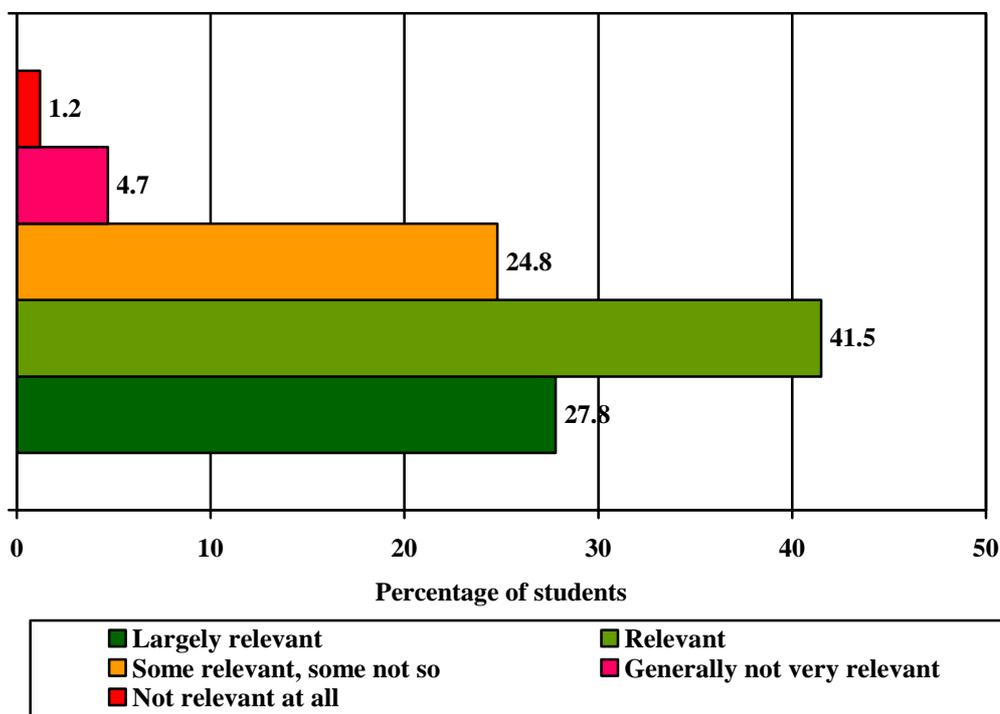
The students suggest that lecturers take a slower pace, showing the links more clearly from one stage to the next: "Slow down – there are times when the tutor especially does not articulate his thought process so some of the answers are harder to get"; "I think sometimes the lecturers jump from one stage to the other without showing some parts in between. It might be obvious to them, but this can make the material more difficult to understand"; "Clearer presentation and a slower pace so have more chance to learn the information before moving on to the next stage"; "It is done at an extremely quick pace. I think it should be advised to all prospective Economics students that it would be of great advantage to them to study a-level Maths".

Some advocate extra help classes or even introduction summer courses for students who struggle with the Maths: "More help or a separate course for students without Maths A-level"; "summer intro course".

Many suggest the need to stream ability groups, or differentiate between those who have done A-level Maths and those that have not. Comments include: "Stream student groups by ability. Mixed ability groups are often bordering on counter-productive"; "Because of differing levels of intelligence there should be different levels of papers, i.e. advanced or foundation papers, so students of their own abilities can work towards correct levels rather than all taking the same paper"; "Maybe setting different lectures for those who have done A-level Maths and those who haven't". A few even suggest making A-level maths a compulsory requirement of the course.

Finally, some students also suggest that relating the Maths to more real-life examples can be a way of making it more interesting and helping those that are struggling: "Make it more interesting using real-world examples of where it can be used"; "There should be additional support available for people without A-level maths. Should be presented in a way which makes it applicable to real life instead of endless equations and formulae which seem to have no point to them".

**Q21. How relevant to the real world do you find the content of the degree?**



Two thirds of the respondents perceive their course to be relevant to the real world and only one in 17 sees it as generally not very relevant or not relevant at all.

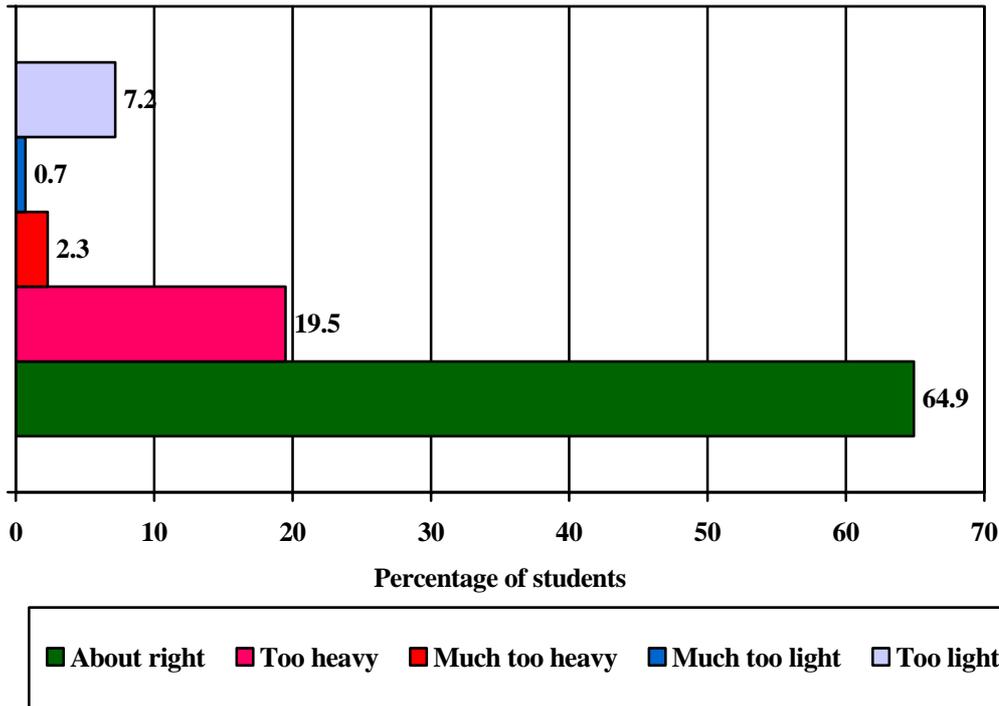
There were differences in responses due to the year of study and A-level Economics.

The biggest group of students, who see the content of their degree as relevant to the real world were postgraduate students – 75.4%. This is opposite to the situation in the 2006 survey, when postgraduates saw it as the least relevant (57.4%). Second came the first-year students – 72.6%. But the more theoretical their courses became the less relevant to the real world they seem to students: 64.3% of second-year students and 67.1% of the third-year students see it as relevant.

Students without A-level Economics found the content of the course more relevant to the real world than those without A-levels: 72.4% and 67.3% respectively.

**Q22. How do you find the workload on this degree?**

About three-fifths of the respondents (64.9%) found their workload about right. At the same time one in five thinks that it is too heavy and one in 13 that it is too light. There were differences in students’ replies due to gender, year of study, language, age and A-level Economics.



Students from the fourth year were the happiest group regarding their workload – 74.8% of them see it as about right. Postgraduates perceive their workload to be heavy (34.5%), compared to the rest of the levels/years of study, where it is about 20.0%. In their comments students try to explain their perceptions and ask for more balanced workloads: “Work just seems to come in lumps, such as through weeks 4–6 we get loads of work, making you work a lot but then there is a kind of break and then it comes again, so a more balanced workload would be nice”; “All heavy at the same time but too light at other times”; “First year was about right to get students to understand basics, second year was about the right level of workload, and third year was the same in the first semester, but the second semester with both modules and the dissertation to write the workload at times seems a bit heavy”; “There is too much pressure in third year if you have to hand in coursework, tutorial work and a dissertation a week before your exams start (my situation last year in third year... I ended up dropping out and having to come back externally)”.

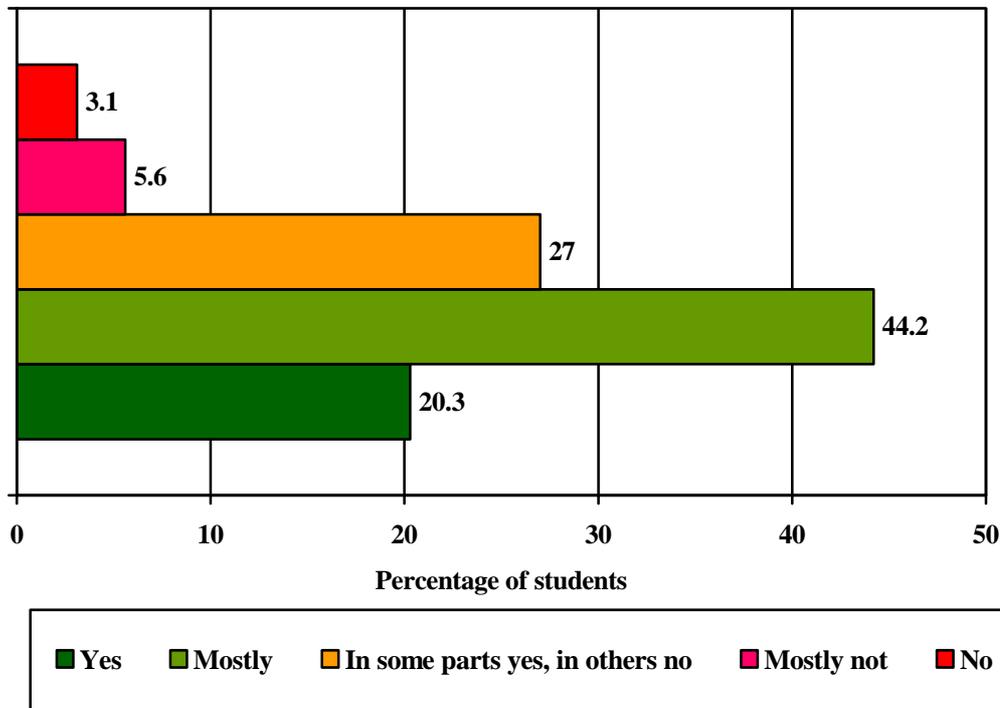
Mature students find their workload heavier than the other age groups: 24.8% see it as heavy compared to 20.1% of 18–21 year olds. As one of them writes: “Depending on what grade I want and which subjects interest me most. In an ideal world, part-time working (instead of full-time) would make this experience a very good thing. I would have loved to invest more time in my degree to read more.” This also could be due to the gap in their education and possible wrong expectations of workloads in HE. Even though nearly the same proportion of males and females see their workloads as about right, more females than males see it as heavy: 25.2% and 19.2% respectively.

Students who have A-level Economics found their workloads heavier than those without it: 23.5% and 19.4% respectively, which is understandable, as their presumptions about workload were based on their experiences at A-levels.

In general, native English speakers were more positive about workload than non-native English speakers: only 19.4% see it as heavy and much too heavy

compared to 27.1%. The perception of the heavier workload could be due to the language problems they encounter: “Workload is stressful and too much.”

**Q23. Do you find the assessment on your degree accurately tests the level of your knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes?**



The next group of questions are dedicated to the assessment. We asked students whether the assessment in their degree accurately tests the level of knowledge and understanding, which types of coursework assessment are used in their degree and what suggestions they could make on how the nature of assessment could be improved to provide a better test of learning and to help them in their learning.

The majority of respondents have positive attitudes towards their assessment. Similar to the 2006 survey results, more than three out of five respondents think that the assessment mostly accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes.

In their comments students criticise the existing system: “100% exam is quite tough, big pressure”; “A few more assessments throughout the year would be nice instead of 70% of final grade on the final exam”; “ Final exams are worth 100% so final outcome could be due to luck. Also, the Economics exam tests more logical/critical thinking skills (rather like an IQ test in my opinion) than economic theory”; “I find that many exams are merely a matter of regurgitation facts or knowledge imparted by a third party. There is not a large emphasis on personal opinion, and originality, despite their allocation in the mark scheme”; “I found it hard to understand this one lecturer’s marking schemes. Difficult to work towards a goal when you don’t know what is required of you”; “I think the final exam is too heavily weighted – at 70% if you find the paper hard-going there isn’t really much chance to improve your grade elsewhere. There are two 10% exams which consist of writing

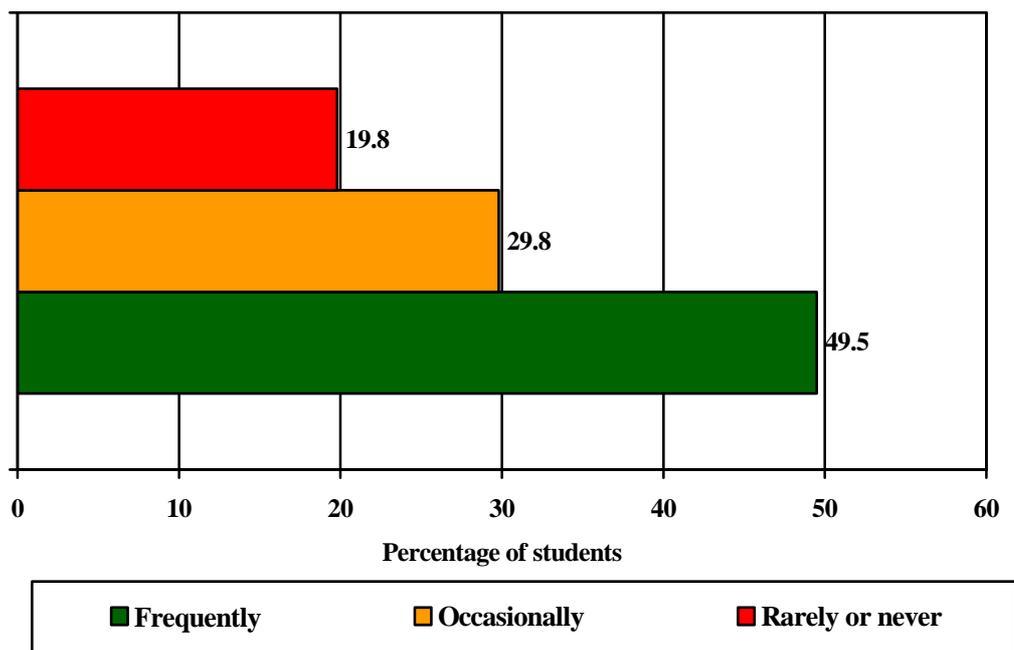
explanatory notes, which I don't think test our knowledge or understanding – just our ability to learn from textbooks”; “Not enough coursework and too much exam focus”.

**Q23.a. Which of the following types of coursework assessment are used on your degree?**

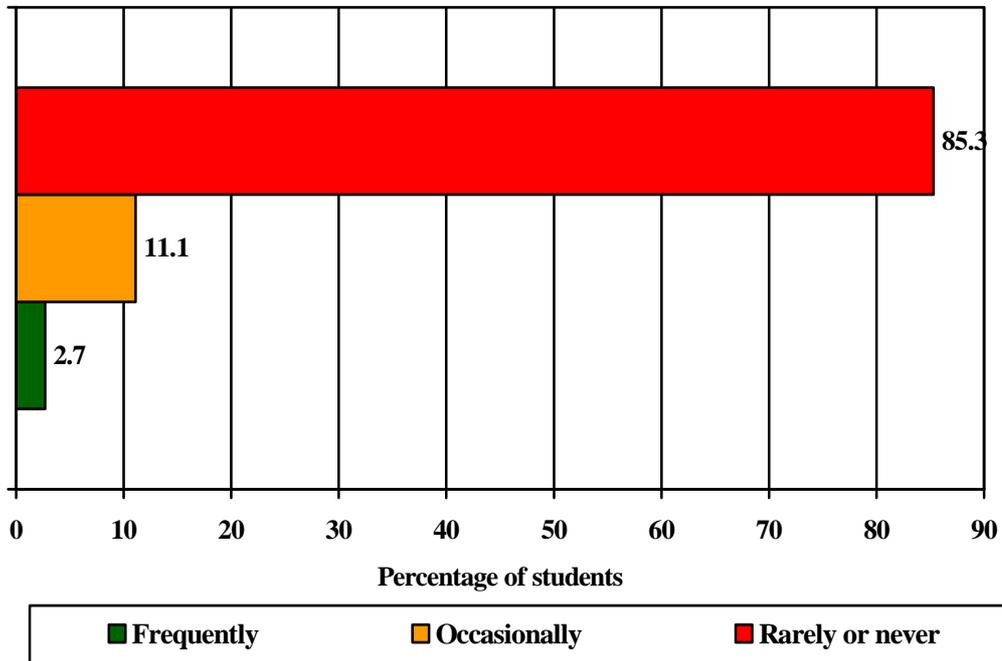
**Q23.a.i. Essays in your own time**

Nearly half of students use essays done in their own time frequently. At the same time it is rarely or never used by one fifth of respondents. There are differences in the way this type of assessment is practised in different years of study. Students in the third (57.5%) and fourth (73.2%) year use it more often than students in the first (40.9%) and second year (48.0%) and postgraduates (49.2%).

Students’ comments include: “Personally I feel essays provides more accurate results of what I am capable of”; “I have had final essays, but they don't accurately test my level of knowledge, only the knowledge of the marker compared to the written work you have provided them to mark”; “Should have more! After not writing essays for two years we are stumbling to write any!”

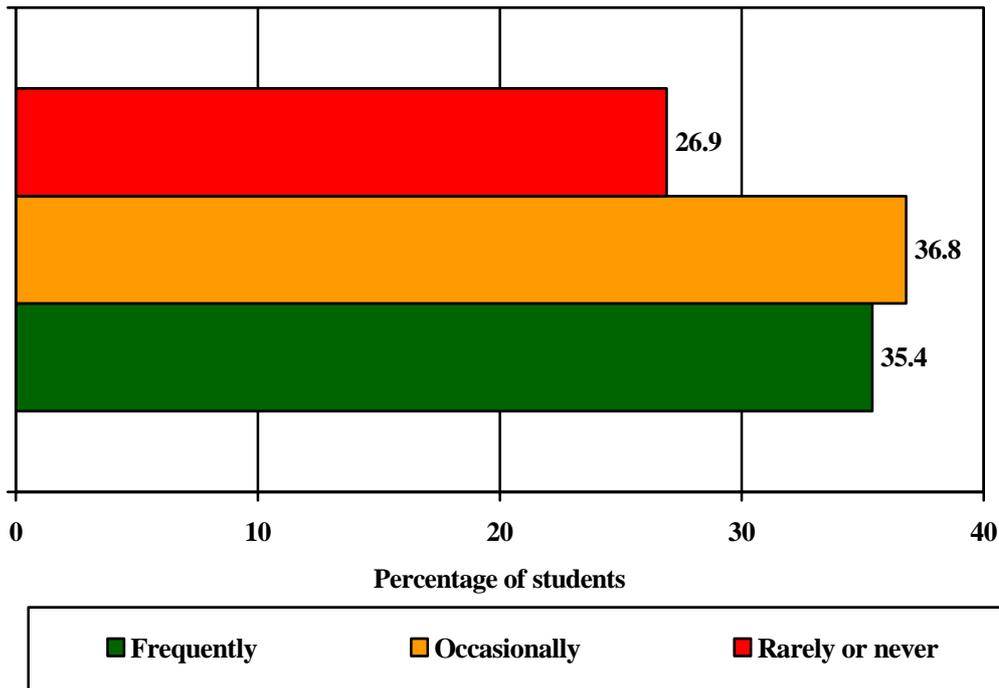


### Q23.a.ii. Essays done in class



This type of coursework assessment is not used often, as 85.3% replied that it is 'Rarely or never' used in their course. One in 10 students has it occasionally and only one in 50 has it frequently. There were differences in the way this type of assessment is used in different years of study: 90.2% of fourth year students rarely or never had essays done in class in comparison to 81.4% of postgraduates and 82.4% of third-year students. In their comments respondents only mention they have not encountered this type of assessment.

### Q23.a.iii. Tests (as opposed to end of year/semester exam)

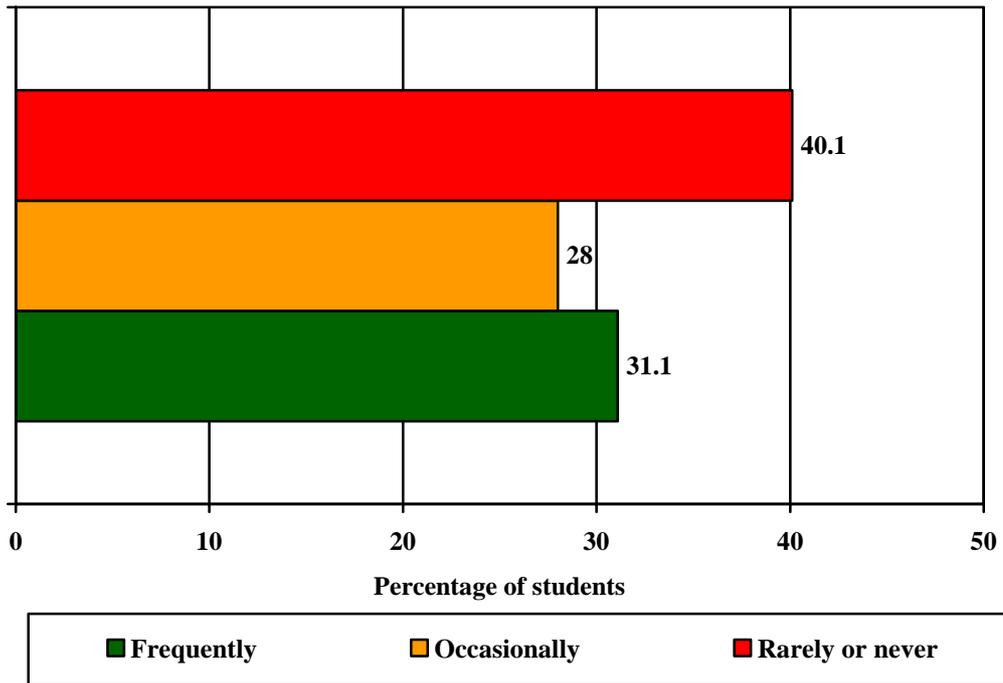


This type of assessment in 2008 was used more often than in 2006: 35.4% compared to 30.9% reply that they use it 'Frequently'. Tests are more frequently used in year four (39.0%) and year one (37.9%) and less in year three (31.7%). About a third of postgraduate students frequently have them. Students' comments on the use of tests: "Tests, but in addition to end of semester exam"; "Tests counts, but they count to a small percentage of the total mark in addition to end of semester/year exams".

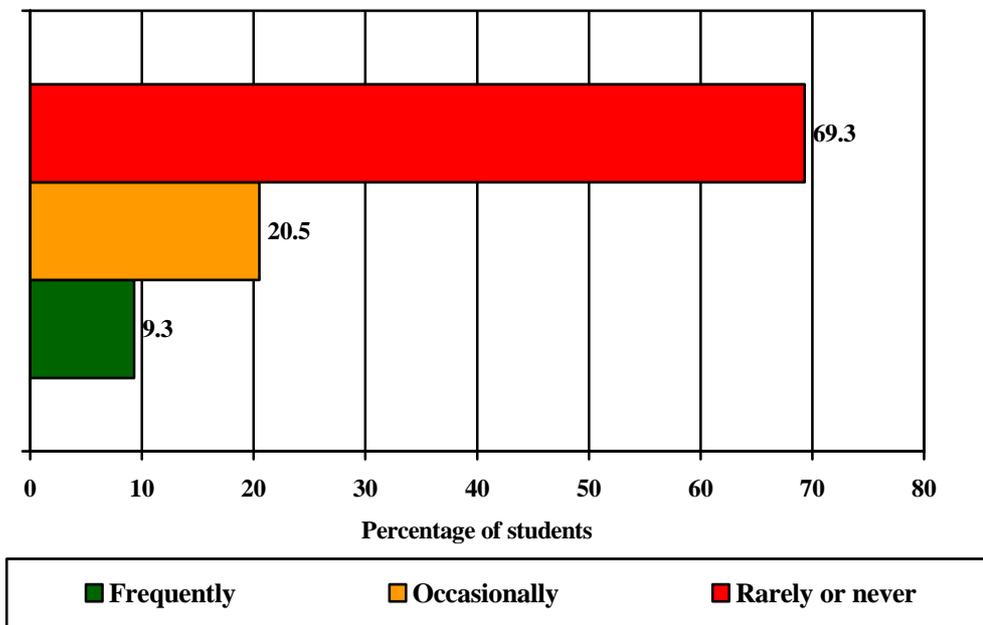
### Q23.a.iv. Problem sets

Problem sets were used more frequently in 2008 than in 2006: 31.1% and 29.0% of respondents respectively. Problem sets are used more often in year one (35.5%) and year two (31.0%) and less often in other years of study. More than two-fifths of third-year students say that it is 'Rarely or never' used in their course.

Students' comments include: "Occasionally: they are not assessed"; "Have in tutorials, but not formally assessed"; "We have Weekly 'Optional' Problem Sets".



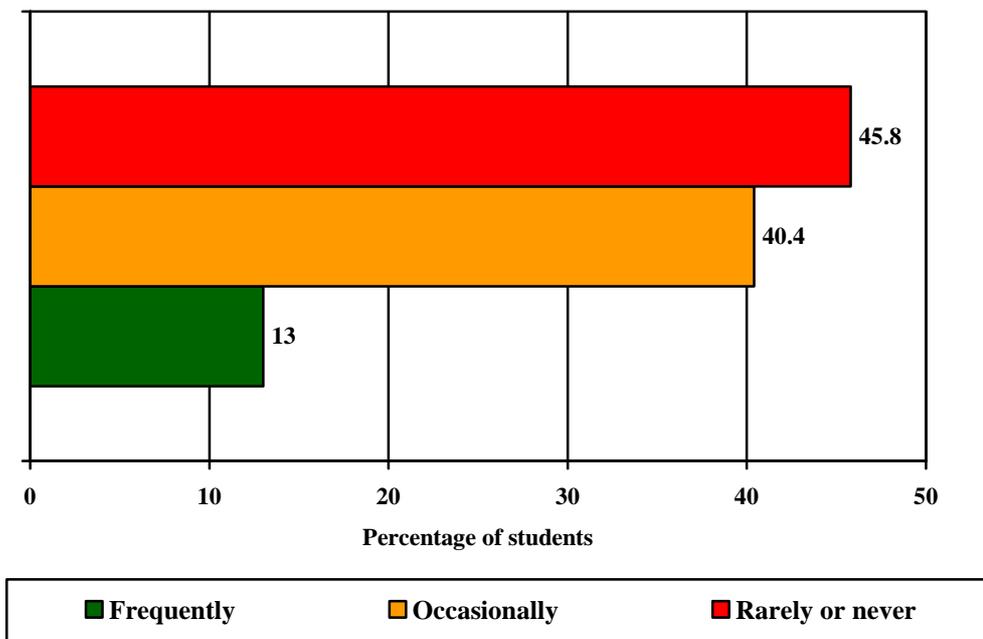
**Q23.a.v. Online assessment**



More than two-thirds of respondents “Rarely or never” have this type of assessment. It is used more often in year one than in any other year: one in six use it frequently and one in five use it occasionally. More than a quarter (28.5%) of second-year

students use it occasionally, while 9.0% use it frequently. Students' comments include: "Frequently: but it doesn't count towards final grade"; "Summative not cumulative"; "Once for a computer module".

**Q23.a.vi. Group work projects**



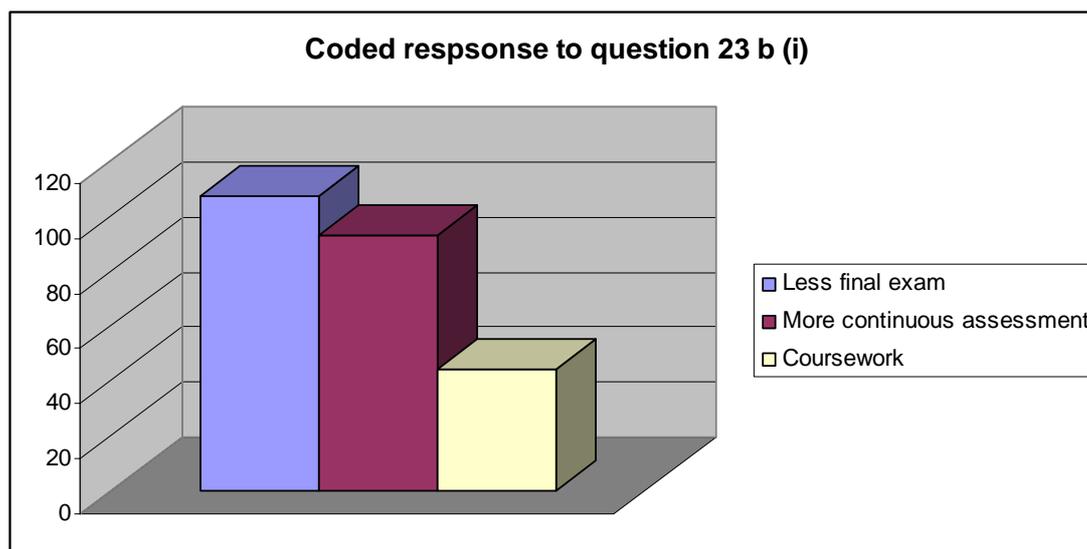
Group work projects was used more often in 2008 than in 2006: half of respondents in 2006 "Rarely or never" have group work project assessment, while in 2008 this number was 45.8%. This type of assessment is used more often in year four (17.1% use it frequently, 60.2% use it occasionally). It started to be used more often in postgraduate courses (in 2006 8.4% used it frequently, it was 11.5% in 2008).

Students' comments about group work assessment include: "Examinations and individual coursework reflect my level of knowledge, but group essays and presentations where only one mark is received for the group does not test individual knowledge, as quite frequently members of the group are at different standards"; "It depends on group members"; "Occasionally: good idea for year two applied modules with presentations for seminars"; "I have only done one group work in my time at university".

**Q23.b. How could the nature of assessment be improved so as (i) to provide a better test of your learning; (ii) to help you in your learning**

There were 727 responses to this question as students were asked to evaluate two different aspects of the assessment process; this has been split into two sections.

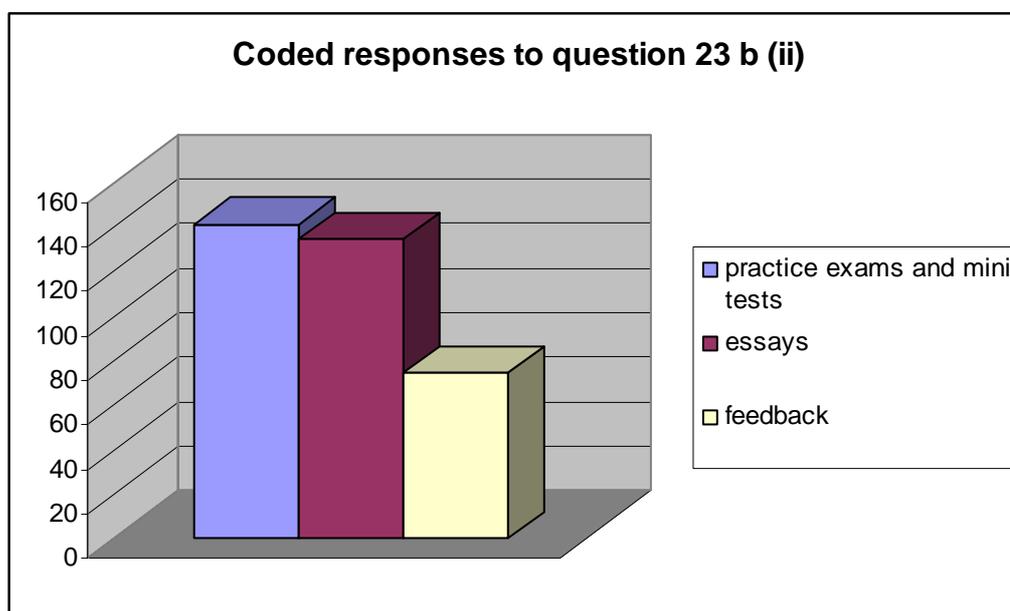
**(i) To provide a better test of your learning**



Many of the students comment on the need for more frequent and continuous testing so that there is less reliance on the final exam, as this can be stressful and not necessarily a good measure of their performance throughout the year: “Less weight on final exam”; “Less weight on the end-of-year exams and more weight on essays”; “That it is not fully reliant on one individual exam”; “I personally feel that final exams do not accurately test how much you know about a topic and your ability. I think smaller tests throughout the year would be better as a way of testing you on each area of the module”; “Less modules that rest solely on one exam. If you have a brilliant year and a bad day you get a bad grade”; “I believe that continuous assessment could be the solution for both these questions”; “More credit given to ongoing course assessment rather than to exams. When continuously working during the term you acquire more knowledge than in exam conditions – a lot of externalities can influence the result”; “More frequent testing on smaller sections of the module as too much in entire module to be tested on fairly in one end-of-year test”; “No 100% exams in third year (we are already under enough stress!)”.

Coursework is suggested by many as a way of breaking assessment up: “It would be better if we were offered more independent coursework rather than 100% end-semester exam. This can help students to develop their own interested part of the course. 100% exam may not indicate the ability of the students due to likely high exam situation pressure”; “Coursework is not used for assessment, which makes it hard to focus when doing it. Should influence final degree”; “Coursework set that counts towards the final mark of a module would be helpful to those who don't do well under short time constraints (exams)”.

**(ii) To help you in your learning**



In terms of improving their learning students commented on how they thought that they would benefit from more frequent tests and practice exams, getting feedback from work handed in and doing more essays.

Students suggest improvement for assessment to aid their learning so that they can be better prepared for exams and monitor their own progress: “By providing old exams it has helped me to prepare for my exams yet I still want more hours at the exam!”; “Have progress tests that do not count to the end-of-year mark instead which gives a rough indication of what level you are currently working at”; “Maybe more non-assessed essays to give us some practice”; “Providing the correct solutions to past papers would greatly aid many people’s understanding of issues”.

For similar reasons, many students said that the assessment could be improved by proving greater feedback: “Much more feedback is needed on what points are good, and where improvements need to be made”; “Blanket feedback on general improvements during the year, things that need attention, pointers on advancing grades, probably an end-of year-interview/review with tutor or lecturer.

Finally, many students commented on how essays were beneficial for their learning as it meant that would spend longer researching the subject and hence obtain more in-depth knowledge: “Essays which provides deeper knowledge of the subject than exams”; “Essays are a good way of researching and getting a deeper understanding of concepts”.

Nevertheless, there were some who were pleased overall with their assessment process and made some positive comments: “Current assessments are really good”; “The combination of assessed coursework and exams works well, the format of exams also allows for a certain degree of specialisation which is excellent for letting you study the subjects you find most enjoyable”; “I find that the form of testing is on the most part very good. I also like the incentive that if you do well on the tests then you

are exempt from the final exam at the end of the year. It means that you are encouraged to work throughout the year rather than cramming at the end”.

#### **Q24. What economics software is used in your degree? Please comment on how useful you have found the software**

The next group of questions were dedicated to the use of information technology in Economics education. We asked students about the types of Economics software used in their degree and invited comments on its usefulness. We also asked if their degree makes use of VLEs and how effective they are in supporting their learning, as well as how this effectiveness could be improved.

Students’ comments on the usefulness of Economics software should be considered in conjunction to their answers on what software is used in their degree.

All respondents answered this question and about a quarter of them said that they either did not use any software or were not aware of using it. The majority of those who use Economics software use Stata 15.1% (21.1%), e views 20.6% (27.5%), microfit 3.86% (5.14%), SPSS 1.9% (2.6%), winEcon 1.9% (2.6%) and minitab 1.7% (2.4%).

Students comments on Stata: “Very useful for dissertation”; “In my first and second year it seemed pointless and I didn't understand its relevance, but in the third year it has been very useful after all”; “Very difficult but useful”; “Very useful in demonstrating the practical use of the econometric theory that we are learning in lectures”; “It’s very good but confusing at first to understand”; “Good and effective way of learning how to analyse data”; “Stata is somewhat a bit complicated, however I have only just begun using the software”; “V. important knowledge for future career. Would have preferred to learn about Stata at an earlier stage”.

Comments on E views: “I have found it useful for understanding regressions and completing projects”; “EViews is absolutely worthless and a waste of time. Stata is very useful”; “It would be more useful if we had exercitations in computing room (we had only one hour)”.

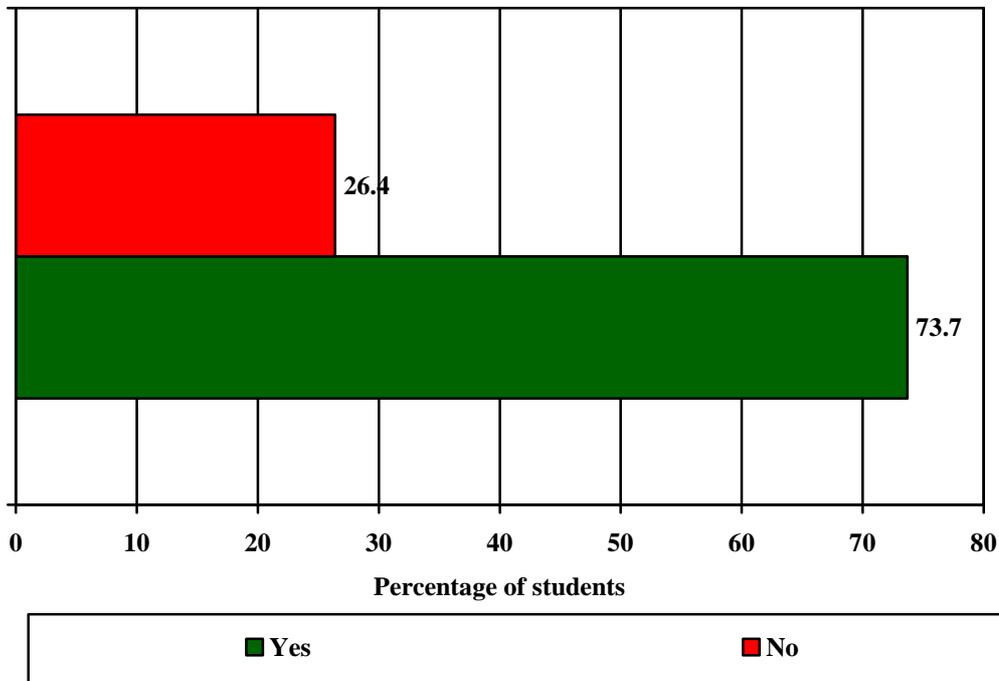
Comments on microfit: “Good in general. Crashes too easily”; “Very simple to use and has the key diagnostics generated alongside main results, but seems to crash quite often”; “It is of average use and prone to crashes”.

Comments on SPSS: “SPSS was used on an IT project in my first year, and while it was an interesting diversion from the rest of the work I was doing, it was very much a diversion”; “SPSS is irritating, but the modules we cover seem to find relevance, complicated to use, not very useful”; “Very useful in mathematical/statistical courses”.

General comments: “Knowledge of the software is essential for a practising economist and also for completion of the dissertation. However, the Department only provides one workshop in the entire year.”

**Q25. Do the modules/units on your degree course make use of a 'Virtual learning environment' (VLE), such as WebCT or Blackboard?**

**Q25.a. If your course uses a VLE, comment on how effective you have found it in supporting your learning and how the effectiveness could be improved.**



All the respondents answered this question. It seems that number of courses using VLE have increased in 2008 compared to 2006. Among the respondents in 2008 73.7 % have VLEs used in their course, while this number was 67.0% in 2006. There are differences in the way various models/units make use of VLEs due to the year of study. Positive responses were highest from fourth year students – 82.1% answer “Yes” to this question, 77.4% from year two, 75.9% from year one, 71.4% from year three and 57.4% from postgraduates.

There were also statistically significant differences in the student’s answers due to their age. Mature students of 26 and older reported less positive, though improved use of VLEs (similar to 2006 results) – 65.3% (57.3% in 2006) of them use a VLE in their course compared to 75.1% of 18–21 year olds and 70.2% of 22–25 year olds. It may be that a higher proportion of mature students attend universities, which do not use VLEs in teaching, but this also could be due to a lower level of computer literacy of the mature students, an issue already discussed in this report.

The overall comments about VLEs is that they are very effective tools and comments are positive, although some do suggest that they are not used enough: “Yes. Good when lecturers know how to use and get notes and class questions up promptly.”

One of the main benefits that students refer to is that the easy access to lecture slides and notes. For some this helped them keep up with the lecture if they had been struggling, although many felt that sometimes the lecturers waited too long to put

them up: "It's very good to have the opportunity to print the slides of the lecture before the lecture, and for the reading of seminar papers as well"; "It is very effective because it allows you to get lecture notes, you can post questions if you are struggling and it also shows announcements of things like upcoming tests"; "It's handy to have the lecture slides uploaded on the VLE and to be able to discuss organisational questions related to the course"; "Mostly effective, some lecturers wait too long to put slides, etc. up".

Others comment on how it is useful to access lecture notes if they have missed the lecture, although some suggest that this discourages attendance: "It has helped if I've missed a lecture and need to catch up"; "It provides the lecture slides, so that you don't have to write it all out in the lecture, just add extra bits"; "WebCT doesn't encourage lecture attendance when the notes are very similar to the content, so when a little extra teaching is necessary it is easy to miss".

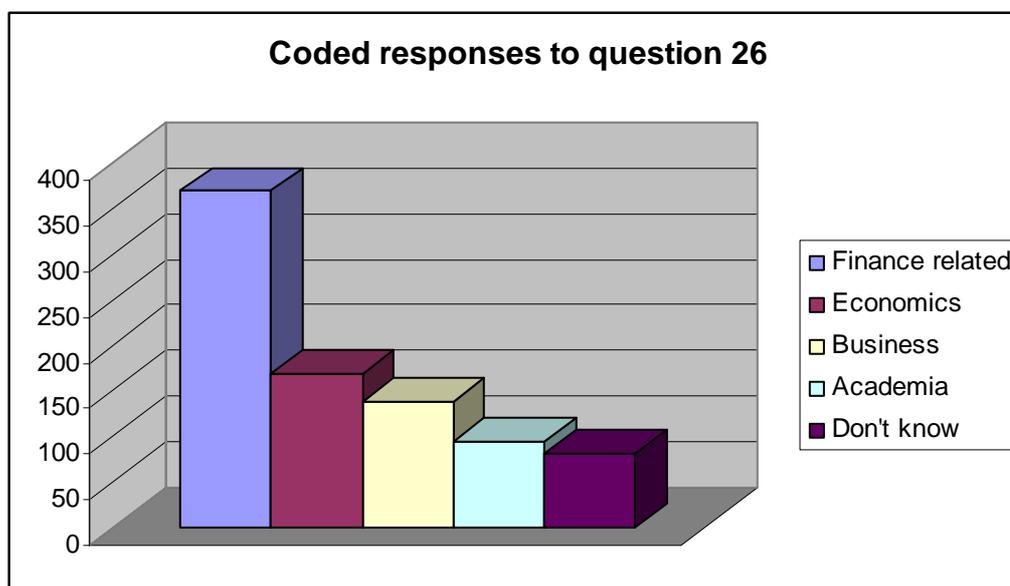
However, some feel that just having lectures notes is not enough, and the VLEs can be used as a source of additional information and readings: "Additional reading could be suggested for every topic, for example." When this is done it is received very positively: "It is really good for it saves time to search for the reading on your own and generally follow the course."

VLEs are also used as a tool for communication and discussion: "Very effective as can ask questions on it and have the lecturer answer them"; "Very useful when there are discussions on topics learnt in lectures"; "Very effective as the discussion boards tend to have FAQs and lecturers or tutors tend to reply very quickly"; "It is really good as most lecturers put up notes and communicate and you know if you happen to misplace something you can find it again by just clicking on Blackboard"; "Think it is a very easy way for communication to occur and allows for availability if resources no matter where you are".

In particular, students have commented on being able to keep up to date by checking for announcements: "Very effective for keeping up to date with work to be done and enables you to find lecture notes, answers to web tests, workshop answers and current announcements to your course"; "I am only using Blackboard to look at announcements that have been posted and to download any worksheets".

Suggestions for improvement are generally around more active use. In particular, they suggest more use of discussion boards, putting on extra tests and solutions to problem set in seminars, as well as being used consistently throughout courses: "Improvement can be made via more online discussions (interaction)"; "Would prefer to make better use of the communication tools in it however"; "Secondly, the announcements about lecture for e.g. change of room could be told earlier"; "They could post up mini, unmarked tests for you to try out. They should post up all lecture notes for the week at the end of the month or semester so students have all the notes"; "More example questions and solutions could be put up"; "Not all professors use this tool, it isn't really consistently implemented"; "The system at my university is fairly good, yet I feel exam papers should be readily available with ANSWERS as some people learn mainly from exam papers. Information must be kept up to date. Information when necessary such as lecturers' names and office rooms should ALWAYS BE AVAILABLE, in some cases I wasted time phoning university and searching on university website"; "Not all the modules on my course use the VLE. In those modules it has been much more difficult to learn about the subject. So I propose that all modules should use the VLE".

## Q26. What career do you hope to follow?



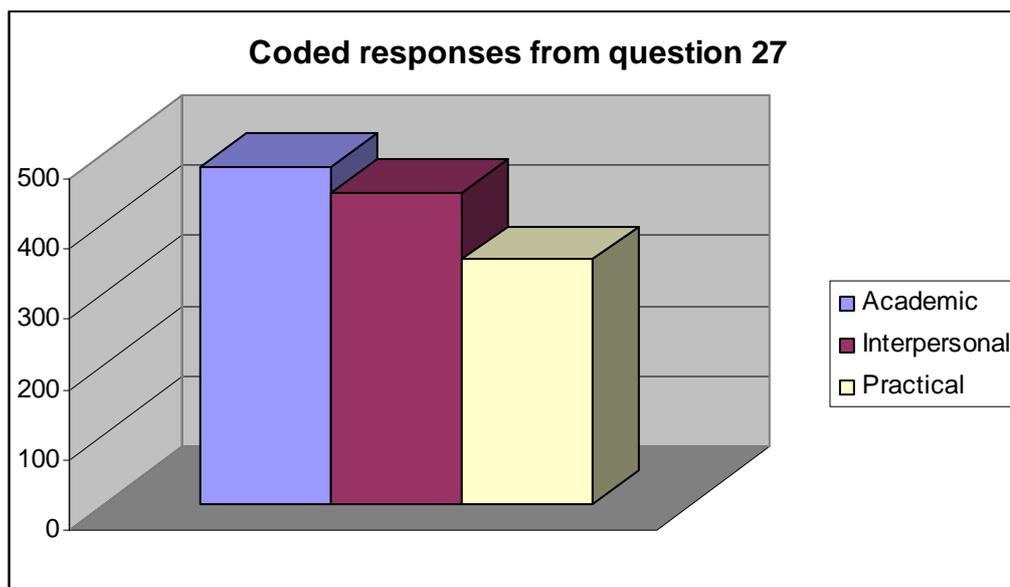
Over half of the respondents answered this question (1267). The responses to this question were similar to the responses in the 2006 survey. The majority report to have decided on a future career although there were a few who were undecided. The majority aspire towards a finance related career, including investment banking, insurance or accountancy,

Others expressed an interest in business including marketing and business, management and consultancy.

Some considered a career in Economics, which were generally divided by those who wanted to work in government and those who considered a career in academia or teaching.

## Q27. What skills have you developed by studying for your degree that you feel will be useful to you in your career after you have graduated?

All the respondents answered and nearly all said that they had gained some skills. The comments were mainly divided between academic, interpersonal and practical. Academic skills included analytical and critical thinking, mathematical techniques, research and independent study and essay writing.



Typical responses were: “Ability to analyse matters in a concise and objective way”; “Analytical skills – ability to critically analyse and question material”; “Time management, analytical skills, reading academic material in large quantities”.

Interpersonal include teamwork, communication and presentation skills. Students also report that they have acquired skills of time management and organisation: “I’m more confident, not afraid of asking questions and know how to cooperate with others in a group”.

More practical skills reported included: problem solving, numerical skills and computer work, particularly analysing statistical data and applying their knowledge to the real world.

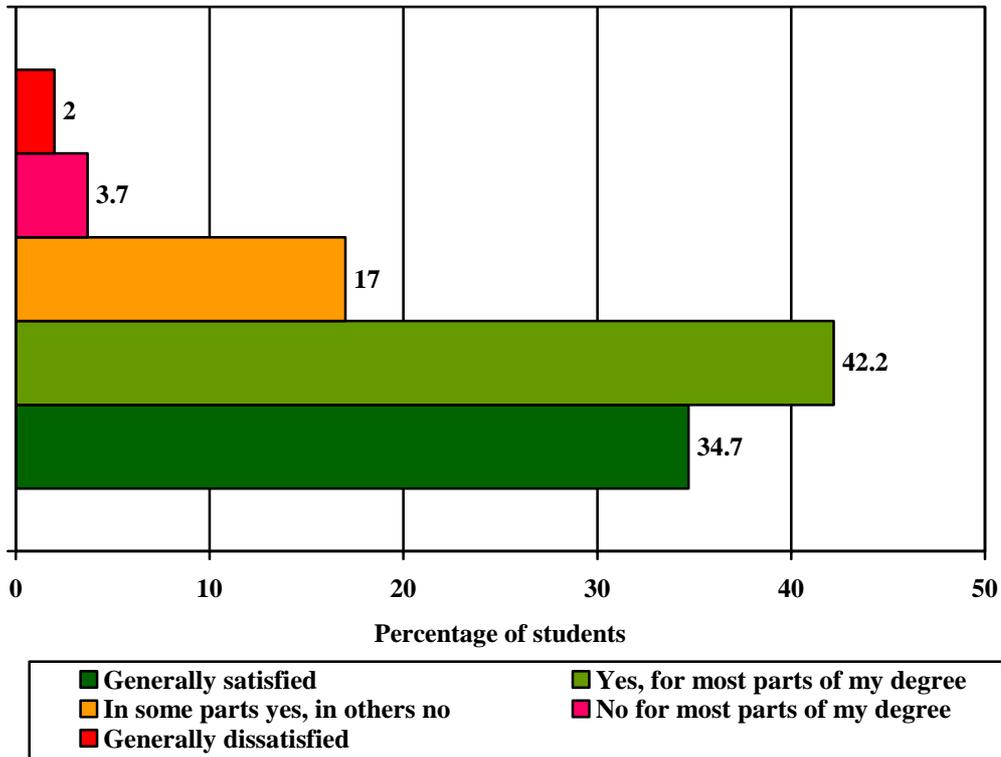
Finally, for some an important skill developed in their degree was self-confidence and dealing with stress: “Confidence in developing own ideas, presentation skills, time management, coping under pressure.”

### **Q28. Overall, are you satisfied with the quality of this degree course?**

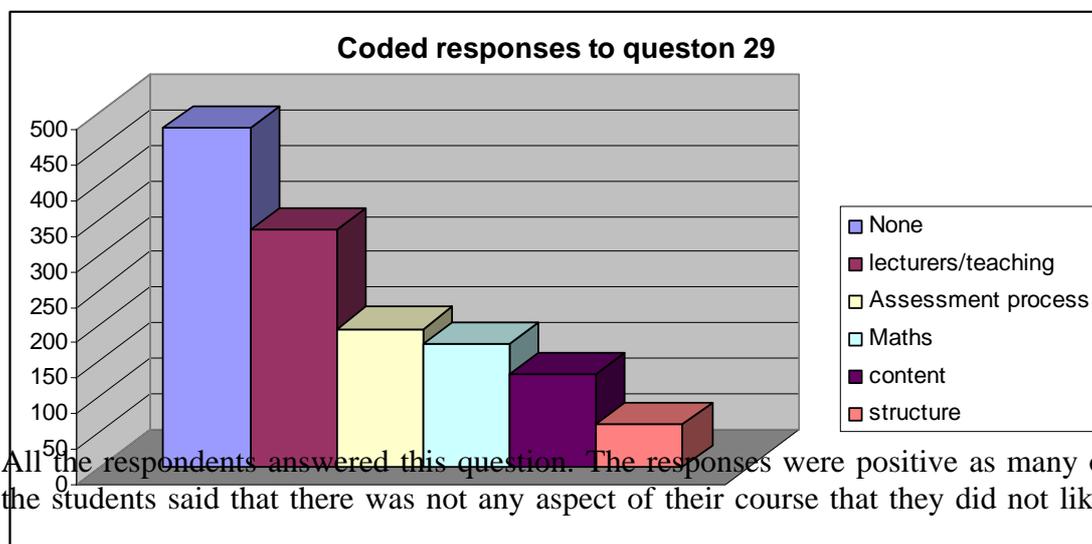
More than three-quarters of respondents are satisfied with their degree course, which is similar to the results of the National Students Survey and to the results of our previous surveys.

In their comments students stress various positive and negative aspects of their degree course: “I am, but I know that a lot of people aren’t, perhaps because I appreciate the idiosyncrasies of the lecturers more while others want as consistent and clear teaching as they had in high school which I feel is unrealistic and detracts from the purpose and charm of studying at university”; “I don’t feel there is enough support at times”; “I have thoroughly enjoyed my degree”; “I have no doubt about the capability and knowledge of the class teachers. However, some of the class teachers’ first language is not English and this is a major problem when the teacher is unable to understand our questions or be able to answer our queries sufficiently”; “Large variation in quantities of work required for different modules that are worth the same number of credits”; “On the whole I am: however I think there are large areas that should be re-examined by the university, which could greatly improve it. For example

the structure of the department changed, so that a personal tutor is allocated for each student and will build a relationship with that student over the course of his/her degree and be the first port of call regarding any problems or general queries. The course would benefit from smaller tutorial groups and some form of 'teacher training' for lecturers, as some are substandard”.



**Q29. Are there any aspects of your course that you do not like?**



All the respondents answered this question. The responses were positive as many of the students said that there was not any aspect of their course that they did not like.

However, there were areas that students had identified as problematic, including the teaching quality, assessment process, the Maths, and finally the content and structure of the course.

The criticisms of the teaching quality reflected similar criticisms made in previous questions. Students are critical of the infrequent contact time, the lecturers for their lack of teaching skills and poor grasp of English: “The lack of contact with lecturers and tutorial leaders”; “Lecturers who can't speak English properly – very hard to follow their teaching. It's definitely bad when you learn more from reading through the lecturer's PowerPoint slides than actually attending the lecture”; “The seminar tutor should speak better English, a strong Chinese accent makes it sometimes very hard to follow, even for my English native speaking friends”.

Students also are critical of the lecturers' attitude, claiming that they are not student centred but more concerned with their own research, and by neglecting their teaching duties they can make the lectures boring and lacking in interaction: “Find many of the lecturers unstimulating and unwilling to help – more concerned with being at the uni to undertake research projects. Lack of real interaction with lecturers”; “The monotony of lectures”; “The lectures are extremely boring”; “Not much of communication between lecturers and students”; “Sometimes, teacher don't focus on student”; “I feel some lecturers are a bit lazy. Not all lecturers make the lecture content available before the lecture and this is a problem for me. I have asked my tutor to ask about this matter, but nothing has been done as yet”; “I find most of the lecturers to be quite dull and they do not manage to get the points across”; “There are too few lectures and also I do not find lectures conducive towards a good learning environment and should be improved to generate more audience interaction and discussion somehow”.

Students commented on how they did not like the assessment process. There were comments about how they did not like an assessment system too heavily weighted on a final exam, which was only testing memory and tended to fall at the same time: “Dependence of some modules on parrot fashion exams”; “Exams and test very close together for different modules than long periods of time with none”; “The examination at the end of the year with only two essays handed in throughout the year, may not be enough to give sufficient feedback”; “The amount of weight attached to the summer exams”; “The weighting of exams/coursework; there was far too much weighting on exams for the final year”; “Lots of stress with coursework and exams”; “100% weighting on eight exams at the end of third year”.

Others comment on how the lack of feedback makes it difficult to monitor progress throughout: “Lack of support and feedback. Have no concept of what level you are working at until you have your grade, and at that point, there is little you can do to change your performance.” There were also many references to the marking scheme as vague and arbitrary: “Vague nature of assessments”; “Marks are effectively given out of 70 for many assessed pieces of work, particularly exams, which does not accurately reflect the work produced”; “Marking scheme is sometimes unclear and very subjective”.

Another key theme that came up frequently was the dislike for Maths in the course, some saying it was too difficult, or boring: “The more maths-orientated aspects tend to be too complex”; “The Maths part does not really, at the moment, relate to general economic aspects, again just random topics”; “In some modules there is a too great a reliance on Mathematics, which is great if you're a mathematician but

for the economists it generally goes over your head. Maybe spending more time on explaining the Maths may help or having lower reliance on Maths”; “Microeconomic Maths was a waste of time; I don't see how that is ever going to be of any use in my future career”; “I don't like my probability course, it is too hard, and no one really understands it, it really makes the lecture boring, and everyone starts worrying about their final exams”.

There were other comments on the actual content of the course, some saying that they didn't actually like economics itself and some saying that they didn't like particular modules. Many respondents said that the course was boring and not related to the real world: “Boring Politics modules that go to slowly”; “Purely theoretical aspects that have no real-world/practical application”; “Lack of application to real world”; “Sometimes things did not refer to the real world and was difficult to fully understand some issues”.

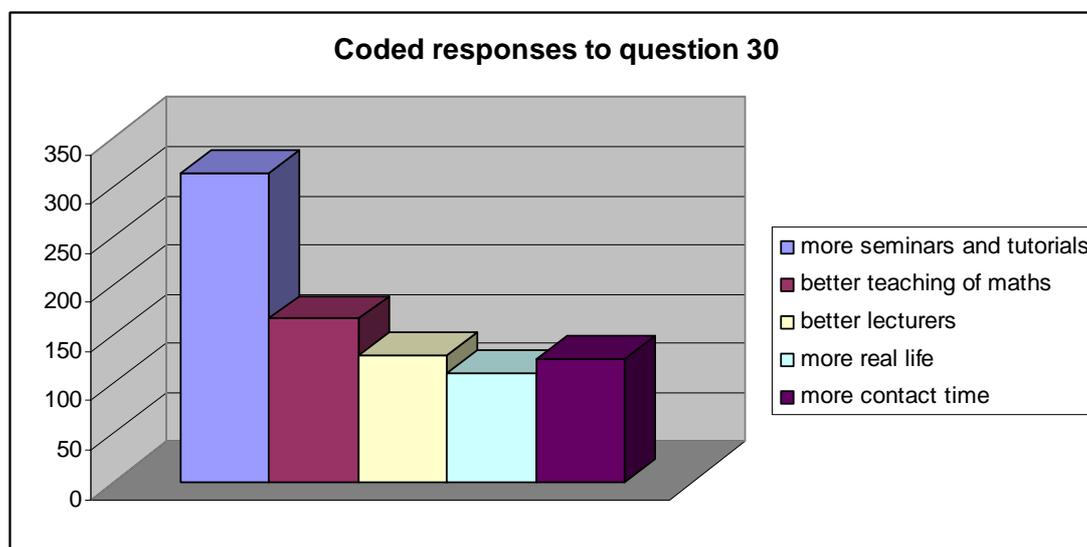
Other more specific suggestions about the course content included: “Too Americanised, i.e. the textbook and examples are all based on US examples. This also means a huge bias towards free market economics”; “An overemphasis on purely mainstream theories tends to lock some courses in ‘faux oppositions’ (e.g. Monetarism vs Keynesianism, which despite their apparent differences are very similar in their limitations)”; “A lack of attention on alternative paradigms limits students' views on economic issues. Marxist economics and especially Austrian economics should be more tolerated to allow students that are interested to pursue them”.

The students also complained about the structure of the course, in particular the little choice over modules, or lack of organisation and constant changes to the course: “There was a limited choice of modules in my final year – would have preferred a greater range so that I didn't have to choose modules that I am not interested in”; “Very disorganised – that throughout my time here the structure is changing every year”; “Constant changes to degree course, often with little or no consultation with students”; “Poor structure, difficult to seek help and hard to understand the course guide”; “Very unorganised department”; “Lack of module options”; “Generally poor organisation and structure to degree course”.

Other comments about aspects of the course included group work: “I do not like group projects. This is because it is not like how it would be when working for a business because if you do not pull your weight then you get the sack. Whereas in university some people do not show up for meetings and sponge off what the rest of the group has done”; “Group work seems pointless if some members aren't committed, in which case I would prefer to do the work on my own.

Several students also commented on the workload, most saying it was too heavy or not equally spread: “The workload is too heavy – does not allow enough time for information and learning to sink in”; “Workload was heavy, exam periods were very stressful”; “Heavy workload – no time for anything except work and study. Quite frustrating really”; “Workload is not equally distributed”. However, a few did say it was actually too light: “You've got too much free time. Sometimes I get the feeling that I'm wasting my time and that this degree could be done much quicker. But that's probably just because I went to a French school where there was a lot more work to do”.

**Q30. Please identify one or two aspects of your degree course that could be improved and say why**



All the respondents answered this question. The majority of the responses are concerned with the quality of teaching, particularly of Maths and the amount of contact time that they have. There are many comments about improving the teaching through having smaller groups and more seminars and tutorials. Typical responses are: “Having more tutorial, it is easy for us to understand the course material in reduced groups”; “More tutorials would be better, allowing for more discussion”; “Smaller tutorial sizes for better interaction with the tutor”; “More seminar time for each module”.

Many comment on the need to increase contact and teaching time, saying that sometimes there is not enough time to deal with all the aspects of the course”; “One aspect could be to have more of teaching hours”; “More hours more teaching instead of reading”; “More hours in class and less outside work”; “The lecture hours can be increased because I think there isn’t enough examples in the class”; “Two-hour tutorials, simply because none of my tutorials so far finished on time, not to mention to time for asking questions”.

Of particular concern for students is the teaching of Maths and Stats and many comment on the need for improvement: “Maths needs to be gone over more often as at the moment it is inadequate.” Some suggest that this can be improved by offering extra support for those who have not done A-level Maths: “The teaching of Maths. We are just given equations and expected to know how to work them out. I don’t have the Maths background to do this. Tutorials on Maths should be given throughout the three years of the degree and should teach the Maths before it’s required in the lecturers. The lecturing of the course, the lecture slots are too long and many of the lecturers aren’t very good at teaching the information effectively”; “There could be better teaching of Maths and Statistics for those that never took A-level Maths”; “More help with Maths/Stats, generally more student support”; “A slower pace and step by step instruction/guide for the Maths”; “Maths teaching could be split into groups of who has done A-level Maths and who hasn’t”.

Others suggest that the teaching can be improved by adopting different teaching methods. Suggestions of this sort tend to fall into two categories, those that suggest more interactive methods and those that suggest more practical problem-based learning: “Mathematics could be improved upon. Lectures only just cover the material. More practice/problems are needed”; “Use of more interactive material to engage the pupils to participate within lectures and seminars both with each other as well as faculty”; “More interactive elements to tutorials occasionally, such as games, experiments, role-play”; “More problem based”; “May improve on adding more practical experiments and use of other software, such as Bloomberg. It will then help us improve employability”.

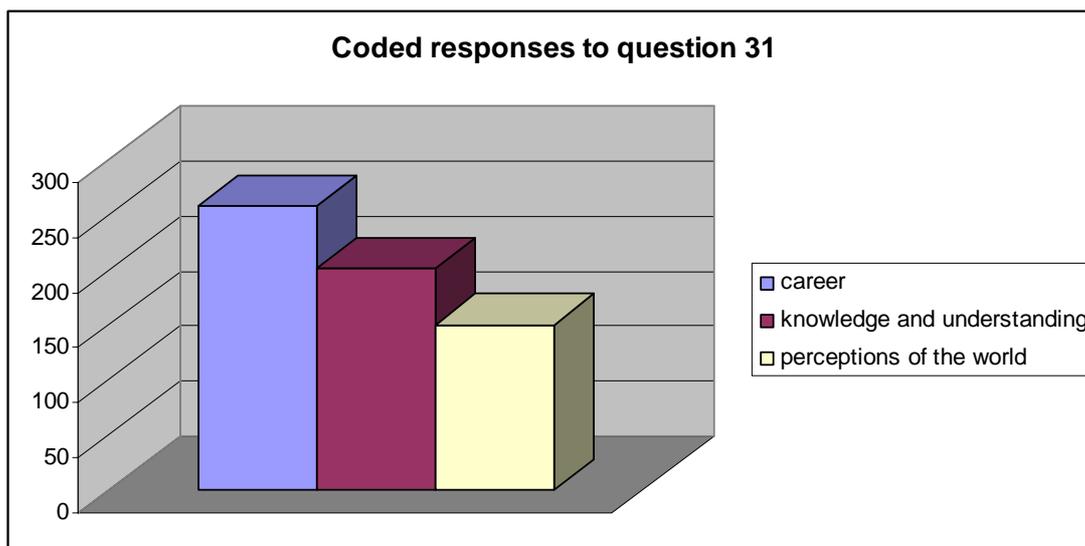
Many comment on the need to improve the lecturers by either employing those with better teaching skills or giving them extra training. In particular, students comment on the need for lecturers to speak better English and be more enthusiastic and interesting: “I think that lecturers should be screened or something before they are allowed to lecture because one of the lecturers I have for an accounting module currently does not really seem to know what he is on about and generally manages to confuse everyone”; “Lecturers need to have more training on how to teach”; “Sometimes the lecturers need to be more enthusiastic”; “Improving the teaching skills of lecturers and then the subject can be understood better”; “Some lecturers are difficult to understand as their English isn’t fluent enough and so they can’t explain everything as easily and clearly as someone who studied English to a advanced standard”; “Lecturers – some seem to have very poor grasp of English”; “Tutors with English is their first language and educated in Britain”; “Making lectures more interesting, so regular attendance is more likely – it’s really hard to keep up with the workload when you start skipping lectures because they’re boring”.

Students suggest that the interest in the course would improve greatly if there was “more real-world relevance”: “Make some modules rely more on background knowledge and give credit to life experiences. Relate the work more to real-life examples”; “To be showed how the things we learnt relate to the real world, i.e. with real companies”; “One aspect could be to relate more things to everyday life, or relate things currently happening to the course, e.g. Northern Rock”; “Relate economic theory to relevant and current events”; “Perhaps more use of examples on how the theory relates to the real world could aid the understanding of the students.”

Students suggest that their degree could be improved by more feedback and continuous assessment: “More examinations through the term so as to assess our current situation along with more interactive tutorials”; “Feedback so students know whether they need to improve the level at which they are working at”; “Better feedback on exam assessments can indicate where exactly you lost marks, especially useful for courses that have follow-on options in a later year”.

Finally, students say that the course could be improved by allowing for more optional courses and choices in modules: “Provide more optional subjects for students... because I don’t like studying only accounting and economics all the time”; “More variety of modules as it is limited”; “More variety in specific subjects to choose from (e.g. in Politics areas, be able to choose from more than just a few modules)”.

**Q31 Has the course changed you? For example, ideas, career choice, perceptions of the world**



There were 896 responses to this question. The answers to this question were overwhelmingly positive. The main themes that came up were career, perceptions of the world and knowledge and understanding. (Two of these were prompts in the question.) Comments about career choice tended to refer to how students' degrees had helped them work out what they wanted to do. Typical comments included: "I started out thinking I would just 'end up in the city', but have become enthralled with Economics in general and hope to now continue my studies to PhD standard"; "It has helped determine my career path. Considering that I am going into investment banking. I am going to work for an investment bank next year, something I never thought I'd do before coming here".

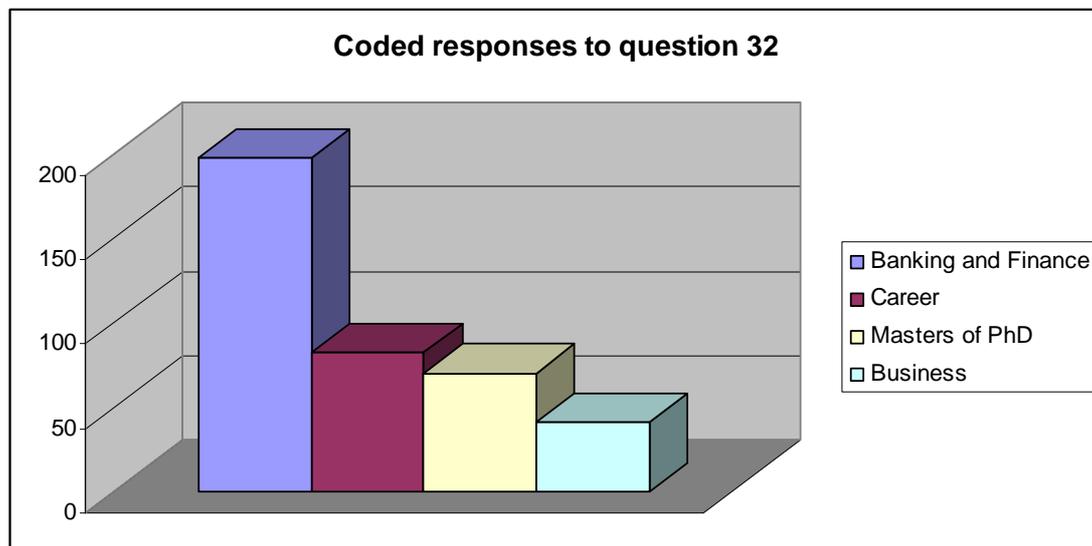
Students commented on how the degree had improved their knowledge and understanding of Economics: "I have a better understanding of how the world operates"; "Given me a wider appreciation and understanding of economy as a whole and what influences what, which will help in marketing later on"; "It has made me understand and have opinions on a lot more of what goes on in the news, particularly in the economic and business environments". This, some said, has made them more interested in current affairs: "It has made me think more about the economy... I now read the *Financial Times* to keep up!"; I am more interested in reading the newspaper and keeping up to date with the happenings in the rest of the world"; "More aware of current affairs and the role Economics plays in the world today"; "I now have a greater understanding of the 'credit crunch' for example".

Students comment on how they have changed their perceptions of the world and political views since studying the course: “I feel my political views have become more centrist and I am not as confident to state my opinion”; “Has change my perceptions of the world and in some ways my political views concerning party economic policy”; “The course has changed my perceptions of the world, and made me more aware of the global situations”.

Other factors that students referred to as having changed them included some personal qualities such as confidence or maturity: “Has helped mature my thinking and behaviour”; “More mature and open minded”; “More confident within myself”; “The course has changed me. I have become much more open and self-confident”.

Finally, although there weren’t many negative remarks, the few that there were often related to the disappointment with HE institutions more generally: “It has changed the way I perceive top universities. My university is quite high up in the rankings and yet the teaching quality is abysmal”; “More cynical about higher education and how students are viewed by universities. I feel universities look at us like we have pound signs on our heads rather than as customers they need to provide with a service. I think they also prioritise things such as reputation and research interests over providing a good undergraduate degree course”.

**Q32 Where do you think you’ll be in five years?**



There were 874 responses to this question. The responses were similar to that in the career question. The majority of the respondents said that they would see themselves working in the banking or financial sector, for example as an investment banker or accountant.

Some students made quite general remarks, saying that they saw themselves pursuing a general career path: “In a good career”; “Hopefully will be working in a full time job with lots of pay and good career prospects”; “In a high paid job”.

Other comments were related to pursuing further study or working in business-related occupation.

### **Q33. Any other comments**

There were 153 responses to this question. The comments to this question were generally positive, and most comments were about how students overall enjoyed the course, typical comments being: “I do enjoy my Economics degree here at Lancaster and do love the subject. I have been critical but only to improve the course for the future”; “I think the standard of teaching in the Economics department at the University of Aberdeen is excellent. The lecturers are really good at what they do and are always willing to help if we do not understand something”.

Many other comments were thanks for the opportunity to participate in the survey: “Thanks for giving me the chance to participate”; “Thanks for asking me these questions. It is nice to stop and think about one's feelings from time to time”; “Interesting survey, looking forward to the results”; “Thanks for your survey... it's food for thought!"

## Conclusions

As in the previous surveys, we were impressed by the maturity of students' comments and by their awareness of teaching and learning issues in Economics. In many ways results of the survey were similar to the 2006 findings but there were some noticeable positive changes: more courses are making use of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs); more students experience interactive forms of seminars/tutorials/classes like games and simulations; and more group work projects and group assessment were used in the Economics degrees.

More than 2000 students from 68 departments took part in the online survey, including both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Of the respondents:

- 54.6% were male and 45.4% were female;
- 80.0% started their courses under the age of 21;
- 68.2% stated that English is their first language;
- 67.9% have an A-level in Maths;
- 60.5% have an A-level in Economics;
- 82.6% stated that Economics was their first choice.

The survey was intended as an observational study and not as a controlled experiment. All the acquired data is confidential and only aggregated national results were included in this report. All the participating institutions with more than 20 respondents will receive a confidential report.

Students' responses to the quantitative survey questions were examined using standard statistical methods. Differences in responses were examined by gender, age of entry, year/level of study, A-level Economics, A-level Mathematics, English as the first language and choice of course. Relationships that are statistically significant at the 0.05 levels were discussed.

Responses to each of the qualitative questions were coded and aggregated for analysis using N-Vivo software. In the report, for illustrative purposes we include graphs, which were based on the codes, summarised in terms of their frequency and typical quotes from students' responses.

Questions from our previous 2006 survey were used with a new added section "About your previous learning experience". Before starting on this course 73.0% of respondents studied in the UK. Those new to UK came mostly from (in order) China, Germany, France, Poland, Lithuania, India and the USA. Students mention the good reputation of UK universities, good level of education, the country itself and English language as the strongest factors in their decision to come to the UK.

Comparing their current course with their previous learning experience, nearly two-thirds of the respondents found contact with lecturers to be either different or very different; more than half found teaching methods, student support, and e-learning and the use of IT to be different or very different; and more than a third found assessment to be different or very different. They mention bigger emphasis on independent learning, larger groups, less interaction and less contact time. They commented on the lack of continuous assessment and the degree to which it was weighted in the final exams. The majority noted less frequent and limited contact with lecturers.

Responses about previous learning experiences were different between those who came from abroad and those who studied in the UK. Starting a university course was a big change for all respondents, but particularly for international students who also have to adjust to another country.

The majority of respondents (64.6%) agree that they were adequately prepared for their current course, and studying on it has met expectations for three-quarters of students.

Those who replied that their expectations were not met were asked to explain in what ways the course differed from their expectations. Overall, most of the students commented on how they had expected a higher level from the course. The main identified themes were: quality of teaching, contact hours and feedback, course content and structure, and relevance to the real world. Among the comments: “The quality of teaching is much worse than I expected”; “Expected more direct contact with lecturers and tutors”; “Expected it to be harder and challenging”; “I would have appreciated learning more about current real-life debates in Economics”.

When asked about the best aspects of the course, respondents pointed to the quality of teaching, the choices and flexibility of the courses and modules and the career prospects: “Excellent teachers: have a deep knowledge of the subject and know how to transmit it to the students;” “Course content and depth”; “Fair division of group and individual work”; “Very close to what it takes in the real world”; “Very challenging. Good for getting a job”. The social aspect of the degree was mentioned by a significant number of respondents: “Meeting different people from all over the world”; “Meeting people with similar interests to myself”. The answers were similar to the ones given in the previous student surveys.

We gave students a list of activities, from formal lectures to informal work with other students, and asked which they find useful in supporting their learning. Most of the activities were rated “useful or very useful” by at least half the respondents. For a breakdown of these responses, see the full report.

In seminars/tutorials/small classes, the vast majority go through pre-prepared problem sets or worksheets. At the same time about 75.7% rarely or never have games, simulations or role-play in seminars. Those who do have them rate them highly: “I think games or experiments could be useful in understanding concepts better”; “Games and experiments because their interactive basis helps learning become much easier”. When asked how the seminars could be improved, students suggest making them more interactive with more space for questions; and to run them more frequently in smaller classes and with better trained tutors. The methods of teaching come under particular criticism, with many students commenting on the need to improve the quality of teaching by having better qualified lecturers and teaching assistants: “I think the only improvement is to make sure that tutors are completely capable of teaching students!”; “The standard of teaching could be improved. Many seminar teachers are postgraduate students who are teaching purely for the money and are not good teachers”.

More than half of the respondents found teaching of Maths and Stats on their course to be good. Among the suggestions for the improvement of these courses were checking on prior knowledge, tutors being more sensitive to students’ learning needs, a larger number of workshop-style classes and more problem-based learning. Students complained that often they cannot understand the lecturers or tutors because of their

accent or poor use of English: “The lecturers must be able to SPEAK ENGLISH CLERLY [sic]”; “Better teaching especially use of English language!”

Two-thirds of respondents found the content of the degree largely relevant to the real world and the workload about right. Students also agree that the assessment on their degree accurately tests the level of their knowledge and understanding of the learning outcomes. When asked how the nature of assessment could be improved so as to provide a better test of their learning and to help them in their learning many students comment on the need for more frequent and continuous testing, so that there is less reliance on the final exam: “Less modules that rest solely on one exam. If you have a brilliant year and a bad day you get a bad grade”; “More credit given to ongoing course assessment rather than to exams”. In terms of improving their learning, students commented on how they thought that they would benefit from more frequent tests and practice exams and getting feedback from submitted work.

The number of respondents on courses that make use of VLEs has increased to 73.7%, compared to 67.0% in 2006. Almost all their comments describe VLEs positively, though some complain that they were underused: “It is very effective because it allows you to get lecture notes, you can post questions if you are struggling and it also shows announcements of things like upcoming tests.”

Overall, more than three-quarters of respondents were satisfied with the quality of their degree course. When asked about aspects of the course that they didn't like, many students were very positive about their course and could not point to any aspect that they did not like. However, others highlighted the problematic areas in teaching quality, assessment process, Maths and content and structure of the course.

When asked about aspects of the degree that could be improved, respondents again raised concerns about problems in teaching. Many commented on the need to increase contact and teaching time, adopt different teaching methods, improve general teaching skills: “Lecturers need to have more training on how to teach”; “Improve the teaching skills of lecturers and the subject can be understood better”; “ More interactive elements to tutorials occasionally, such as games, experiments, role-play”.

When respondents were asked how the course changes them, the answers were overwhelmingly positive. The main themes that came up were career, perceptions of the world, and knowledge and understanding: “I have a better understanding of how the world operates”; “The course has changed my perceptions of the world and made me more aware of the global situations”; “Has help matured my thinking and behaviour”.

In five years' time students see themselves working in the banking or financial sector, pursuing further study or working in a business-related occupation.

At the end of the survey in the ‘Any other comments’ section students left generally positive replies about how they enjoyed the course overall and/or giving thanks for the opportunity to participate in the survey and reflect on their learning.

One of the issues often mentioned by students, both in 2006 and in 2008, is misunderstanding by non-English lecturers of the UK education system and the level of knowledge one can expect from the students. Even though our survey was conducted with Economics students, we presume that it is an important issue for other disciplines as well and needs to be addressed at the university level. We have included advice for international class teachers in our *Handbook for Economics Teaching Assistants*, available from <http://www.economicnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/gta/>

We are aware of the different attitudes of lecturers to the growing number of international students in the classes: some see it as a benefit to students' learning while others point to the additional problems that situation creates. Students themselves in the survey mention growing internationalisation as one of the best aspects of the course. At the same time international students pointed to the same language issues raised by UK students: "The seminar tutor should speak better English, as a strong Chinese accent makes it sometimes very hard to follow, even for my English native speaking friends", and highlighted other problems that they had: "Please, think about all students, not just only British students. Foreigners are suffering for studying compared with British." (Note that Economics Network has commissioned a new Handbook chapter for lecturers dedicated to Internationalisation.)

The results of the survey could be used by the departments along with other sources of information to reflect on their own practices. We have no intention for the survey to be used as a ranking exercise. Comparison of data between universities may be misleading, as students differ in terms of personal, educational and family backgrounds, which may have a profound effect on their perceptions of learning.

National results that are provided in the report could, nevertheless, be used as a benchmark against which to compare a department's own (confidential) results.

Finding out about their previous learning experience will allow us to provide better support to new students through our website [Why Study Economics](#) and develop new resources for lecturers teaching international students. Comparing results with the previous years allow us to follow the changing picture of studying Economics in HE in the UK and better target our support to lecturers. In some cases, students' suggestions for improvements in the way courses are run, such as smaller class sizes or more contact time, would require extra resources. In other cases, however, their suggestions could be achieved through relatively small changes in practice, such as ways of using VLEs, classroom activities or teaching styles. The Economics Network is very happy to support lecturers in making changes.

The report also includes Appendices with the Economics Network Student Questionnaire and comparative data from BOS for 2006 and 2008 surveys

We hope that this survey will not only provide the Economics community with useful information, but will play an important role in the improvement of teaching and learning in Economics. The Economics Network will be happy to provide workshops and advice to interested departments on the issues raised by the survey.

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