



**Report on:**  
**'Stretch and Challenge'**  
**in the 16-19 Curriculum**

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# **Section 1**

## **Executive Summary**

# 1 Executive Summary

- The research outcomes represent the opinions of a cross-section of HE staff, and their perceptions concerning stretch and challenge in the pre-HE curriculum and the factors which might assist progression to HE.
- There was little perceived difference in current student preparedness by country of origin in the UK.

## **Differentiation mechanisms used by Universities in the admissions process**

- It was clear that HE valued evidence of skills and qualities derived from a range of sources as a part of holistic assessment.
- Overall, GCE A levels and AS were regarded as the best source of evidence, and continued to play an important role in progression to HE.
- The International Baccalaureate and Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher were also thought to provide a good source of evidence of a range of skills.
- Vocational qualifications were not highly regarded as sources of evidence of skills and qualities, and key/core skills rated lowest.
- Respondents valued interviews (where appropriate) and the personal statement and reference on the UCAS application.
- There was felt to be a worrying decline in the last five years in many skills, particularly written communication, numeracy, critical thinking and autonomous learning. There were, however, major improvements in ICT and presentation skills.
- The decline was attributable to a range of factors including lack of depth in the curriculum, issues over literacy and numeracy, and the impact of a modular approach to delivery and assessment, resulting in “spoon feeding” and “teaching to the test”.

## **Reason for student dropout**

- A variety of reasons was given for student dropout - motivation and personal factors predominated.
- There were significant issues of mismatch between the student and the course and between the student’s expectations and the reality.
- There were issues over lack of preparation for the transition to HE.
- Financial reasons also featured, but did not predominate.

## **Required differentiation**

- Differentiation was most needed for near-miss applicants at Confirmation.
- While differentiation was used to select high-ranking applicants for high-demand courses, there was nearly as much desire to differentiate lower-achieving applicants.

## **Evaluation of stretch and challenge initiatives**

- There was a desire to assess accurately non-standard qualifications such as Access to HE and international qualifications.
- Most respondents were aware of the concept of stretch and challenge.
- There was strong support for changes to A levels and the introduction of the Extended Project.

- However, enthusiasm for reforms was not reflected in an intention to use the outcomes for selection e.g. A\* grade in A level would only be used by a third of respondents.
- There was little support for the use of HE modules.
- There was little interest in the introduction of overarching awards such as Diplomas.
- Unit grade information was likely to be widely used e.g. for near-miss applicants at Confirmation.
- A majority of respondents also wanted to receive UMS marks in addition to unit grades.
- The IB was felt to offer more stretch and challenge than A levels.
- There was a desire for greater HE involvement in the development of the 14-19 curriculum and the design of examination questions.
- HE could also work with schools to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum prepared students appropriately for study in HE.
- There was little interest in admissions tests.
- There was evidence of the potential value for HE of the evidence from the Extended Project, the integration of AEA demand into A2 assessment, the use of unit grades, the use of more open-ended questions, and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of A\*.



## **Section 2**

### **Introduction, Research Objectives and Methodology**

## 2 Introduction

Proposals for increasing stretch and challenge were presented in the 14-19 White Paper published by the DfES in February 2005. The primary focus was to introduce a range of different initiatives to facilitate development of a broader range of skills which would in turn provide better preparation for entry to HE and allow for increased differentiation among top performing students.

The Council for the Curriculum Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) is a unique educational body in the UK, bringing together the three areas of curriculum, examinations and assessment. It advises Government on what should be taught in Northern Ireland's schools and colleges. It also monitors standards, ensuring that the qualifications and examinations offered by awarding bodies in Northern Ireland are of an appropriate quality and standard and is itself Northern Ireland's leading awarding body.

The CCEA is interested in investigating the meaning of 'stretch and challenge' as defined by HEI staff at institutions who receive applications from Northern Irish students. As it is believed that HEIs will use certain criteria to differentiate amongst high attaining applicants they wish to explore this area in order to obtain guidance as to how 'stretch and challenge' should best be implemented within the 16-19 curriculum.

The CCEA Ireland requested feedback from UCAS member institutions on the preparation of students who are applying to enter higher education and the role that aspects of stretch and challenge could play in reforms implemented by CCEA in the future.

The UCAS Research Team was commissioned to obtain this feedback through a combination of in-depth interviews, and questionnaires. Between October and November 2006 the UCAS Research Team conducted in-depth Interviews to ascertain how well the Stretch and Challenge (S&C) initiative will prepare students for HE study and provide evidence for differentiation among high achieving students. The results from these interviews are provided in Section 3 of this document.

In December 2006 the UCAS Research Team released an online questionnaire for completion by member institutions. The results of the questionnaire are provided in Section 3 of this document.

### 2.1 Research Objectives

This research project addressed the following objectives:

- To investigate the skills and capabilities that HEI staff consider necessary for students undertaking HE courses;
- To explore their understanding of what is meant by 'stretch and challenge' in terms of skills and capabilities
- To determine how the 16-19 curriculum would need to be amended in order to implement strategies that would meet the definition of 'stretch & challenge'
- To evaluate the particular areas/disciplines where differentiation between high attaining applicants is required

- To explore the preferred mechanism for differentiating between high attaining applicants currently
- To identify any potential barriers to the introduction of new methods to assess 'stretch and challenge' amongst 16-19

## **2.2 Methodology**

The methodology used is a combination of database analysis, qualitative and quantitative research methods, as detailed below.

### **2.2.1 Database Analysis**

The database analysis was used to identify those HEIs that have accepted applicants domiciled in Northern Ireland. This analysis has used 'accepted applicants' rather than 'applications' due to the problem that with each applicant making up to six applications, it would not be possible to obtain an accurate measure of those HEIs that students from Northern Ireland were most likely to attend.

### **2.2.2 Qualitative Research**

The essential purpose of qualitative research is to gain a deeper understanding of a particular issue by talking to a small number of people in great depth. We used individual depth interviews here so that we could explore interpretations of 'stretch and challenge' amongst admissions tutors and/or course leaders/lecturers responsible for particular undergraduate programmes.

As part of the area of investigation relates to possible differentiation between high ability students, subjects have been selected that are likely to have high entry requirements across a range of faculties. These are:

- Medicine and Dentistry
- Subjects allied to Medicine
- Law
- Engineering
- Maths and Computer Science
- Architecture

The sample structure for the qualitative phase of research therefore needs to encompass each of these subjects in a matrix with different types of HEI.

The types of HEI suggested here are divided between 'Pre-92' and 'Post 92' categories within each of Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales.

### **2.1.3 Quantitative Research**

Part of the purpose of the qualitative research phase was to facilitate the design of the quantitative questionnaire. Altogether 232 interviews had been completed with HEI staff (either admissions tutors or course leaders/lecturers) using an online questionnaire. The interviews have been spread across 90 HEIs, with admissions and teaching staff within the different undergraduate programmes of interest.

## **Section 3**

# **In-Depth Interview Results**

## **3 In-Depth Interviews**

### **3.2 Analysis of in-depth interviews**

#### **3.2.1 Introduction**

To ascertain how well the Stretch and Challenge (S&C) initiative will prepare students for HE study and provide evidence for differentiation among high achieving students, focus groups were held with Admissions staff and academic selectors at eight HEIs. The institutions chosen had all accepted reasonably high numbers of NI applicants in the past.

The focus groups concentrated on four distinct areas: the current differentiation mechanisms used by HEIs and their perception of Northern Irish applicants' preparedness; S&C implementation and HEI's possible role in this; issues of phasing in and barriers to implementation.

#### **3.2.2 The fieldwork**

The interviews were conducted in October and November, 2006. The final draft of the Topic Guide was reviewed and approved by CCEA. Discussions lasted 90 minutes, and there were between three and 10 participants in the majority of the groups. The UCAS External Relations and Research teams conducted the interviews. In five of the eight groups, a conference recording kit was used, and, in others, notes were taken. The audio records were transcribed and presented to CCEA. The interview results were also used in designing the on-line questionnaire.

### **3.2.3 Research Findings**

The outcomes of the interviews are summarised in the following 12 sections:

1. Differentiation mechanisms used by Universities in the admissions process
2. Skills required for HE entry and studies
3. Comparison of applicants from Northern Ireland with applicants from other UK countries
4. Understanding and meaning of the Stretch and Challenge Concept
5. Implementation of Stretch and Challenge in A level exams
6. Stretch and Challenge in HE and Open University modules
7. Extended Projects as a means of implementation of Stretch and Challenge
8. Specialised Diplomas and their role in stretching and challenging students
9. International Baccalaureate as an alternative to A levels
10. Use of Unit Grades in admissions and in stretching and challenging students
11. Admissions tests
12. Participants overall evaluation and recommendations

### 3.3 Differentiation mechanisms used by Universities in the admissions process

The focus groups identified a range of differentiation mechanisms employed in the admissions process:

- qualifications;
- study skills and intellectual abilities;
- personal qualities, which included motivation, ability to work with others and requirements of specific disciplines.

The major mechanism for recognizing *qualifications* was A level results. Requirements differed according to the number of subjects required, with some selective universities and highly competitive disciplines such as Medicine requiring up to eight GSCE exams in addition. Combinations of subjects were also of importance in the admissions process. Some preferred a clear-cut academic orientation of subjects, with selective universities being more inclined towards such combinations. Others encouraged studying the subjects relevant to the discipline, for example, IT subjects for Computing and Engineering degrees. A majority quoted Maths A levels as part of their requirements. Breadth was preferred over depth in subject selection. A highly selective department recruiter quoted an ideal combination of subjects to be science or numerate subjects, humanity and a social science subject, all of which had strong methodological basis.

Another main *qualification* differentiator is the UCAS Tariff, the required points ranging from 220 to 559 points, depending on the competition for the course. Other qualification criteria included the International Baccalaureate, with entry requirements ranging from 22 to 36 points. Vocational qualifications were rarely mentioned in the focus groups.

*Study skills and intellectual abilities* were directly tested via admissions tests in a small number of institutions. The use of tests was largely discipline based, e.g. Medicine, Dentistry and allied health professions used tests that included Healthcare Professions Admissions Tests (HPAT), UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT) and Medical School Admissions Test (MSAT). Some Law departments used The National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT). Only one university quoted using a general Admissions Test, as it was a pilot institution in the UniTEST initiative which involves seven selective UK universities. Admissions tests concentrate on gauging generic reasoning and thinking skills, some placing more emphasis on written skills (LNAT) and some including sections on empathy and working with others (Medicine related tests).

*Personal qualities* were assessed mainly via personal statements and references, although emphasis on these depended on the selectivity of an institution or department. Some selective institutions have developed a scoring scheme, where personal statements were assessed against six or seven criteria. A Dentistry department required submission of a portfolio, which had to contain evidence of work experience, proof of manual dexterity and spatial awareness (e.g. crafts or music and other related interests) and extra-curricular activities. Similar requirements were included in the Passport scheme<sup>1</sup> and e-portfolios mentioned by interviewees and operating at local level, e.g. Nottingham. In one example, a Media Design course required a portfolio including a design project in this area. Interviews

<sup>1</sup> Local progression agreement in Nottingham involving HEI's, schools, and colleges to ensure that evidence of preparedness for HE study is available

were used by few institutions and departments, mainly Medicine and Dentistry and other highly competitive courses.

This means, although the differentiation mechanisms are similar in principle, they differ greatly across institutions in range and structure, depending on the demand for an institution or course.

Generally, A level does not seem to provide a sufficient basis for differentiation of skills as opposed to knowledge. Thus, highly competitive courses and institutions had introduced additional instruments, such as admissions tests. Selective institutions also tend to pre-select their applicants by requiring precise qualifications and qualities they look for in prospective applicants. Consequently, part of the successful process in entering these institutions is attributed to applicants' full understanding of these requirements. In addition, personal statements and references are an intrinsic component of the admissions process of selective universities, while recruiting HEIs use personal statements mainly in 'near miss' cases.

### 3.4 Skills required for HE entry and studies

The HEIs visited all cited the following skills as prerequisite for entry and for subsequent successful study at an HEI.

- Written communication
- Numeric skills
- Problem solving
- Critical thinking, reasoning
- Study skills
  - information retrieval and use
  - analytical skills
  - time management
- Independent learning and thought
- Originality and creativity
- Motivation to learn, curiosity
- Working with others

The interviewees have noted a general deterioration of these skills over time, resulting in a need to organize preparatory courses for increasing numbers of admitted students. These courses mainly target the improvement of study skills, conducting research, working with information from various sources and the use of resources; introduction to professions; training in numeric skills (one department stated an increase to this course from 10% to 70% of admitted applicants in the last few years); and improving written communication skills. A general impression is that HE has been increasingly engaged in areas which normally should have been addressed at the school level.

Several suggestions were made on how to improve the skills that were lacking: Numeric skills did not require the introduction of additional material, but more practice. Further Maths was quoted to be an excellent training ground. As one of the respondents quoted: “Anyone who has done Further Maths at A level, irrespective of the grade, will do better because of the practice in Maths. This course helps to acquire fluency.” One recruiter positively commented on the Further Maths Network, supported by the government, which gives interested students access to additional practice problems, without requiring additional teaching time and material.

Written communication and reasoning skills were expected to improve if the structure of questions changed from multiple-choice to open-ended. The character of questions also had to be cross-curriculum oriented and not limited to chunks of specific knowledge; this way, the analytical and synthesizing skills would be stimulated. Greater involvement with English language subjects was quoted as a solution to literacy problems. Independent learning skills were recommended to be encouraged through a decrease in directional teaching approach, especially in years 13 and 14 (12 and 13 in England), allowing more hours of independent learning and research. It was suggested that students need to be taught how to use libraries and the internet to develop their own learning techniques and styles, and accumulate their own notes and materials.

With regard to creativity and originality, one respondent stated a need for defining the originality, creativity and assessment criteria. Another respondent suggested that the Extended Project was a way to improve time management skills. Special attention needed to be paid to plagiarism issues, and these had to be thoroughly explained at the school level.

### 3.5 Comparison of applicants from Northern Ireland with applicants from other UK countries.

Most staff interviewed did not differentiate Northern Irish applicants from others. Some who did mentioned the following favourable qualities specific to Northern Irish students: well-informed choices and decisions about institutions and courses; participation in extra-curricular activities; active participation of local schools in generating applications.

Several noted a common problem with Northern Irish students, being more family oriented, they tend to get more homesick and visit their families quite often, and as a consequence missing lectures and seminars. One institution has noted that this frequent absence of Northern Irish students has been the cause of higher than average drop-out rates among them.

Several institutions carried out direct marketing activities in Northern Ireland, (due to their geographical proximity to Northern Ireland). These marketing activities proved to be an effective tool in attracting more applicants from Northern Ireland. One specific department has quoted a marked increase in application and intake of Northern Irish students after recruitment tours. Other reasons for attracting Northern Irish applicants were higher living costs in Northern Ireland and lack, or absence, of degrees in specific areas, e.g. Built Environment.

An interesting comment was made by one of the respondents with regard to the admissions criteria. "English applicants are assessed also on their school and school score, so some would want to look at the school, its geography and background for every applicant. More of this information is used by some universities. No such information is available for Northern Ireland, Wales, and Scottish applicants, which creates problems."<sup>2</sup>

Some interviewees commented on the COPE qualification and one representative commented: *"Would like to raise the issue that Northern Ireland is a bit of a goldfish bowl and by that I mean that it's a fairly closed environment - schools and colleges tend to operate fairly tactically. An HEI might identify shortcomings in applicants that could be addressed through greater input of skills, but in reality, because of the competitive environment in education, schools want their students to achieve hard, measurable qualifications. The COPE cert (Certificate of Personal Effectiveness), which is coming on board in NI and which attracts 70 UCAS Tariff points, may well have a lot of the skills and attributes that would be helpful in addressing some of things that have been talked about, but I suspect that most universities would be wary of it and would rather have a 'good old-fashioned' third A level to make up the Tariff points total."*

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<sup>2</sup> This information is provided, however, some HEIs might not be aware of it.

## 3.6 Understanding and meaning of the Stretch and Challenge Concept

Understanding of S&C has varied across and within focus groups. Difficulties were mainly in defining S&C as an additional assessment tool or as a tool to address and improve skills that applicants seem increasingly to lack.

### 3.6.1 S&C as an assessment tool

Most interviewees have asserted that viewing S&C as an additional instrument for differentiating only among high achieving applicants would greatly limit its use to a handful of institutions which have applicants with three or more A grades. The majority of HEIs identified a need to differentiate among lower end applicants, when admissions officers and recruiters have to look for additional clues before making offers. Several implementation techniques were identified; one was the introduction of A\* grade, another was adding additional points to the UCAS Tariff.

### 3.6.2 S&C as a skills addressing and improving tool

Some saw S&C as a way to change the attitude towards knowledge and studying in the schools as a whole. S&C was seen as a way to overcome the compartmentalisation and segmentation of knowledge caused by the modular approach of A levels, and to provide opportunities of cross-border analysis and synthesis. In that sense, S&C was expected to shift the emphasis from acquiring and storing knowledge to gaining learning skills via knowledge accumulation. The most quoted implementation mechanism was examination restructuring by placing 'a greater challenge to the ability of students in finding the answers, than being provided with one.' Some argued for the introduction of more complicated material.

Practically all the problems with S&C mentioned by focus groups related to the understanding of S&C as an assessment tool. A major concern was that the majority of institutions did not require a differentiation tool for high achieving candidates and, as such, the cost of implementation would greatly outweigh the benefits of its use by only a few institutions. A common understanding was that S&C should target all students, without drawing a circle around high achieving students or students planning to continue into HE.

Another matter of concern was any further unjustified increase in the burden of assessments and examinations, which would further compartmentalise knowledge, re-emphasise the importance of knowledge base over the leaning skills acquisition, and leave less time for extra-curricular activities, thus preventing the development of a well-rounded individuals.

It seems, therefore, that the use of S&C as a mere additional assessment tool would not contribute to the success of applicants to enter and engage with HE. A broader approach would have to be adopted, which was supported unanimously by the focus groups.

Below is a comment which reflects the essence of the latter approach:

*‘...Challenge was the term that I’ve responded to. My take is that, some of the information that comes to us about post 16 education in particular, and education generally, is that education seems to be highly structured, more structured than the education that I had. And it is compartmentalised into modules, and I do wonder whether that compartmentalisation is a natural fact, if not the antithesis of challenge. It is rather suddenly a convenient box of drawing around the knowledge. So if you wanted to define stretch, maybe it is to distort or remove these boxes around the knowledge. ‘*

### 3.7 Implementation of Stretch and Challenge in A level

Discussions of implementing S&C in A levels led to conclusions that it needed to address several shortcomings. The biggest problem was cited as students' emphasis on passing examinations, and covering the answer with the minimum needed information and not enquiring beyond that - 'question spotting'. In addition, the A level system was regarded as teacher-dependent, and the students have no power in selecting what they want to study, they are risk-averse and will study the subjects where they can obtain the best grades rather than those that will give them a better background to the degree that they want to take. The structure of examinations was judged as not conducive to the development of synthesis and cross-border analysis or ability to use familiar information in unfamiliar situations. There was a general feeling that the school system tended to programme into students that they will get the results required, and this is achieved by doing multiple modules, revising exams papers and giving model answers.

In general, it was perceived that A levels were rather narrow, as they set very specific tasks, allowed numerous re-sits and did not tally well with the principles of tertiary education and final degree qualifications. The following comment demonstrates incompatibility between secondary and tertiary education: *"There is a fundamental difference in secondary and tertiary curricula – in the tertiary, it is geared to the maximum specified of what they need to know, whereas secondary curriculum specifies the minimum they need to pass."*

The proposals for introducing S&C into A levels mainly concerned not an increase in the content, but stretching the examination questions themselves. Specifically, it was recommended to use less formulaic, less atomised and more synoptic assessment opportunities and more extended writing. Another set of proposals involved the shift in the teaching approach from content related to theoretical and methodological approaches in writing or application of rules.

#### 3.7.1 Extra questions in A level assessments

Respondents unanimously were against adding extra questions in the A level assessments. One reason was that it would make students further risk-averse and force them to adopt strategies such as attempting certain questions only if they counted towards extra points, or whether extra time was allowed for the question, and so on. Another concern was the policy of a school in selecting which students should attempt the extra questions. It was also thought that more difficult questions could reduce confidence among capable students.

#### 3.7.2 A\* grading

With regard to grading, only one institution expressed interest in having an A\* grade, but not extending it to A\*\*. As a selective university, they observe quite a range of knowledge and key skills among A grade holders, and A\* was expected to single out especially bright candidates. To that end it was suggested that to gain A\* students should be asked to do something that they had not done before under examination conditions.

The rest reasoned against this extended grading, specifically stating that the majority of universities, as recruiting universities took all A grade holders and needed to differentiate at the lower end. Another argument was that an A\* grade would simply shift the grading distribution to the lower end, and those who would have previously achieved an A would now get an A\*, those achieving B's would get an A etc. This would be as a result of yet more teaching to order to allow students to achieve A\* grades and the school to rise up the league table. Widening participation was mentioned as one of the reasons why A\* would not be suitable.

Some participants expressed their surprise that there was talk of introducing another level to the grading scheme, given that there is also talk of moving away from a classification system for degrees.

### 3.7.3 Advanced Extension Awards

Overall AEA was viewed to be another extra examination paper adding pressure to students' already busy schedule. Only one respondent, representing a Maths Department, has stated that their department used AEA widely in admissions, as it *provided the depth*. It tended to prepare a student for university in terms of developing a better, more mature understanding of what they have learned. The approach was not to introduce additional material, but to put together the material they have learned in six different modules into a different context, with a longer three-hour examination. Tackling more difficult questions certainly reinforced their knowledge of the standard A level, and increased confidence.

One of the major reasons quoted against AEA was lack of resources on the school side and, as such, inequality of access. The Maths Department had avoided this problem by providing a website which points to the sources of relevant papers on which students could practise. A similar approach has been adopted by Cambridge, which offers Step Papers to potential entrants to its Maths Department. When asked if a similar approach could be used for other subject areas, the general perception was that the distance-based AEA practice paper would not suit all subjects, especially subjects that required coaching and background work, such as modern foreign languages, history, and English.

Thus the issue of resource availability was a major concern with AEA. Specifically, it was stated that while there are students from state schools who undertake AEA, the number is, however, very small and linked to quite a cohesive section of the educational community. As one interviewee framed it *'I am very concerned not just about the mechanism, but about adoption of the mechanism more widely. And I wonder whether the Extension Awards will be adopted sufficiently widely to widen that access.'*

### 3.7.4 Stretching the questions

Instead of adding extra questions or papers, focus groups suggested stretching the existing questions themselves. One suggestion was to introduce three levels of difficulty: easy questions testing the knowledge, milder questions testing knowledge and skills, and harder questions testing skills, knowledge and understanding. Depending on the difficulty, the questions then could be assigned different values, thus allowing the brighter students to distinguish themselves by accumulating higher points. It was proposed to increase the challenge and introduce questions not taught in class.

Another suggestion was to introduce scenario-based questions, which would stimulate students to provide better, fuller answers. Subject wise, for example, it was recommended that IT subjects should introduce design-driven questions, which would test the application of skills rather than basic knowledge.

The timing of examinations was considered to be an important factor. The focus groups recommended spreading out the intellectual stretch evenly over two years of study to foster a 'learn and understand' approach rather than a 'memorise to pass exams' approach, as, for example, in the final year, where only half the year is spent on learning and the rest on testing.

### 3.8 Higher Education and Open University Modules

Opinion on Higher Education modules was split. Proponents of HE modules pointed to the advantages of HE experience that students can gain while still at school and getting a taste what HE is about. Some mentioned that HE modules helped to strengthen the ties of a university with local schools, and helped it to market itself more directly to potential applicants. An example was given where a university offered part-time courses to students of a local school/college if they had already met the entrance requirements, and granted credits for such courses if they undertook a relevant degree there.

Arguments against HE modules were more numerous and concerned ownership issues; absence of standardised content and assessment; and limited access. Because of these concerns, most universities decided not to recognize HE modules either in admissions or for granting credit. Some refused to recognise HE modules because university work was not based on credit accumulation. However, two recruiting institutions expressed an interest in granting credit for HE modules or using them in the Passport scheme during admissions.

One focus group expressed the opinion that HE modules were an attempt to make up for the inadequacies of the A level syllabus and that they provided a precedent for further diffusion of borders between schools/colleges and universities. The former would attempt to deliver HE content and the latter have to complement school content by providing preparatory courses. It was suggested that universities could instead help to improve the A level syllabus. The following comment expresses this opinion: *"I think in an ideal world we would expect that A levels were doing that. It would be ideal that A level in some form does that preparation and there should be no need for an HEI to go and deliver the modules. They already have the study days, master classes, the widening participation and raising aspiration and there are many things that we have been doing already at different stages of 14-19 curriculum, which is one thing. While doing preparatory courses is quite another. Really the A level syllabus ought to be doing that. The IB is doing it."*

#### 3.8.1 OU modules

OU modules were mostly associated with mature students and were considered in the admissions process, especially the second level modules, as they were viewed to be an excellent basis for starting an HE course and demonstrating necessary skills.

The main concern with OU modules was the timely provision of final results, as these are not available by the start of the admissions cycle. As a solution, one university had an agreement with the Open University where a tutor provided an early report stating the students' achievements in the modules and whether or not they had a good chance of passing the examination. However, the use of results was limited only to students entering the general faculty and not the higher entry courses.

### **3.8.2 Distance-based preparation**

An alternative to HE modules was suggested in the form of collaboration between universities and schools in providing Networks for Learning and Practice in certain subjects. One such network is the Further Mathematics Network, which gives access to students who do not have Further Mathematics classes in their schools. This is a national project, which has 30 centres around the country, and connects local schools and universities. By a combination of distance learning, attendance (Wednesday afternoons), faculty members visiting the schools occasionally, a good number of A level students find that they are able undertake Further Mathematics and they are stimulated to feel a commitment to the participating university. It is interesting to note that this is not regular academic staff who are involved, although they are connected with the department.

### 3.9 Extended Project

Overall, the idea of an Extended Project was received positively. The EP was viewed as an opportunity to exhibit originality, develop cross-border analytical skills, learn research techniques and methodology, introduce greater breadth and gain study skills such as time management and use resource material. In that sense, a general expectation was that EPs should complement A levels and somewhat overcome their modular and segmented character.

Problems associated with EP were connected with its execution. Specifically, how well schools would be equipped to provide necessary tutoring and information resources to students, the development of adequate assessment tools, timing, and placing of additional pressure on students in the final years. The biggest concern was identifying authenticity of work and problems of plagiarism, especially when it related to subjects where topics are limited in variety, such as Maths. The facility to submit group work also strengthened concerns over authenticity of the projects.

Focus group participants suggested that EPs should be compulsory if they were adopted. Adequate assessment should concentrate on methodology and be grade-based, not points-based. Some participants suggested conducting interviews in addition, although it was acknowledged that this would entail a heavy resource demand. One of the respondents suggested looking at the Welsh Baccalaureate in terms of its structure and assessment method. With regard to timing, it was suggested that EP results should be available by the beginning of the admissions cycle. If group work was offered, then a mechanism to identify individual contributions would have to be implemented. In respect of content, it was strongly recommended that the EP should concentrate on developing additional sets of skills and not become just another assessment tool and definitely not to equate to another AS level.

Most of the universities have not made a decision on how they would use EPs in their admissions process. Some expressed an interest in knowing the title of the EP and, if relevant to the discipline, they would take it into account during the admissions process.

With regard to the EP outcome, written work was preferred to a performance or artefact. One participant specifically mentioned that while they would look at performance, dance and artefact, evidence of academic rigour would be essential, which could be expressed in a written piece reflecting the process of designing and creating the outcome.

### 3.10 Specialised Diplomas

The majority of participants alluded to the strong vocational orientation of Specialised Diplomas (SD) and, consequently, their lack of academic relevance to HE. One of the participants suggested that SDs would duplicate the BTEC. It was noted that the SD should be helpful to professions which were struggling to recruit employees but that professional interest in certain disciplines could be expressed in various ways besides taking a specific SD. The main challenge was seen to be combining academic rigour and vocational orientation in the SD in order for it to be acceptable to HE. The timing of the SD raised concerns that students would be required to decide about their professional route too early in their lives.

One advantage the SD might have was in respect of Post-92 universities, as they traditionally accepted specialised qualifications that covered a common spectrum of skills e.g. BTEC.

No decisions were reached with regard to the relevance of SDs for admissions purposes, but there was the likelihood that they would be accepted in terms of general entry, depending on the content. In Engineering, for example, when the Maths and Physics elements were adequately covered, they could be acceptable for entry, but selectors would need to examine the syllabus in great detail before this could be decided. The IT Diploma, for example, was perceived as having an insufficient Maths element to permit entry to Computer Science. One of the participants commented that efforts were being made to bring the SD in Engineering closer to HE requirements.

It was also mentioned that some academic disciplines, such as Law, had no corresponding SD and these areas were unlikely to consider the new qualifications. Selective universities also referred to the academic nature of the subjects they normally required for entry, and also doubted the likelihood of accepting SDs. With regard to grading, it was expected that applicants would have to gain Merits and Distinctions to be considered for entry.

### 3.11 Admissions Tests

Admissions tests used by the institutions interviewed were largely discipline based. Medicine, Dentistry and allied health professions used at least three tests: Healthcare Professionals Admissions Test (HPAT), UK Clinical Aptitude Test (UKCAT), and Medical Schools Admissions Test (MSAT). As one of the participants put it, HPAT aimed to separate people who might be academically gifted but not have a 'caring gene', and vice versa – it could identify students who have lower academic achievement but who would excel in a physiotherapy course for example. One Law department used the National Admissions Test for Law (LNAT).

One university was a participant in the pilot of UniTEST, a general admissions test measuring reasoning and thinking skills across the two broad domains of mathematics and science, and humanities and social sciences. In 2006, there was a problem with the timing of the UniTEST, as it was scheduled for May - the peak time of exam preparations, and out of 30,000 invited students, only 300 had actually taken the tests.

The main concerns with admissions tests were their costs and the extent to which applicants could be coached for them. The students could be easily schooled to pass the test thus rendering the assessment of skills unreliable. Or, as has happened in the past, some could simply buy the tests online. Many associated the passing of the tests with the ability of people to pay for tests and training. This raises issues of widening participation, especially if universities started using different tests and applicants find themselves both taking and paying for multiple tests. In addition, not all schools could provide additional test facilities if that were a requirement.

In one focus group the opinion was expressed that admissions tests were again an attempt to cover the deficiencies of A levels. It was stressed that the qualifications that all applicants have access to should be assessed within that subject's area boundaries. This statement is supported by the fact that all general admissions tests aim to uncover in applicants the same skills which A levels are thought to fail to evidence. Specifically, the tests concentrated on gauging the general aptitude towards learning, information processing, logic, and written skills rather than knowledge base. As one participant stated: "*In an ideal world, I would like to see the A level syllabus cover the areas that Admissions tests cover.*"

### 3.12 Unit Grades

Unit grades in general were viewed to be a complicated multi-structured assessment tool, with potentially 24 grades per applicant to look at. The main advantage of unit grades was seen in providing a differentiation point for 'near miss' or Clearing applicants, at both the upper and lower end. A grade composition can in fact differ substantially from candidate to candidate because of grades obtained in various units.

However, once the universities start requiring grades in specific modules, a concern was expressed that this will even further segment the A levels and encourage numerous re-sits and concentration on passing the examinations rather than on learning. It was suggested that unit grades should be available on optional and ad hoc bases via, for example, weblink. In such cases, it would be used to differentiate among similarly qualified candidates to see how they had performed in a module that was important for the HE course. Many staff expressed an interest in using unit grades after offers were accepted, in order to determine the profile of students, obtain a snapshot of what candidates actually achieved and assess their potential.

One focus group agreed that the demand for unit grade information had arisen from the fact that the A grade covered such a wide band, and that the introduction of A\* could solve this problem and reduce the need for unit grades. In another group this was taken further. They implied that the problem is not about grades, but the qualifications themselves, and whether they are delivering what is required for the course.

With regard to the Unified Mark Scheme (UMS), participants saw it in the same light as the unit grades. One participant assessed it as difficult to measure.

### 3.13 International Baccalaureate

The quality, content and grading of the International Baccalaureate (IB) was highly praised by the focus groups and cited as an example of the successful introduction of S&C into the 16-19 curriculum. Strong points listed were breadth, academic rigour, development of study skills for HE, advanced numeracy, required written project, knowledge of a foreign language and participation in community services. It measured intellectual abilities and demonstrated a range of other abilities. In addition, the IB did not require specialisation too early. As a result IB students performed better than A level students, fared better in HE studies and were widely acceptable to HE.

Problems associated with the IB were limited access and availability (it was offered mainly via a certain type of school); pre-selection by schools; higher grade of difficulty as instead of three subjects at A level, six had to be undertaken.

The main implication of the IB's success is the combination of the EP and community service components, along with a range of disciplinary studies, allow selectors to see a much more rounded profile and a student who is better prepared for HE. As one participant says: *"We have sat with Admissions Tutors saying that we want an IB type diploma. It would solve a lot that is wrong with the A level system. It would provide stretch and challenge and a way to differentiate among applicants and prepare them well for HE. It actually does what course selectors want. I cannot find any fault with it. The students that we take with the IB do very well, either because of the intellectual rigour, or their ability to think coherently and to synthesise."* Strong inclination of the focus group participants towards IB Diplomas implies a general attractiveness of a unified qualification system which incorporates three core components of education: intellectual excellence, skills and character formation, which are assessed using transparent and clear structure of criteria.

### 3.14 Overall evaluation and participants' recommendations

The focus group participants generally agreed that there was a need for expanding skills in writing, reading, and theorising. Emphasis was on the skills base than the knowledge base: basic writing, reading, numeric skills and a willingness to work by themselves. It was recommended that close attention be paid to extra-curricular activities. It might be necessary to quantify and grade these activities to make them more appealing to students. Another option was to study the Passport scheme. Practically all the interviewed institutions expressed an interest in considering extra-curricular activities in their admissions. An example of possible extra-curricular activities included the Duke of Edinburgh award.

HEIs in general were willing to collaborate with curriculum and examination bodies and schools to improve the syllabus and assessment mechanism. However, the suggested changes needed to be made in a timely manner, as usually the curriculum is slow to change and hence is always behind the current requirements of HE and employers. It was mentioned that there was no official forum for consultation between schools, HEIs, curriculum and awarding bodies and employers.

The groups agreed that the key elements they wanted to see in terms of 'Stretch and Challenge' were an increase in Key Skills. The groups indicated that Key Skills (e.g. numeracy) were seen as something that was done at a lower level of study, but they are actually assessed at HE level 3 - and that they would provide value if introduced into the current A level system. Students in general needed to have a wider range of skills for progression through HE and their career. The group did acknowledge that all suggested routes of Stretch and Challenge had advantages and disadvantages. Key words for developing a student's ability are thinking and functional skills. More knowledge was not what was required but an applicant who is more well-rounded. Thus, everybody shared some reluctance about the introduction of extra testing.

Examples of perceived barriers were certain institutions not seeing qualifications as relevant, and schools therefore being reluctant to commit resources to making the options available. This would immediately put some students at a disadvantage to those who were given the opportunity to 'stretch' themselves. The practical burden of these elements meant that they should be phased in by pilots. Simultaneous proceeding on different elements might result in big reform agenda but actually nothing gets implemented successfully. The participants perceive a real risk that some of the proposals would not be implemented, because it would take a lot of political energy to bring them all in by 2009-2010.

Another concern was that by asking teachers to take on more work, and by more extensive testing of students, the result could be that schools with lots of money and resources would be in a privileged position compared to others. Thus a phased approach was recommended. The first step recommended by a selective university was the introduction of A\*. Then the use of synthetic or cross-module questions was suggested. It is not so much about adding questions, but replacing some of the middle of the road questions by cross-boundary questions, to break up the 'modularisation' or compartmentalisation of knowledge. With regard to the special position of Maths and other related science subjects, it was recommended to have an extra Maths paper to demonstrate the challenges that have risen in the area they have chosen. As one of the participants stated: *"The sort of reforms that we would actually ideally like to see is something that benefits all the students. And then, yes, that would naturally lead to it being easier for us to identify the top percentage across the system."*

A note of caution was expressed with the phased approach, however. It was stressed that with the current level of information, schools would need to receive a real stimulus to take up the initiative as universities would be unwilling to incorporate the entry requirements until more data becomes available.

Recommendations to CCEA included keeping the qualifications system short and simple (KISS). Contrary to the English system, it must contain a clear and transparent structure of classifications. Studying the qualifications systems of other countries might reveal some examples. Specifically, IB Diploma's content and structure will need reviewing as a possible prototype of a unified qualification system. Between choosing breadth and depth, breadth was clearly preferred, recommended and identified as a greater challenge; it allows HEIs to see a wider picture, and look for excellence. Universities look for competence in a broad range of subjects and value it as much as depth, except perhaps for Mathematics, where depth has more value than breadth.

The development of the syllabus should be more transparent and collaborative between schools and HEIs. One participant stated: *"It is actually a mystery, as we had quite a lot of contact with school teachers. School teachers think that we set the A level syllabus. We know that they do not set the syllabus, as they do not like it any more than we do. But then there is a mystery as to who sets the syllabus, which is clearly not what the teachers want and does not fit the HE requirements and not necessarily listening to employers either... We have lots of contribution and discussion about 14-19 curriculum."*

It was mentioned that there was a general attempt to increase dialogue with HE, one example being an Admissions consultancy in Manchester. SQA was believed to involve HEI staff sufficiently: *"They positively come out and ask for input from Higher Education staff, particularly in the development of HN units. The difficulty arises when trying to persuade our staff to take part. The other exam boards have never approached me to ask me to provide people on panels. I would expect to be involved dependent on factors i.e. who the qualification is aimed at."* Another participant stated: *"From a resource point of view, there are other areas such as widening access and development of relations with local colleges that we would prefer to concentrate on - develop a course rather than comment on a range of qualifications that probably aren't relevant to our field."*



## **Section 4**

# **On-Line Questionnaire Results**

## 4 On-line questionnaire

In December 2006 the UCAS Research Team released an online questionnaire for completion by member institutions.

The objective of the questionnaire was to provide feedback to the Council for the Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland, from the UCAS member institutions on the preparation of students who are applying to enter higher education and the role that aspects of stretch and challenge could play in reforms implemented by CCEA in the future.

The following section provides an analysis of the results of the 'Stretch and Challenge' questionnaire using responses collected between 11<sup>th</sup> December 2006 and 12<sup>th</sup> January 2007.

### 4.2 Methodology

The survey was made available to HE staff through the SurveyMonkey website. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix A.

### 4.3 Findings

The following sections relate to the separate sections within the questionnaire. Tables representing the results are provided in Appendices B to K.

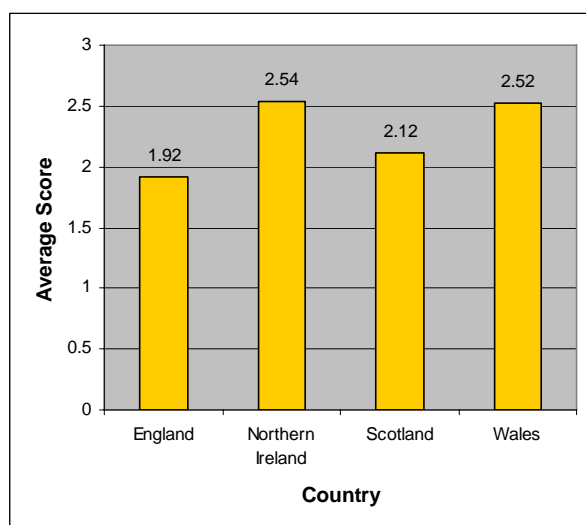
#### 4.3.1 Respondents

There were 232 respondents to the survey, representing 90 separate institutions. The inference from the broad range of job titles (including lecturers, directors, and admissions officers) is that the respondents were representative of different types of decision makers within the HEIs. It should be noted that there was a tendency for respondents to only answer some of the questions (in many cases less than 50% of the respondents completed a question). Evidence of this is supplied in the appendices. A full listing of Institutions and job titles is provided in Appendix B.

#### 4.3.2 Background

When asked the question if student preparedness differed by country of origin within the UK, the general consensus was that it did not (82% of the 192 respondents to this question). This was partly corroborated by the response to the question that asked the respondents to score each of the four countries with a value between 1 and 4 representing how well their curriculum prepared students. 25 of the 232 respondents completed this question with the average score indicating that Northern Ireland and Wales prepared students better than Scotland and England. These results can be found in Appendix C.

Chart 1 - Generally which country's curriculum best prepares students for progression into HE?



### 4.3.3 Skills & Qualities

The Skills & Qualities questions asked the respondents' opinions on the factors that provided the best evidence of a range of skills and qualities, and which characteristics had changed in the last five years and for what reasons.

When asked to select out of thirteen different factors the ones that provided the best evidence, the results indicated that four of them outperformed the rest, as shown in Table 1.

Table1 - What provides the best evidence for the following skills and qualities?

Skills and Qualities Characteristics	Factors	Rating	Respondent Count
Numeracy	GCE AS/A level AEA	87%	99
Oral Communication	Interview	84%	96
Written Communication	Personal Statement	81%	103
Presentation Skills	Interview	64%	88
Study Skills	GCE AS/A level AEA	71%	98
Problem-Solving	GCE AS/A level AEA	58%	93
Research Skills	GCE AS/A level AEA	63%	82
Analysis/Synthesis/Evaluation	GCE AS/A level AEA	64%	87
Critical thinking	GCE AS/A level AEA	58%	85
ICT Skills	GCE AS/A level AEA	55%	78
Time Management	Reference	70%	88
Autonomous learning	Reference	71%	85
Working with others	Reference	78%	87
Personal commitment	Personal Statement	81%	93

Respondents were asked to indicate which of the characteristics had decreased, improved or stayed the same. Chart 2 displays the results graphically, indicating that on the whole the perception is of a decline in most skills. However, there were two cases where over 50% of the respondents considered that the skills were increasing. This is evident in Table 2.

Chart 2 - What specific characteristics have changed in the last 5 years among UK applicants?

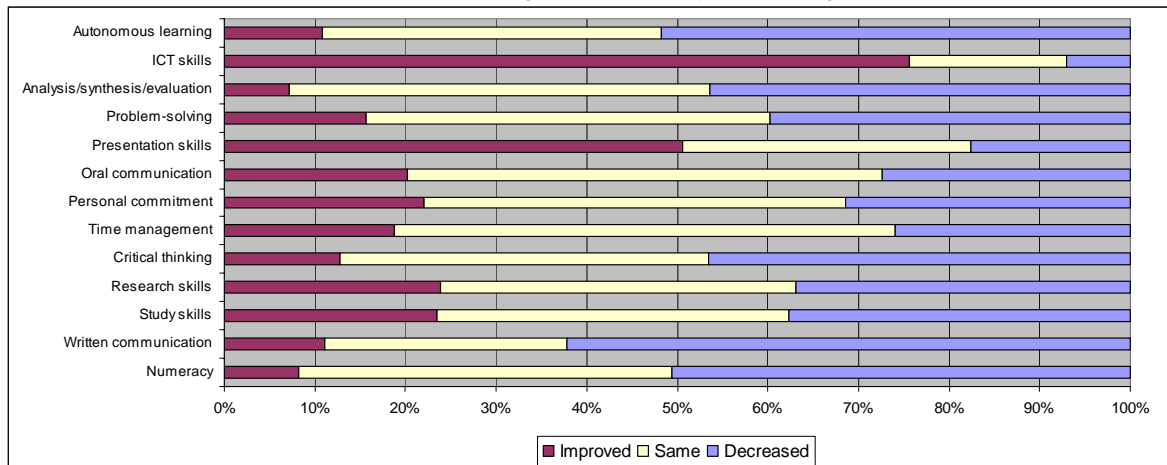
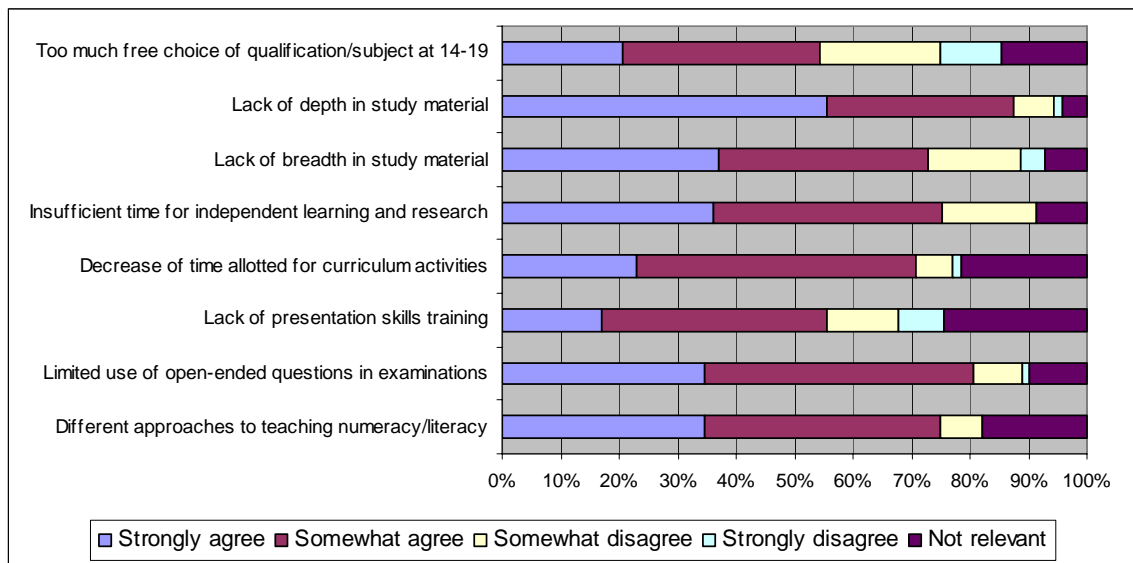


Table 2 - What specific characteristics have changed in the last 5 years among UK applicants?

Skills and Qualities	Rating	Respondent Count
<b>Characteristics where an increase has been evident</b>		
ICT Skills	76%	86
Presentation Skills	51%	85
<b>Characteristics where no change has been evident</b>		
Time Management	55%	85
Oral Communication	52%	84
<b>Characteristics where a decrease has been evident</b>		
Written Communication	62%	90
Autonomous learning	52%	83

In response to a question on what may be causing a decrease in applicants' ability to exhibit these skills, the respondents indicated that the primary causes were lack of depth of study material, the limited use of open-ended questions in examinations, insufficient time for independent learning and research, and the different approaches to teaching numeracy/ literacy. This is portrayed in Chart 3.

Chart 3 - If overall you think that the level of these skills and qualities has decreased what do you think are the causes?



The respondents were also asked to provide some insight on what could provide the best evidence of skills and qualities. The 36 responses fell mainly into three categories: most comments revolved around the fact that they currently found it too difficult to assess due to lack of information, some suggested a new examination system was required, and others stated that it could be achieved through a face-to-face interview or the presentation of relevant evidence.

A further open-ended question asked if they had any further comments on the causes of decreases in applicants' skills and qualities. The 34 responses can be put into two categories: the majority revolved around changes to the A level examination system which currently was thought to have less open-ended questions and the delivery to be more focused on "teaching to the test". Some stated that it was due to a lack of skills in basic literacy, probably resulting from students not reading as much. The underlying theme appeared to point to the differences in teaching methods between A levels and HE, and how the progression from one to the other was now more difficult for students as they need to adapt from a 'spoon-fed' learning system to one involving independent learning and investigation.

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix D.

#### 4.3.4 Student Retention

The predominant reasons for students dropping out from a course were related to motivation, lifestyle, and personal problems. Any lack of skill sets featured as secondary to these. Ranked reasons for dropping out are shown in Table 3 based upon a rating of 1-5, 5 being the most relevant. The average rating is used for ranking.

Table 3 - If you are involved with students who discontinue their studies what are the reasons for dropping out?

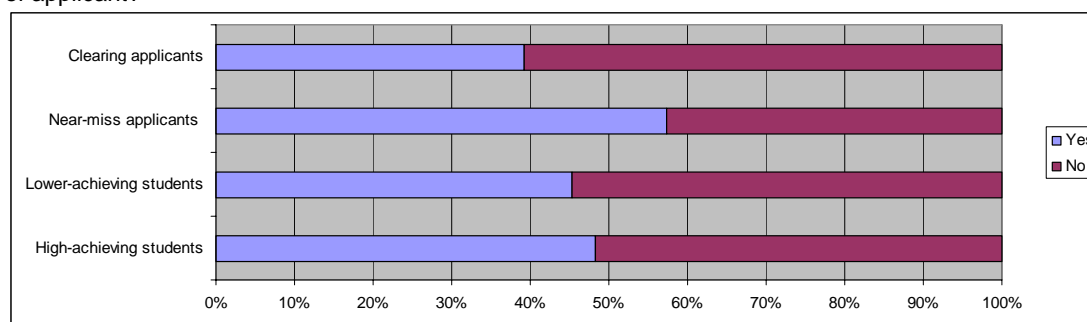
Reasons for Dropping Out	Average Score
Lack of motivation to study	3.76
Lack of personal commitment	3.67
Personal/family problems	3.46
Mismatch between academic demands of course & student	3.43
University life was not what student expected	3.36
Failed examinations once in HE	3.24
Lack of autonomous learning skills	3.24
Lack of time management skills	3.13
Financial reasons	3.11
Lack of study skills	3.01
Change of career goals	2.94
Lack of problem-solving	2.85
Lack of analysis/synthesis/evaluation	2.85
Lack of critical thinking	2.84
Lack of research skills	2.76
Lack of written communication skills	2.7
Homesickness	2.68
Lack of numeracy skills	2.38
Lack of working with others skills	2.12
Lack of oral communication skills	2.08
Lack of presentation skills	2.08
Lack of ICT skills	1.86

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix E

### 4.3.5 Differentiation

When asked if they needed additional differentiation among the given categories of applicants, respondents stated that they would most like it for ‘near-miss’ applicants. This is shown graphically in Chart 4.

Chart 4 - Do you have a need for additional differentiation mechanisms among the following categories of applicant?



The open-ended question “What other categories of student do you need to differentiate between?” prompted 17 responses. The majority of these related to widening participation and the need to assess non-standard entrants such as those taking access courses. Some mentioned the need to assess accurately international qualifications and students with identified learning difficulties or disabilities.

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix F.

### 4.3.6 The Stretch & Challenge Initiative

A number of questions were asked with regard to the Stretch & Challenge initiative.

The first addressed awareness of the initiative's developments, and enquired whether the respondents would use them for selection. There was a generally high level of awareness (over 65%) of all but two of the developments (the 'use of more open ended questions', and the 'introduction of an extended project'). These two also emerged as the developments most in need of introduction, with 71% and 61% in favour respectively. The factor most likely to be used for selection was grading differentiation at the top end of A level, yet only 34% of the respondents were in favour of using this. (Table 4)

Table 4 - What aspects of the current 'Stretch and Challenge' developments are you aware of which do you think should be introduced and which would you use for selection purposes?

Stretch & Challenge' Developments	Aware of	Should be introduced	Use for selection
Integration of AEA demand into A2 assessments	74%	42%	17%
Grading differentiation at top end of A level (e.g. introduction of A* grade)	67%	53%	34%
Use of more open-ended questions	41%	71%	22%
Study of HE modules alongside Level 3 qualifications	71%	31%	10%
Introduction of an Extended Project	53%	61%	29%
Use of unit information and grades	71%	50%	32%
Introduction of structured overarching awards which include a number of different components (e.g. Specialised Diplomas)	68%	38%	23%
Use of admissions tests	71%	31%	27%

When provided with a list of options for the use A level unit grade information in the future, respondents were in favour of using it for near-miss applicants (86%). (Table 5).

Table 5 - How do you intend to use A level unit grade information in the future?

Information Uses	Yes	No
In initial Offer Making	57%	43%
For near-miss applicants	86%	14%
For Clearing applicants	68%	32%
For personal development planning purposes during induction	27%	73%

In addition to the Unit grade information, 63% of respondents also wanted to receive Unified Mark Scheme scores (Table 6).

Table 6 - Would you like to receive Unified Mark Scheme scores as well as or instead of Unit grades?

As well as	63%
Instead of	4%
Would not use either	33%

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix G

### 4.3.7 International Baccalaureate

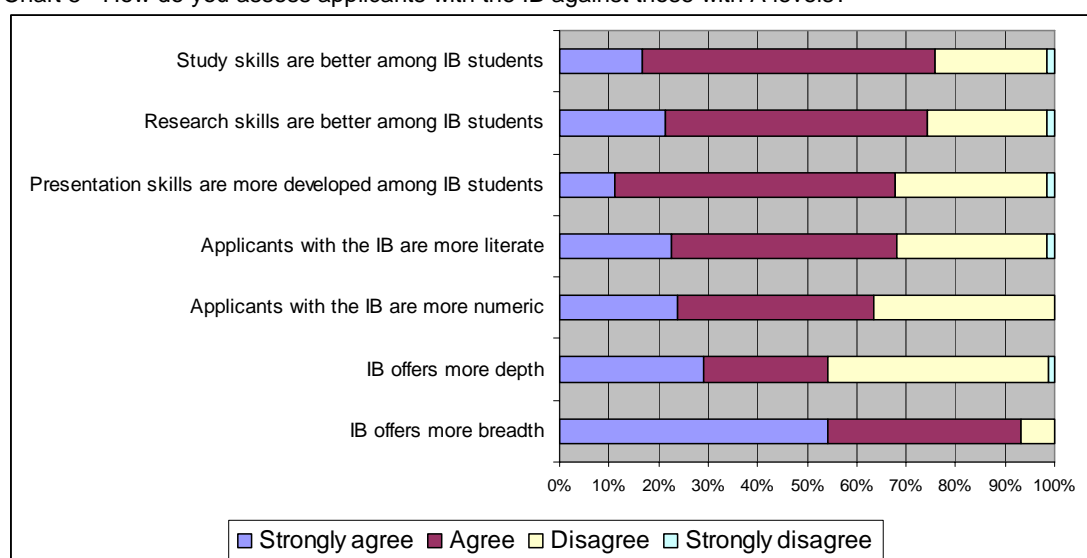
Respondents were asked about the International Baccalaureate (IB), and, in particular if it offered more stretch and challenge than A levels. 71% of the respondents confirmed that it did. This was explored further with a question on what features of the IB they considered to provide stretch and challenge. The compulsory range of disciplines and a minimum of six subjects rated the highest (Table7).

Table 7 - Please select features of the IB that you consider provide stretch and challenge.

International Baccalaureate Features	Average Score
Compulsory study of a range of disciplines	4.17
Study of a minimum of six subjects	4.03
Overarching award with compulsory components	3.97
Study of core - Extended Essay	3.73
Grading structure	3.67
Linear assessment	3.55
Study of core - Theory of Knowledge	3.47
Study of core - Creativity Action Service	2.89

Comparing the IB to A Levels, the respondents tended to agree with all the assertions made within the questionnaire, more so with the statement that the IB offers more breadth than A levels, and less so that an IB offers more depth (Chart 5).

Chart 5 - How do you assess applicants with the IB against those with A levels?



The respondents were also asked if they had any further comments on the comparison of students with the IB to students with A levels. 27 responded, but many were unable to offer an opinion through lack of knowledge. Those that did stated that IB students were generally better motivated, and had a wider breadth and depth of knowledge. Some considered that the UCAS Tariff for the IB was too high, and one mentioned that this led to a lack of low-calibre IB students. There were also a couple of negative comments: one stated that IB students were over-stretched and challenged too much, and that this distracted them from key subjects. The other compared them unfavourably to the 1980s style A levels.

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix H.

### 4.3.8 The Role of Higher Education

Respondents were asked about the role that HE could play in the further development of qualifications used in 14-19 (Table 8)

Table 8 - What role could HE play in the further development of qualifications used in 14-19?

HE Role	Most likely	Somewhat likely	Not relevant
Involvement in developing the 14-19 curriculum	61%	32%	7%
Facilitating access to HE resources	43%	41%	16%
Further development of new qualifications	33%	43%	23%

18 people responded to the open-ended question “What further role do you think HE could play in the further development of qualifications used 14-19?” The underlying theme was that HEIs should be more involved in the design of the questions used in the pre-HE examinations with a view to preparing students for the subjects they would be taught. Other comments revolved around encouraging schools to teach students what would be expected of them at university.

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix I.

### 4.3.9 Admissions tests

None of the respondents planned to use admission tests, and in fact the majority of them did not use admission tests (Table 9).

Table 9 - Do you use any or plan to use admissions tests?

Admission Tests	Don't use	Use	Plan to use
SAT	93%	8%	0%
UniTEST	97%	3%	0%
HPAT	100%	0%	0%
MSAT	99%	1%	0%
BMAT	96%	4%	0%
LNAT	96%	4%	0%
UKCAT	97%	3%	0%

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix J.

### 4.3.10 Stretch & Challenge Summary

Respondents were asked to consider which components of stretch and challenge best contributed to the skills and qualities required of a successful HE student. After rating a number of components, the average score was ranked to establish what the respondents felt best contributed overall to the evidencing of skills, qualities and other characteristics required for successful transition to the demands of HE (Table 10).

Table 10 - Which component of stretch and challenge do you consider best contributes overall to the evidencing of skills qualities and other characteristics required for successful transition in the demands of HE study?

Stretch & Challenge Component	Average Score
Use of admissions tests	3.21
Introduction of an Extended Project	3.12
Study of HE modules alongside Level 3 qualifications	3.01
Introduction of structured overarching awards which include a number of different components (eg Specialised Diplomas)	3
Integration of AEA demand into A2 assessment	2.88
Use of unit information and grades	2.87
Use of more open-ended questions	2.68
Grading differentiation at top end of A level (e.g. introduction of A*)	2.5

When asked if there were any other admissions tests that they currently used or planned to use, 34 respondents provided comments. Nine said they did not use them; the rest stated that they used some form of internal assessment which was either subject-specific or generic. One mentioned that they had been using GAMSAT (Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test) for nine years.

23 people responded to the question “What additional skills, knowledge, understanding, qualities or other characteristic do you consider admissions tests offer over and above other Stretch and Challenge components?” The comments related to:

- Performance under pressure
- Written skills
- Working in teams/ groups
- Combined skills usage (e.g. numeracy, ICT, written communication)
- Subject-specific knowledge.

The results from these questions can be found in Appendix K.

## 4.4 Commentary/Conclusions

### 4.4.1 General

- The research outcomes represent the opinions of a cross-section of HE staff, and their perceptions concerning stretch and challenge in the pre-HE curriculum and the factors which might assist progression to HE. There was generally a good level of knowledge and understanding of current 14-19 developments, but it is likely that some of the responses reflect opinion and received wisdom rather than objective judgement.
- Nevertheless, the analysis is instructive as a source of information and as a snapshot of the current thinking in HEIs, and should prove useful in informing CCEA’s decision-making about stretch and challenge.

#### 4.4.2 Background

- There was little difference in current student preparedness by country of origin in the UK, although Northern Ireland and Wales were rated slightly higher than England and Scotland. The survey as a whole suggested that there were UK-wide issues over the level of preparedness which needed to be addressed.

#### 4.4.3 Skills and qualities

- It was clear that HE valued evidence of skills and qualities derived from a range of sources, and, echoing Schwartz's recommendations, this underlined the desirability of holistic assessment rather than reliance on a particular qualification or tool.
- Despite frequent expressions of concern outside of the survey about their adequacy as a tool for selection and differentiation, overall GCE A levels and AS were regarded as the best source of evidence, suggesting that they continued to play an important role in progression to HE.
- Other qualifications which were thought to provide a good source of evidence of a range of skills were the International Baccalaureate and the Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher. It was noteworthy that the response to the Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma was less positive, and this may reflect a lack of familiarity with, and understanding of, this relatively new qualification.
- It is a source of concern that vocational qualifications were not highly regarded as sources of evidence of skills and qualities, despite the fact that they are designed to develop and evidence a range of skills. The response may reflect lack of familiarity with the qualifications which in turn may be caused by relatively low numbers of applications and a mismatch between vocational qualifications and many degree courses. It may also be a reflection of the perceived quality of students taking such courses.
- Key/core skills rated lowest (along with Scottish National Certificates), which suggested a perceived failure of key skills within the 14-19 curriculum and probably did not acknowledge the recent promotion of the wider key skills. It remains to be seen how HE will respond to functional skills.
- It is clear that respondents still valued aspects of the personal statement and reference on the UCAS reference, despite concerns about the originality of the former. Interviews were also seen to be valuable in some contexts.
- Respondents reported a worrying decline in the last five years in many of the important skills, particularly written communication, numeracy, critical thinking and autonomous learning. This is particularly worrying given the Government's initial emphasis on key skills in Curriculum 2000 and the growth of Critical Thinking. There were, however, considered to be major improvements in ICT skills and presentation skills.
- The decline was attributable to a range of factors including the lack of depth in study material. There was a sense that HE perceived some "dumbing down" in the pre-HE curriculum, and that there was a major educational culture shift from the "spoon feeding" in the delivery of A levels in schools to the independent learning within HE.

- The research findings in this area reflected those of the Nuffield Review of 14-19 Education and Training e.g. in respect of:
  - Issues with literacy and numeracy;
  - Concern about “teaching to the test”; and
  - The impact of a modular approach to delivery and assessment.

#### 4.4.4 Student retention

- The comments suggested that respondents had varying levels of knowledge of the reasons for student dropout, and one commented that the survey should have been asking the students rather than staff.
- A variety of reasons were given for student dropout, with motivation and personal factors predominating.
- There also appeared to be significant issues over the mismatch between the student and the course and between the student’s expectations and the reality. This suggested that there were problems of the quality of student choice, possibly reflecting failures of IAG and a lack of transparency of information about HEIs and their courses.
- There were also issues over lack of preparation for the transition to HE e.g. over autonomous learning and time management learning. These skills needed to be developed within pre-HE programmes to prepare students for the transition.
- Financial reasons also featured, but perhaps not to the extent which commentators have feared – however, the information from the survey was unlikely to reflect fully the new fees and financial support regime.

#### 4.4.5 Differentiation

- In terms of the stages of the admissions process, differentiation takes place as follows:
  - At the point of the original offer; and/or
  - At Confirmation, primarily for near-miss applicants.
- Traditionally differentiation is primarily associated with ways of selecting high-ranking applicants for high-demand courses. While the survey did indeed find evidence of this, it was interesting to note that there was nearly as much expressed need to differentiate lower-achieving applicants e.g. to assess their ability to cope with the course.
- There were some comments about the need to assess accurately students with non-standard qualifications such as Access to HE qualifications and those offering international qualifications. Increasingly the UCAS Tariff provides a tool for equivalence and comparison, and it is hoped to include the new Access to HE Diploma in the Tariff once a grading system has been agreed. There might be potential for the expansion of the Tariff to cover the most commonly offered international qualifications subject to funding and resources.

#### 4.4.6 The Stretch and Challenge Initiative

- The majority of respondents were aware of the concept of stretch and challenge, and the lower levels of awareness of the use of more open-ended questions in A levels and the Extended Project probably reflected the developmental stage of these proposals at the time of the survey.
- The strong level of support for changes to A levels and the introduction of the Extended Project provided evidence of the appropriateness of Government policies in these areas, and suggested that these developments should have positive benefits for HE.
- However, enthusiasm for many aspects of the reforms was not necessarily reflected in an intention to use the outcomes for selection. Even the introduction of an A\* grade in A level would only be used by a third of respondents. This no doubt reflected the fact that, although much of the political and media attention is focused on differentiation at the top of the market e.g. between students with three grade As at A level, in practice the majority of HE courses are not faced with such a need.
- There was relatively little support for the use of HE modules, and an earlier research project found little evidence of their use with the exception of Open University modules. There would be concerns about modules which might tie students into progression to a single HEI, but there was scope for the development of modules which assisted the development of the skills for independent learning in HE which the survey had identified as lacking.
- It is a source of concern that there was little interest in the introduction of overarching awards such as the new Diplomas, particularly as respondents claimed to be aware of this development. There is clearly a strong need for explanation and marketing of Diplomas to HE, and the DfES has initiated a dissemination strategy for this.
- There was an encouraging response to the question about the use of unit grade information, suggesting a potentially higher use than was originally anticipated, particularly for near-miss applicants at Confirmation. This tool should assist differentiation, particularly between applicants with grade As at A level and may reduce reliance on other devices such as admissions tests. UCAS is conducting more detailed research into the use of unit grades in the HE admissions process, in conjunction with QCA.
- A substantial majority of respondents also wanted to receive UMS marks in addition to unit grades. The pressure to provide UMS marks is clearly increasing and UCAS has already made technical provision for this. However, it is known that awarding bodies have some reservations about the ways in which this information might be used by HE and it may be necessary to monitor the use by HE of unit grades before moving to the provision of UMS marks.

#### 4.4.7 International Baccalaureate

- There was a strong view that the IB offered more stretch and challenge than a typical A level programme. The requirement to study a range of disciplines and a minimum of six subjects was seen to give breadth, although some felt that students might lack depth for progression to some degree subjects.
- The welcome from HE for the IB lends support to the Government's recent decision to fund its provision in each LEA area, although there must some

question as to whether it is the qualification itself or the nature of the students currently taking it which appeals to HE.

#### **4.4.8 The Role of Higher Education**

- There was a strong desire for HE involvement in the overall development of the 14-19 curriculum. Recent activities such as the development of the new suite of Diplomas have had some HE involvement, but there may need to be a need for deeper engagement and an attempt for a more systematic representation of the views of HE as a whole. It should be noted that the DfES has initiated an HE Engagement programme.
- There was also a call for HE to have a greater involvement in the detailed design of pre-HE syllabuses and examination questions in order to improve the preparation for progression to HE courses.
- HE could also play a role in working with schools to ensure that the delivery of the curriculum prepares students appropriately for study in HE.

#### **4.4.9 Admissions Tests**

- The vast majority of respondents did not use admissions tests and none had future plans to do so. This may have been a reflection of the sample rather than an HE-wide view as other forms of evidence suggest the likelihood of further growth of admissions testing.

#### **4.4.10 Stretch and Challenge Summary**

- Somewhat puzzlingly in relation to the response above concerning admissions tests, they came out as the strongest of the sources of evidence of skills, qualities and other characteristics for successful transition to HE. It seems that respondents were including in this category interviews and internal testing arrangements.
- There seem to be a number of inconsistencies in the responses in that the study of HE modules and the introduction of structured overarching awards such as Diplomas were little favoured above, but nevertheless thought to be useful sources of evidence.
- Despite these mixed messages, there was evidence of the potential value for HE of the evidence from a number of key aspects of stretch and challenge, including the Extended Project, the integration of AEA demand into A2 assessment, the use of unit grades, the use of more open-ended questions, and, to a lesser extent, the introduction of A\*.

# Appendices

## Appendix A: Survey

### ON-LINE QUESTIONNAIRE

Thank you for taking part in this survey about characteristics needed for successful transition from the 14-19 phase to Higher Education (HE) and a number of stretch and challenge developments which are to be implemented as part of current 14-19 reforms in England.

The objective of this questionnaire is to provide feedback to the Council for the Curriculum Examination and Assessment (CCEA), Northern Ireland, from UCAS member institutions on the preparation of students who are applying to enter HE and the role that aspects of stretch and challenge could play in reforms implemented by CCEA in the future.

Proposals for increasing stretch and challenge were presented in the 14-19 White Paper published by DFES in February 2005. The primary focus was to introduce a range of different initiatives to facilitate the development of a broader range of skills which would in turn provide better preparation for entry to HE and allow for increased differentiation among top performing students.

Please read each question, tick relevant boxes or provide more detail as appropriate. All answers are confidential and the results of the survey will be presented in an aggregated format.

If you need any help in completing the questionnaire, please contact Julian Schwarz either on 01242 544886 or at [j.schwarz@ucas.ac.uk](mailto:j.schwarz@ucas.ac.uk).

Please give the name of your institution:

Please give your job title:

Please indicate which disciplines your institution offers by ✓ all boxes that apply.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Medicine & Dentistry                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Subjects allied to Medicine           | <input type="checkbox"/> Linguistics, Classics & related   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vet Science, Agriculture & related             | <input type="checkbox"/> Law                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative Arts & Design            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> History & Philosophical studies       | <input type="checkbox"/> Combined arts                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social sciences combined with arts             | <input type="checkbox"/> Biological Sciences                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematical & Computer Sciences  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture, Build & Plan                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Business & Administration Studies     | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Sciences                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General  | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Combined sciences                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sciences combined with social sciences or arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Combined social sciences              | <input type="checkbox"/> European Languages, Lit & related |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-European Languages and related             | <input type="checkbox"/> Education                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Technologies                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-European Languages and related             | <input type="checkbox"/> Mass Communications and Documentation |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other. Please specify.                         |  |  |

1. Do you find that student preparedness differs by the country of origin within UK? Please ✓.

Yes

No

If yes, generally, which country's curriculum best prepares students for progression into HE? Please indicate in rank order using 1 for best and 4 for worst or ✓ no difference:

England

Wales

No difference

Scotland

Northern Ireland

2. What provides the best evidence for the following skills and qualities? Please ✓ all those that apply.

	Numeracy	Oral communication	Written communication	Presentation skills	Study skills	Problem solving	Research skills	Analysis/synthesis/evaluation	Critical thinking	ICT	Time management	Autonomous learning	Working with others	Personal commitment
GCE AS/A level/AEA	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
International Baccalaureate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
European Baccalaureate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BTEC/OCR Nationals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scottish National Certificates/Progression Awards	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
City and Guilds qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Key/Core Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal statement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reference	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Admissions tests	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**3. What specific characteristics have changed in the last 5 years among UK applicants? Please ✓ as appropriate.**

	Decreased	Improved	Same		Decreased	Improved	Same
Numeracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Oral communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written Communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Presentation skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Problem solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Analysis/synthesis/evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	ICT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Autonomous learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**4. If overall, you consider that the level of these skills and qualities has decreased, what do you think are the causes? Please ✓ as appropriate.**

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly disagree	Not relevant
Different approaches to teaching numeracy/literacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Limited use of open-ended questions in examinations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of presentation skills training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decrease of time allotted for curriculum activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Insufficient time allowed for independent learning and research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of breadth in study material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of depth in study material	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too much free choice of qualification and/or subject 14-19	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
_____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

5. If you are involved with students who discontinue their studies, what are the reasons for dropping-out? Please ✓ a box from 1 to 5, 1 being the least relevant and 5 being the most relevant.

	1	2	3	4	5
Mismatch between academic demands of course & student	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Failed examinations once in HE	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Financial reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of:					
• numeracy skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• oral communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• written communication skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• presentation skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• study skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• problem solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• research skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• analysis/synthesis/evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• ICT skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• time management skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• autonomous learning skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• working with others skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• personal commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
University life was not what student expected	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lack of motivation to study	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Change of career goals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal, family problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Homesickness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6. Do you have a need for additional differentiation mechanisms among the following categories of applicant? Please ✓ as appropriate.

	Yes	No		Yes	No
High-achieving students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Lower-achieving students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Near-miss applicants <sup>1</sup>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Clearing applicants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

<sup>1</sup> Those who fail to meet their exact offer but are considered for a vacant place at Confirmation.

**11. How do you assess applicants with IB against those with A levels? Please ✓ as appropriate.**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
IB offers more breadth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
IB offers more depth	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants with IB are more numeric	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Applicants with IB are more literate	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation skills are more developed among IB students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research Skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study skills are better among IB students	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**12. What role could HE play in the further development of qualifications used 14-19? Please ✓ as appropriate.**

	Most likely	Somewhat likely	Not relevant
Involvement in developing the 14-19 curriculum	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Facilitating access to HE resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Further development of new qualifications	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**13. Do you use or plan to use admissions tests? Please ✓ those which apply.**

	Don't use	Use	Plan to use		Don't use	Use	Plan to use
SAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	UniTest	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
HPAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	MSAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
BMAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	LNAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please specify)				UKCAT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

14. What additional skills, knowledge, understanding, qualities or other characteristics do you consider admissions tests offer over and above other S&C components?

15. Please assign values for the contribution you consider that S&C components make towards the development of the skills and qualities listed. Please enter a number from 1 to 5, 1 being the least relevant and 5 being the most relevant.

	Integration of AEA demand into A2 assessment	Grading differentiation at top end of A level (eg introduction of A** grade)	Use of more open-ended questions	Study of HE modules alongside Level 3 qualifications	Introduction of an Extended Project	Use of unit information and grades	Introduction of structured, overarching awards which include a number of different components (eg Specialised Diplomas)	Use of admissions tests
Numeracy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Oral communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Written communication	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presentation skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Study skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Problem solving	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analysis/synthesis/evaluation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Critical thinking	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ICT	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Time management	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Autonomous learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Working with others	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Personal commitment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

If you would like to receive a copy of the executive summary from this consultation, please provide your e-mail address in the box below:

## Appendix B: Introduction

Please give the name of your institution.

Institution	Respondant Count	Institution	Respondant Count
Academy of Live and Record Art	2	Staffordshire University	2
Anglia Ruskin University	3	Stranmillis University College	2
Arts Institute at Bournemouth	1	Thames Valley University	1
Aston University	6	Trinity College Carmarthen	1
Barking College	1	TTTT	1
Bell College	1	UCE Birmingham	1
Birmingham College of Food, Tourism & Creative Studies	1	University College Falmouth	1
Bournemouth University	7	University of Abertay Dundee	1
Bridgwater College	1	University of Bath	9
Brockenhurst College	1	University of Birmingham	1
Brunel University	4	University of Bradford	3
Cardiff University	7	University of Brighton	4
Chesterfield College	1	University of Bristol	7
City College Coventry	1	University of Buckingham	1
City College, Birmingham	1	University of Cambridge	1
Cleveland College of Art and Design	1	University of Central Lancashire	18
College of West Anglia	1	University of Chester	1
Cornwall College	7	University of Durham	2
Courtauld Institute of Art	1	University of East Anglia	1
Coventry University	2	University of Exeter	1
De Montfort University	7	University of Glamorgan	1
East Surrey College	1	University of Huddersfield	1
Edinburgh College of Art	1	University of Hull	3
Goldsmiths College	1	University of Leeds	14
Imperial College London	1	University of Leicester	6
King's College London	1	University of Liverpool	11
Lancaster University	2	University of Luton	1
Leeds College of Art & Design	2	University of Manchester	2
Leeds College of Music	1	University of Newcastle Upon Tyne	5
Leeds Metropolitan University	5	University of Nottingham	1
Lincoln College	1	University of Portsmouth	1
London School of Economics and Political Science	1	University of Reading	9
London South Bank University	1	University of Salford	1
Loughborough University	2	University of Southampton	3
North East Worcestershire College	1	University of St Andrews	6
Northumbria University	1	University of Stirling	1
Nottingham Trent University	6	University of Sussex	1
Oxford University	1	University of Ulster	1
Peninsula Medical School	1	University of Wales, Lampeter	1
Plymouth College of Art and Design	1	University of Wales, Swansea	2
Robert Gordon University	1	University of Westminster	3
Roehampton University	2	University of Winchester	1
Royal Agricultural College	1	Uxbridge College	1
Royal Holloway, University of London	1	Wirral Metropolitan College	2
South Cheshire College	1		
St George's, University of London	1		
		<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>232</b>
		<b>Total Institutions</b>	<b>90</b>

Please give your job title

Job Title	Total
Administrator	1
Admissions Assistant	1
Admissions Manager	4
Admissions Office	1
Admissions Officer	5
Assistant Registrar	2
Deputy Registrar	1
Gifted and Talented Coordinator	1
H E Coordinator	1
HE Co-ordinator	1
HE Development Manager	1
HE Student Support Co-ordinator	1
Head of Student Services	1
Lecturer	23
Marketing & Recruitment Manager	1
Senior Admissions Assistant	1
Senior Assistant Registrar	2
senior lecturer	20
Senior Lecturer / Admissions Tutor	1
Senior Student Records/Admissions Officer	1
senior tutor	1
Senior UG Admissions Officer	1
UG Admissions Officer	1
UG Admissions Manager	1
Academic Administration Manager	2
Academic Administrator	1
Academic Registrar	1
Administrative Assistant	1
Administrative Officer	1
Adminstrator	1
Admissions & Degree Development Manager	1
admissions adviser	1
Admissions Clerk	1
Admissions Office Manager	1
Admissions tutor	6
Admissions Tutor in Optometry	1
Admissions tutor in Physics	1
Admissions Sub Dean	1
Applicant Guidance Officer	1
ASIS Director	1
Assistant Academic Registrar	1
Assistant Head of Music Production (FE)	1
Assistant Principal	1
Assistant Registrar (Undergraduate Admissions)	1
Assistant Registrar Admissions	1
Assistant Registrar, Undergraduate Admissions	1
Associate Dean	1
Clerical officer	1
clinical demonstrator	1
Course Leader	1
Course Manager FdA Business	1
Curriculum Area Manager	1
Curriculum Manager HE	1
Dean of Undergraduate Studies	1
Deputy Director Admissions Faculty of Business, Computing and Inform	1
Deputy Registrar and Head of Admissions	1
Deputy Team Leader	1
Director of Admissions	2
Director of Combined Honours	1
Director of Joint Honours in Modern Languages	1
Director of Learning, Teaching and Administration	1
Director of Recruitment and Admissions	1
Director of teaching and learning	1
Director of Undergraduate Admissions	1
Director Student Recruitment	1
Director, Cardiff Japanese Studies Centre	1
Director, Centre for Joint Honours	1
Director: Admissions Application Centre	1
Education Manager	1

Job Title	Total
Enquiry & Admissions Manager	1
faculty admissions tutor / lecturer	1
Faculty Admissions Tutor	1
Faculty Director	1
Frameworks Coordinator	1
Head of Admissions	3
Head of Department	3
Head of Quality	1
Head of Recruitment and Admissions	1
Head of the Undergraduate Office	1
Information, Advice and Guidance Manager	1
International Admissions Manager	1
International Officer	1
Learning and Teaching Coordinator	1
Lecturer & Admissions Tutor in Food Biosciences	1
lecturer / Admissions Tutor	1
Lecturer and admissions officer	1
lecturer and admissions tutor	1
Lecturer in Chinese History and Admissions Tutor for History	1
Lecturer in Economics	1
Lecturer in Education Studies	1
Lecturer in English	1
Lecturer in International Relations	1
Lecturer in Media and Communication	1
Lecturer in Music and Audio Art, Admissions Tutor for BA (Hons) Music	1
lecturer in social work	1
Lecturer/Admissions Tutor	1
MA Pgm LEADER	1
Marketing Manager	1
principal lecturer	5
Principal Lecturer in Tourism and Environmental Management	1
Principal Officer (Academic Standards)	1
Profesorial Teaching Fellow in Physics	1
Professional Tutor, Undergraduate Admissions Tutor	1
professor	3
Professor of European History	1
Programme Manager	1
Programme Manager FdA Fine Art Practice	1
Reader	3
Reader in English	1
Reader in Geography	1
Recruitment and Admissions Officer	1
Registrar	2
Registry Admissions & Enquiries Officer	1
School Administrator	1
school admissions administrator	1
Secretary	1
Senior Academic	1
Senior Admissions Tutor	1
Senior Lecturer + Admissions Tutor	1
Senior lecturer in history	1
Senior lecturer in Petrology	1
Senior Lecturer Midwifery	1
Senior Lecturer/Admissions Tutor	1
Senior lecturer/course leader	1
Senior Programmes Administrator	1
Senior Recruitment Administrator - Institute of Health & Community Stu	1
Senoir Lecturer	1
SL responsible for UG admissions	1
Snr Admissions and School/Colleges Liaison Coordinator	1
Snr lecturer - TV	1
student recruitment co-ordinator	1
Teaching coordinator and admissions tutor	1
Team Leader, SESD	1
Tutor for Admissions: Biology programmes	1
Undergraduate Admissions Manager	1
Undergraduate Admissions Officer	2
Undergraduate Admissions Tutor	1
Vice Principal (Registrar)	1
Other	6
Grand Total	216

## Appendix C: Background

Do you find that student preparedness differs by country of origin within the UK (i.e. England Northern Ireland Scotland or Wales)?

	Response Total	%
Yes	34	18%
No	159	82%

Total Respondents	193
(skipped this question)	39

Generally which country's curriculum best prepares students for progression into HE?

Country	Average Rank
England	1.92
Northern Ireland	2.54
Scotland	2.12
Wales	2.52

Total Respondents	25
(skipped this question)	207

## Appendix D: Skills & Qualities

What provides the best evidence for the following skills and qualities? Please tick all that apply.

Skills & Qualities	Personal statement	Reference	Interview	Admissions tests	GCE AS/A level/AEA	Scottish Higher/Advanced Higher	Welsh Baccalaureate Advanced Diploma	International Baccalaureate	European Baccalaureate	BTEC/OCR Nationals	Scottish National Certificates/Progression	City & Guilds qualifications	Key/Core Skills	Total Responses
Numeracy	1% (1)	11% (11)	5% (5)	29% (29)	87% (86)	62% (61)	41% (41)	52% (51)	30% (30)	28% (28)	16% (16)	15% (15)	24% (24)	99
Oral communication	11% (11)	24% (23)	84% (81)	4% (4)	16% (15)	15% (14)	9% (9)	27% (26)	11% (11)	15% (14)	7% (7)	8% (8)	15% (14)	96
Written communication	81% (83)	23% (24)	4% (4)	21% (22)	54% (56)	38% (39)	26% (27)	51% (53)	30% (31)	25% (26)	17% (17)	11% (11)	17% (18)	103
Presentation skills	40% (35)	31% (27)	64% (56)	11% (10)	22% (19)	13% (11)	8% (7)	28% (25)	15% (13)	24% (21)	8% (7)	8% (7)	14% (12)	88
Study skills	14% (14)	57% (56)	16% (16)	9% (9)	71% (70)	53% (52)	40% (39)	47% (46)	30% (29)	29% (28)	14% (14)	12% (12)	13% (13)	98
Problem-solving	17% (16)	38% (35)	41% (38)	29% (27)	58% (54)	44% (41)	34% (32)	45% (42)	26% (24)	25% (23)	12% (11)	12% (11)	15% (14)	93
Research skills	24% (20)	38% (31)	22% (18)	13% (11)	63% (52)	48% (39)	38% (31)	46% (38)	28% (23)	23% (19)	15% (12)	10% (8)	6% (5)	82
Analysis/synthesis/evaluation	21% (18)	38% (33)	39% (34)	16% (14)	64% (56)	52% (45)	37% (32)	47% (41)	28% (24)	23% (20)	14% (12)	8% (7)	3% (3)	87
Critical thinking	26% (22)	34% (29)	46% (39)	19% (16)	58% (49)	44% (37)	28% (24)	48% (41)	22% (19)	20% (17)	9% (8)	7% (6)	5% (4)	85
ICT skills	33% (26)	33% (26)	5% (4)	28% (22)	55% (43)	36% (28)	26% (20)	35% (27)	18% (14)	23% (18)	13% (10)	17% (13)	24% (19)	78
Time management	36% (32)	70% (62)	20% (18)	14% (12)	31% (27)	24% (21)	15% (13)	35% (31)	14% (12)	22% (19)	8% (7)	8% (7)	7% (6)	88
Autonomous learning	32% (27)	71% (60)	28% (24)	12% (10)	24% (20)	13% (11)	8% (7)	36% (31)	16% (14)	20% (17)	9% (8)	7% (6)	2% (2)	85
Working with others	52% (45)	78% (68)	30% (26)	6% (5)	11% (10)	7% (6)	6% (5)	25% (22)	11% (10)	22% (19)	7% (6)	7% (6)	7% (6)	87
Personal commitment	81% (75)	68% (63)	51% (47)	6% (6)	19% (18)	14% (13)	10% (9)	29% (27)	16% (15)	20% (19)	8% (7)	11% (10)	5% (5)	93

What specific characteristics have changed in the last 5 years among UK applicants? Please tick as appropriate

Skills & Qualities	Decreased	Improved	Same
Numeracy	51%	8%	41%
Written communication	62%	11%	27%
Study skills	38%	24%	39%
Research skills	37%	24%	39%
Critical thinking	47%	13%	41%
Time management	26%	19%	55%
Personal commitment	31%	22%	47%
Oral communication	27%	20%	52%
Presentation skills	18%	51%	32%
Problem-solving	40%	16%	45%
Analysis/synthesis/evaluation	46%	7%	46%
ICT skills	7%	76%	17%
Autonomous learning	52%	11%	37%

Total Respondents	92
(skipped this question)	140

If overall you think that the level of these skills and qualities has decreased what do you think are the causes?

Causes	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Somewhat disagree	Strongly disagree	Not relevant
Different approaches to teaching numeracy/literacy	35%	40%	7%	0%	18%
Limited use of open-ended questions in examinations	35%	46%	8%	1%	10%
Lack of presentation skills training	17%	38%	12%	8%	25%
Decrease of time allotted for curriculum activities	23%	48%	6%	2%	22%
Insufficient time for independent learning and research	36%	39%	16%	0%	9%
Lack of breadth in study material	37%	36%	16%	4%	7%
Lack of depth in study material	56%	32%	7%	1%	4%
Too much free choice of qualification/subject at 14-19	21%	34%	21%	10%	15%

Total Respondents	78
(skipped this question)	154

Do you have any further comments on what can provide best evidence of the above skills and qualities?

1	A clear and precise marking scheme attached to a project which involves independent learning and original work.
2	A robust examination system would be the most fair, but as we do not have this in the UK, colleges have to resort to other evidence such as interview assessments.
3	Although I have ticked several boxes above, in many cases the items that provide the 'best evidence' do not provide much evidence at all, only more than the other options. A much better question would have been 'how much evidence of the following skills and qualities do the following provide?' The reference could, in theory, provide much useful evidence. The reality is that in the majority of cases the reference is at best marginally useful. References could be improved enormously by making them more structured and requiring the referee to assess the subject's skills and qualities systematically against a well defined comparison group.
4	Applicant questions about course content on open days.
5	As I have no experience of qualifications beyond the English system, I find these questions impossible to answer.
6	Evidence is only helpful in context. Personal statements can be ghost-written, so face to face communication/questioning/testing is the most reliable.
7	Evidence of relevant work experience that the candidate has undertaken independently.
8	High grade A levels means good skills/easy to teach - but no measure of critical thinking/analysis exists.
9	How on earth can one answer a question like the above? The average admissions tutor wouldn't know where to start; and in any case, these are all non-specific skills. I've ticked the IB because it's a pretty good general preparation, but I don't see enough students with the other qualifications to tell.
10	I have very little experience of dealing with students with International/European Baccalaureate awards.
11	I must note that the course I lecture on is through the medium of Welsh, so the student cohort is exclusively from Wales.
12	I really do not know. Also, I do not see how where you are looking for the best evidence you could tick more than one box per line.
13	I think very few people in universities would be in a position to answer this meaningfully. We deal in mass admissions, so those who have some familiarity with this range of qualifications know them only in terms of how their grades relate, and admissions tutors rarely see any of them. No-one tells us what is contained within them, unless we go seeking this, and for most of us admissions are a sideline. Certainly an institution like mine has a genuine commitment to opportunity, so we aren't looking for ways to exclude people. We find out about skills when they get here, and I can't think of a way to short-circuit that reliably. Also, we have a lot of mature students who may have very few formal qualifications.
14	Interview and admission tests usually provide the best evidence, but are difficult to run with large numbers of applicants.
15	It is difficult to assess the above skills and to be sure and certain most of the appropriate candidate has been selected through application and interview alone. Personal experience suggests those who have undertaken academically challenging A levels such as history, sociology, sciences will demonstrate most of the above. If they have studied and taken then achieved good results (grade C and above) they will demonstrate the above categories.

16	It is very difficult to comment on Scottish qualifications now as we get no applicants from Scottish schools unless they have done A level. As we no longer interview, it is also impossible to assess oral skills, although a foreign language oral (if we are given a separate mark) gives some guide. We have to rely on the honesty of the referees for most of these qualities and skills, but in a subject where candidates are in short supply such as modern languages, selectors can't be too fussy.
17	It is very hard. Personally I would like to see the Key Skills available at a higher level so that it could be used to gauge more advanced students.
18	Many Departments ask applicants to provide examples of relevant work in advance of interview.
19	Most of these skills are very difficult to assess on the basis of an application form. I would certainly be unable to say whether particular qualifications evidence them more clearly than others.
20	Mostly we don't really know. I can only comment on the basis of what I USE as evidence for these things, not on what I actually KNOW correlates with abilities once students get to university. We do not have the resources to compare student performance after arrival with how they did in their A levels. A level results are unreliable measures because of the amount of coaching that students receive. The personal statement, followed by the reference, are the most reliable indicators of the qualities that we seek in History undergraduates.
21	Much depends upon the subjects studied and the interest of the individual.
22	Open-Ended Response.
23	Personal Development Profile. Record of CPD.
24	Portfolio / interviews, but we don't interview our applicants.
25	Portfolios - as an Art & Design HEI we find the personal statement, interview and portfolio the most informative in assessing an applicant's entire ability.
26	Practically, an academic test provides the best evidence of the skills needed to complete an academic course.
27	Pre-degree access courses. The International and European Bac are not yet clearly identified as such - but will be very useful.
28	Scrap the Welsh Baccalaureate.
29	Students can achieve much through the school system but their true study skills come out at university. We do not interview so it is difficult to judge numeracy and literacy until they arrive.
30	The best evidence for numeracy, written communication, study skills, problem-solving, research skills, analysis/synthesis/evaluation, critical thinking, time management, and autonomous learning would be provided by an 1980's style A-level ie an A2 level with the same syllabi, type of exam questions, and marking scheme as used during the 1980s.
31	The best evidence, in my opinion, is always a personal interview.
32	The important skills and qualities that we seek are not necessarily expressed by academic qualifications for physiotherapy. We need a basic level of achievement but there are other equally important things to be assessed through the personal statement and ref primarily.
33	These skills cannot be assessed by subject-specific examinations as listed above. I can't comment on admissions tests because I haven't used them.
34	We do not have enough applicants with the European Bac, BTEC, Scottish National, City and Guilds or Key skills to comment on these qualifications.
35	We would not rate any type of qualification per se to be intrinsically more suitable than another.
36	Within my department we can only comment on A Levels as we have had insufficient applicants with other qualifications to identify a pattern of prediction. I am confident that one of the best predictors for successful completion of the BSc programme is evidence in the personal statement of making a clearly informed choice of career. This obviously means research the profession and understanding the diversity and the skills and attributes required.
37	Written qualifications can give some indication of students' abilities in the above criteria, but this is heavily dependent on the subjects they are offering. It is also very difficult to compare similar results/projections across different types of award (e.g. AVCE versus A2 level).

Do you have any further comments on the causes of decreases in applicants' skills and qualities?

1	Undergraduate Level 1 now equivalent to A level.
2	30 + years of a failure to teach basic English language at school and woeful neglect of foreign languages at all school ages has resulted in poor written communication skills. There is also, probably, a sociological influence at work here: children do not read as much. Too much spoon-feeding.
3	A key cause not mentioned above is 'teaching to the test' which now seems to be endemic in all but a very few schools. In its most extreme cases schools go as far as encouraging learners to memorise essays word for word, which are then regurgitated in the examination. If the right (highly predictable) question comes up, the student gets an A grade. If it does not, the student still gets a passing grade, because so many of the assessment objectives relate to demonstrating specified skills and competences rather than answering the actual question asked.
4	A level entry scores are very high, but do not act as an indicator or predictor of potential and ability. A level entry scores have increased but student ability has decreased. They want to be told what to do and are not proactive at finding out how to do things for themselves. I feel that they do not find the transition between school where they are told what to do to get an A grade and university where they are encouraged to adopt independent study and critical thinking skills easy. They think of university as a continuation of school. They are therefore, poorer quality students, despite their quality on paper. School gives lots of opportunity to accrue marks by continuous assessment. I am concerned at how much of this is cutting and pasting from the internet and how much is their own work.
5	A Modern Language no longer compulsory at GCSE!
6	Applicants generally have less time to develop through engagement in extra-curricular activities. Much of the opportunities to develop self-confidence and awareness no longer exist as the curriculum timetable is filled with task-based activities. Because many students use free-time to engage in employment there is also a reduction in the opportunity to engage in activities beyond what is required to pass exams. Observing candidates at interview, it is clear that many have the intellectual ability to do well in exams, but lack the enthusiasm and motivation for their subject. Being able to pass exams is seen by applicants as being all that is required to be successful in education.
7	As a science admissions tutor, the most important overall detrimental effect in my opinion, is the fact that students need to be 'trained' to use the right words and phrases in order to get the marks in exams. In my opinion, teachers are being pushed into 'programming' students rather than educating them.
8	As the materials are taught in a more structured and easily accessible way the need for students to independently investigate and think critically about things decreases.
9	Candidates, in too many cases, lack an adequate grounding in the basic skills of their subjects. I believe that this is changing a bit now but universities are not yet seeing the students who might benefit from this.
10	Certain skills have increased but at the expense of experimentation.
11	Current science and maths A level (and other UK equivalents) exam questions give insufficient emphasis to the testing of analytical skills (eg in maths it is often not required to spot which mathematical form a particular equation has because students are prompted with this information in the question). The current A level syllabi also seem to encourage only recipe-driven thinking - there seems to be little development of skills in applying existing knowledge to new situations not met before in specific examples given during the course. The unitised system for A levels also seems to encourage the false idea that subjects can be divided up into self-contained topics that can be forgotten once one has moved on to another unit. This leads to poor abilities at combining understanding learnt from different areas.
12	I am not entirely sure whether these have improves/decreased etc or whether candidates are better equipped to complete UCAS forms and study skills have improved overall.
13	I don't know what the cause of decreases in applicants skills and qualities are but it seems to relate to spoon-feeding at school and college and the fact that it's now so easy to contact tutors by email rather than working things out for oneself.
14	I have said that ICT skills have improved but not sufficiently. They are better than they were but they are not keeping pace with technological improvements and time is needed during the degree to teach students how to search databases, access e-journals and use VLE.

15	I think it is invidious to focus on decreases in skill in the way this questionnaire is presented. I think research is needed to assess whether or not there has been any change in the skill set for school leavers. Many academics complain about it but it's all anecdotal.
16	I think this is easily influenced by selective memory. In large part the apparent decline in average skills is because we are taking people who wouldn't have gone to university two decades ago, and who often have little engagement with academic concerns. There is the decline in reading in general, from the press to novels, which must make an impact on routine literacy, especially as so much of what does get read is now written in very pared-down, stylised English, and students may have no idea that there is an alternative. Many of our students find comments on skills like this very threatening, showing it is tied up with their image of themselves, rather than just being a skill in the sense of cooking or DIY. This is why they seem to resist attempts to help them at all educational levels, rather than engaging with them, and that seems to be the biggest problem to me.
17	Lack of appreciation of need to understand and apply principles across disciplines. Lack of understanding that numeracy and literacy are basic tools not usually an end in themselves, or necessarily exciting, but open doors to the whole wealth of knowledge. Poor alignment of teaching of numeracy and literacy to real world.
18	Open-Ended Response.
19	Poor career advice leading to lack of engagement which becomes an overarching feature despite different approaches adopted.
20	Progression to HE seen by many as entitlement rather than something for which they need to work hard. Tendency to restrict themselves to set curriculum rather than wanting to explore knowledge for its own sake - lack of intellectual curiosity. Decline in teaching of modern languages at school a serious problem.
21	Stop watering down A levels. Allow no modules to be resat. Abolish coursework.
22	Students arrive being trained to answer exam questions. We have to retrain them to think for themselves, to question what they read and to critically evaluate arguments instead of just repeating them.
23	Students come to us having been taught how to do things wrongly, eg. referencing. We then have to get them to unlearn what they did at school and start again - a waste of everyone's time. More importantly, they come with a skewed and simplistic sense of what the subject of history is about, while also knowing very little about what happened in the past (that is, they have a fair amount of knowledge about just a few things). This may well be due to the requirements of A level curricula, which I notice are not in the list above. Unfortunately, the knowledge they do have is nothing like critical enough to justify the small content coverage, and the lack of content coverage makes it extremely difficult for them to gear up to the kind of historical comparisons that we demand in our programme.
24	Students tend to be much more teacher-led now than in the past. The shift towards modular assessment and the greater opportunities to repeat modules has meant that students are less able/practised in taking in a lot of material over a longer period of time and revising independently.
25	The above are necessarily generalisations, but the overall standard of students recruited onto our courses continues to vary greatly. The stronger students are no stronger than previously, but the percentage of such students recruited has definitely declined. The number of weaker students is increasing annually, both in absolute terms and as an overall percentage of a cohort. As a result, we face challenges that should not really be addressed within Higher Education, i.e. having to raise levels of basic literacy and numeracy amongst our students. Students joining us straight from Further Education should already be able to read, write and have basic analytical and evaluation skills. Sadly, many of them do not, raising the question of whether they are prepared for the challenges of Higher Education. Experience indicates that in many cases they are not.
26	The GCSEs and AS/A2 qualifications still contain a certain amount of coursework and this is problematic. Students from supportive families, and generally female students work better with coursework. An exam-only qualification would determine the absolute skills and qualities of candidates. If A2 qualifications are to determine an applicant's skills then it should be examined rather than having projects/course work.
27	The increased use of the internet (especially Google) to 'research' has led to some sloppy thinking and a lack of critical thought and also contributes to an increased plagiarism.

28	The introduction of GCSE seriously affected applicants' command of foreign languages, and making foreign langs. optional at 14 has been a disaster. Lack of grammar teaching in schools hasn't helped either (though I have hopes of better things when the literacy hour begins to work through).
29	There is a lack of depth in A level subjects. It is now possible to get a good grade with a very superficial understanding of the subject. There is no incentive for deep learning.
30	This is a symptom of many factors: too many universities have to spend time teaching students how to write and think now when we could build on it from an already good ground level 15-10 years ago. The fact they enter without solid knowledge of punctuation and grammar or the ability to adapt theories from text to text is a knock-on from their own teacher's lack of confidence in their skills. Which, of course is a reflection of earlier flaws. The main one being the time when teachers were told NOT to mark flaws of writing but to focus on content. This is a false economy because you cannot communicate content if you cannot write. The second key problem is that A level exams are being marked by people who are not sufficiently qualified in the opinion of most HE academics. I know of people of higher qualifications who apply to exam boards and are turned down only to discover later that an undergraduate or Masters student has been employed (obviously at a cheaper rate) to do the job. Why is this not good? UG and MA students today are still working on their own basic writing skills by and large - they are in the same position as the school teachers. Also, they are not experts in a field and will not be able to recognise thinking outside the box because they are marking to too fixed a set of criteria.
31	Too many distractions and too much reliance on the internet as a primary source.
32	Too much leading and not enough experiential learning prior to HE. Not enough use and emphasis placed on independent learning and investigation.
33	Unfortunately not able to comment as I am unsure of school activities and the examination content.
34	Where the skills have stayed the same, it is generally because they are at the same low level they were five years ago. In particular, many students are incapable of writing clear, grammatically correct English.
35	With over 30 years experience in HE and accepting that there are always 'high flyers', many students have been taught and assessed in 'sound bytes' which decreases their retention of information.

## Appendix E: Student Retention

If you are involved with students who discontinue their studies what are the reasons for dropping-out. Please tick a box from 1-5 1 being least relevant and 5 being the most relevant.

Reasons for Dropping Out	1	2	3	4	5	Average Rating
Mismatch between academic der	10	12	16	18	24	3.43
Failed examinations once in HE	10	10	20	22	13	3.24
Financial reasons	12	21	15	12	21	3.11
- numeracy skills	22	17	22	8	4	2.38
- oral communication skills	27	19	21	6	0	2.08
- written communication skills	16	19	18	13	8	2.7
- presentation skills	27	20	21	3	2	2.08
- study skills	12	12	24	15	11	3.01
- problem-solving	16	11	22	16	8	2.85
- research skills	16	13	22	14	7	2.76
- analysis/synthesis/evaluation	15	14	21	13	10	2.85
- critical thinking	16	12	22	14	9	2.84
- ICT skills	36	19	10	5	2	1.86
- time management skills	7	16	25	14	13	3.13
- autonomous learning skills	8	15	18	17	16	3.24
- working with others skills	26	23	19	5	2	2.12
- personal commitment	3	9	19	24	21	3.67
University life was not what stude	6	14	22	18	18	3.36
Lack of motivation to study	3	9	17	21	26	3.76
Change of career goals	10	20	21	19	8	2.94
Personal/family problems	9	9	20	28	19	3.46
Homesickness	16	21	22	17	5	2.68

Total Respondents	85
(skipped this question)	147

## Appendix F: Differentiation

Do you have a need for additional differentiation mechanisms among the following categories of applicant?

Applicant Category	Yes	No
High-achieving students	48%	52%
Lower-achieving students	45%	55%
Near-miss applicants	57%	43%
Clearing applicants	39%	61%

Total Respondents	94
(skipped this question)	138

Do you have any further comments on the reasons for students dropping out of their studies?

1	Demands of the academic programme combined with clinical practice of health care training. All health care students only spend 50% of the course in uni, the other 50% is mandatory clinical practice. Only have 6 weeks of lectures / academic input but still required to submit assignments in the semester. Also have clinical assessments to complete each semester. Also have 3 semesters a year as opposed to 2. Only get 9 weeks leave per year.
2	Failure to complete is usually due to non-academic reasons. Universities have become adept at dealing with poor study skills etc. (they have had to!). However, for those who fail to complete for academic reasons, lack of motivation and autonomy are crucial.
3	For Joint Honours students, good time-management skills are particularly crucial.
4	Having to work many and unsociable hours linked to financial reasons.
5	I'm surprised you are asking admissions tutors about this and not asking the students themselves.
6	Lack of support in terms of pastoral care when commencing university or at difficult times either personal or academic.
7	Location - Cornwall is a dream place to be if you want a laid back sea-based existence but if you need the lights of a city (clubbing, shopping) and you need to be able to get home quickly then these are causes for annual dropout at this HEI.
8	Many students drop out in year one because they hadn't appreciated how difficult the HE course is. Many of the students have been 'spoon fed' in preparing for A levels and therefore find HE work very tricky.
9	Mostly they don't tell us, or tell us a bare minimum, even though we would very much like to know.
10	Nursing is a demanding programme that only suits well prepared and well informed people as a career choice. Still thought of 'hands-on' career not academically demanding.
11	Open-Ended Response.
12	Our course is over-subscribed and we have a careful selection process followed by an extensive induction to ensure students have adequate skills to succeed. Students in our experience drop out for financial and family reasons.
13	Our drop-out rate is, thankfully, very low, particularly as Joint Honours provides opportunities to change programme rather than leave the University. Health problems constitute the major reason for drop-out.

14	Our research has shown that dropout is more likely in students who live in their own homes or continue to live with parents - missing social experience of University perhaps. Gender is also a factor, more men leave than women. Also socio-economic status and first generation into HE - suggests that developing an understanding of and tolerance for the cultural difference between HE and school is a vital component.
15	Reasons are varied but computing seems to suffer quite badly with experience of ICT not meeting the requirements of computing at HE level.
16	Students living at home are more likely to drop out than those in University accommodation - they often have conflicting pressures on their time and find it more difficult to both study and integrate.
17	Students who reach university rarely drop out for academic reasons in my department. It is nearly always personal reasons ranging from homesickness to illness.
18	Students withdraw for many reasons, but the most common ones are: financial pressures; a basic misunderstanding of the academic expectations of university study (physically turning up for lectures, contributing when they do, preparing for seminars, READING!!!); and an inability to adapt to the academic demands of university (as evidenced by the work they submit, their attendance records, etc).
19	The drop-out rate at Cambridge is very low, so we do not have great experience of students dropping out. The most common reasons why students drop out are personal problems or because they are compelled to leave after failing their examinations. Examination failure is usually due either to a lack of effort or poor study and thinking skills.
20	The majority of students are still only 18 years old when coming to university and I feel that the majority are absolutely woefully prepared, mentally and emotionally for the huge changes that coming to University requires of a young person's life.
21	They don't drop out through homesickness but they may go to an institution nearer home.
22	They needed a space to find out more about themselves due to being in highly structured education since they were 4 or 5.
23	Two main related categories - sometimes overlapping 1. academic failure usually due to specific skill lacks or to lack of engagement with the programme 2. social reasons often relating to personal problems and family issues.
24	Very few students at Stranmillis UC discontinue their course.
25	We have a very low drop-out rate, so the above is based on opinion rather than hard evidence. The points marked as 5 are very rarely seen as we select on evidence of personal commitment and motivation. We have seen some recent cases of students withdrawing from studies because of a change in career goals but this has only been because the profession has had a graduate employment crisis.
26	You can't necessarily learn a skill if you do not have the aptitude or motivation.

## What other categories of student do you need to differentiate between?

1	All offers are made by the Admissions Tutor and some differentiation is made in terms of making a realistic and achievable offer. This is done within the framework of an overall points total at A2 level (or equivalent) which is fixed. Problems often occur with students accepted through Clearing, whose points total is generally significantly lower than that required of initial applicants. It has also been my view for several years that the points target is too low, which - when combined with Clearing admissions - results in a high proportion of our students joining us with comparatively low A2 level scores. There is a very real tension between maintaining student numbers on the one hand and academic standards and quality on the other. The two are often mutually incompatible but financial constraints usually take priority at institutional level when this topic is raised.
2	As we are a college of FE offering HE, we tend to have applicants from the lower end of the spectrum. It is these students especially as many of them are late applicants that we need further differentiation mechanisms.
3	At my institution there is sadly no need to differentiate between high-achieving students but this is a big problem in many other institutions.
4	Home and overseas fee payers. Disabled and not.
5	I don't understand what this question is asking - it seems to be asking 'do we utilise positive discrimination'.
6	It can be very difficult to assess overseas qualifications.
7	Mature students with family commitments, including those with Access or less recent qualifications, and typical 18 year olds just out of school/college.
8	None.
9	None.
10	Open-Ended Response.
11	Part of our selection process is based on predicted academic grades. This desperately needs changing in order to select fairly. Post-qualification applications is needed. I am happy with using A Levels or Bacs as academic differentiation mechanisms but for them to be used fairly, we need the results first!
12	Since British HE is becoming increasingly segregated, an institution like ours gets very few 'high-achieving' applicants. This has the problem that there is a lack of peer-group role models in our cohorts. We would never exclude someone on a skills basis unless it was completely clear that they could not cope with HE, and then we refer them to an access course. I appreciate this is a very different attitude to HE from that displayed by the aggressively elitist institutions that now seem to be getting all the praise and funding.
13	Students doing mature access courses.
14	Students transferring from another course or non-traditional entrants with e.g., access qualifications which are often just pass/fail.
15	Those students who have identified learning difficulties and disabilities.
16	Those who are genuinely committed to studying and those who are only doing it because it's expected of them.
17	We are committed to widening participation and accept students through access courses but it would be helpful if access courses were brought into the UCAS Tariff system or differentiated in some way. There are simply too many to interview them all.
18	Widening participation different learning pathways.

## Appendix G: The Stretch & Challenge Initiative

What aspects of the current stretch and challenge developments are you aware of which do you think should be introduced and which would you use for selection purposes?

Stretch & Challenge' Developments	Aware of	Should be introduced	Use for selection
Integration of AEA demand into A2 assessments	74%	42%	17%
Grading differentiation at top end of A level (e.g. introduction of A* grade)	67%	53%	34%
Use of more open-ended questions	41%	71%	22%
Study of HE modules alongside Level 3 qualifications	71%	31%	10%
Introduction of an Extended Project	53%	61%	29%
Use of unit information and grades	71%	50%	32%
Introduction of structured overarching awards which include a number of different components (e.g. Specialised Diplomas)	68%	38%	23%
Use of admissions tests	71%	31%	27%

Total Respondents	85
(skipped this question)	147

How do you intend to use A level unit grade information in the future?

Information Uses	Yes	No
In initial Offer Making	57%	43%
For near-miss applicants	86%	14%
For Clearing applicants	68%	32%
For personal development planning purposes during induction	27%	73%

Total Respondents	90
(skipped this question)	142

Would you like to receive Unified Mark Scheme scores as well as or instead of Unit grades?

As well as	63%
Instead of	4%
Would not use either	33%

Total Respondents	81
(skipped this question)	151

Do you consider that the International Baccalaureate offers more stretch and challenge than A levels?

Yes	71%
No	29%

Total Respondents	87
(skipped this question)	145

Please select features of the IB that you consider provide Stretch & Challenge.  
Please tick a box from 1 to 5 1 being least relevant and 5 being most relevant.

<b>International Baccalaureate Features</b>	<b>Average Score</b>
Compulsory study of a range of disciplines	4.17
Study of a minimum of six subjects	4.03
Overarching award with compulsory components	3.97
Study of core - Extended Essay	3.73
Grading structure	3.67
Linear assessment	3.55
Study of core - Theory of Knowledge	3.47
Study of core - Creativity Action Service	2.89
Total Respondents	62
(skipped this question)	170

How do you assess applicants with the IB against those with A levels?

<b>IB Comparison to A Level</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
IB offers more breadth	54%	39%	7%	0%
IB offers more depth	29%	25%	44%	1%
Applicants with the IB are more numeric	24%	40%	37%	0%
Applicants with the IB are more literate	23%	45%	30%	2%
Presentation skills are more developed among IB students	11%	56%	31%	2%
Research skills are better among IB students	21%	53%	24%	2%
Study skills are better among IB students	17%	59%	23%	2%
Total Respondents	72			
(skipped this question)	160			

## Appendix H: The Role of Higher Education

What role could HE play in the further development of qualifications used 14-19?

HE Role	Most likely	Somewhat likely	Not relevant
Involvement in developing the 14-19 curriculum	61%	32%	7%
Facilitating access to HE resources	43%	41%	16%
Further development of new qualifications	33%	43%	23%

Total Respondents	91
(skipped this question)	141

Do you have any further comments on the comparison of students with the IB to students with A levels?

1	Based on the limited number of IB applicants, the ones that apply to this HEI are scoring much much higher than they need to in order to gain a place. i.e. we attract high achieving IB applicants.
2	Comparison is difficult, since most of our IB entrants are well to high achieving European students who already have a good command of English as their second language, and have thus demonstrated further study skills and often greater motivation than many of our UK A level entrants.
3	Don't know enough about it to comment.
4	I am not entirely clear on the differences between A-level and IB students and as I've only just begun working as an admissions tutor I'm afraid I've not had chance to observe this yet.
5	I cannot comment as I do not have any experience of students with IB.
6	I have dealt only with very few so far.
7	I have left so many sections blank because I lack information to make a judgement. The idea that we have time to engage with all this when we can barely keep up with our own teaching, despite working way over our contracted hours, is ludicrous. In any case, much of it seems to be designed to divide sheep from goats, whereas I see education as being something quite different.
8	I have no experience.
9	I only have limited knowledge of the IB and have never had an applicant with that qualification. Very nearly all my applicants have A-levels, BTECs or Scottish Nationals.
10	IB has greater breadth, especially with the Theory of Knowledge and Extended Essay.
11	IB stretches and challenges students by distracting their attention from key specialised goals: it's an instance of stretching that is NOT good or productive, if compared with a well-selected A level and AS programme.
12	IB students have better study skills, better time-management skills and are less likely to be damned by poor choice of subjects.
13	IB students seem to be more rounded, to have connected their subjects to each other instead of thinking about them in a modular fashion, to have developed a capacity for deeper analysis, and to think more independently.
14	In my opinion IB has been too highly rated on UCAS Tariff for 2008.
15	Insufficient experience of Bac to make firm comparisons.
16	It's good to have applicants who have done a compulsory language element.
17	Never used it.
18	Not really able to make confident comparison as we have relatively few IB students on the LLB programme and have not consciously compared them with A level students

19	Open-Ended Response.
20	Science/maths students do not actually need to study literature/arts/humanities, or do separate essay/project units, in order to develop literacy skills. These skills could be developed within the science subjects themselves. The breadth of the IB does not test rigour of understanding as well as the depth of 1980s style A-levels.
21	Students with IB tend to have a much deeper understanding of material compared with A level students with 'equivalent' grades. They are able to think for themselves.
22	The different depth of knowledge compared to A level means that IB students may struggle to get up to speed in the early stages of their degree studies. Given that few schools offer the qualification, it is difficult to say whether the perceived benefits of the IB are due to the breadth of the exam, or the ethos of the schools teaching it.
23	The limitation of the IB is that whilst students are able to study six subjects, there is not the same range of choice that is available at A-level. That being said, having applicants who are numerate, literate, have ability in at least two languages to a reasonable level, and have undertaken all of the activities that form core elements (ToK, CAS, Extended Essay) is superb. Note however that this feature would not make the IB a suitable qualification for post-16 students - it is a qualification that appeals (and is suited to) a fairly limited range of the UK student community.
24	There are many more points on the IB assessment scale compared with A-levels, and it is therefore much easier to differentiate the good from the excellent.
25	Tracking our students through the degree programme (in Physics) shows those who took IB consistently achieve better grades than those who took A-levels - even though the syllabus is designed around an A-level entry.
26	Trouble is we do not see many lower-achieving IB students. Current UCAS Tariff is unrealistically high for IB.
27	Very few IB applicants apply to make an informed comment.
28	We have only the occasional applicant with IB so I could not comment fully.

## Appendix I: Admission Tests

Do you use any or plan to use admissions tests?

Admission Tests	Don't use	Use	Plan to use
SAT	93%	8%	0%
UniTEST	97%	3%	0%
HPAT	100%	0%	0%
MSAT	99%	1%	0%
BMAT	96%	4%	0%
LNAT	96%	4%	0%
UKCAT	97%	3%	0%

Total Respondents	84
(skipped this question)	148

What further role do you think HE could play in the further development of qualifications used 14-19?

1	Access to HE resources can only be possible for those within easy reach of a university and therefore disadvantages many candidates who leave too far from a university/college and/or do not have adequate transport. At the moment many are not trained how to use such resources and have little interest in doing so.
2	ASK US WHAT WE NEED!! Symposia to share experience, needs and content between schools, exam boards and HE. Compulsory HE representatives on curriculum committees of exam boards (maybe they're already there - if so, they don't seem to have much say in curriculum content) - force the exam boards to structure their curricula to reflect the realities of the subject as currently taught at university level. Eg. the approach to history at A-level is at least 20 years out of date, which is where many of our transition problems arise.
3	Being less constrained by a national fixation on A levels. We are an Art & Design institution and we need students with high levels of practical skills (which we attract) and decent levels of written skills (which is harder to attract).
4	Curriculum development should take account of HE views on content.
5	Do not understand what you are asking here: what role HE will play (likely or unlikely) or could play (agree or disagree).
6	Does HE need to play a role in development of even more exams? Please just give us a period of stability so that we know what has been taught in secondary education and allow us to build on that. With so many different entry routes with differing amounts of knowledge, often in different optional modules, teaching in HE is becoming increasingly difficult because we have no simple way of finding what the students have been taught and to what depth of detail. If there are no solid foundations - what can you then build?
7	Ensure that the levels of attainment of students are not further eroded.
8	HE is open to schools to investigate. HE knows what industry/research needs. School should try to prepare 19 year olds as best they can for University education and explain what it will be like - self-directed, interactive study reinforced by great teaching and resource. School should explain that HE does not expect specialist knowledge so much as a good grounding in the basics of communication and analysis.
9	HE should certainly be more widely consulted in the development of new 14-19 syllabi and qualifications, including down to the style of exam questions.

10	Higher Education has I think learned the important lesson from the curriculum 2000 experience that to NOT engage in the development of pre-University education means that there is little probability that you develop 14-19 qualifications that are suited to prepare applicants to entry. Also it is necessary to engage so that teachers, students and parents are aware of what higher education wants applicants to undertake to demonstrate, and so that those involved in curriculum development at University have a clear understanding of what applicants are capable of doing when they first enter higher education.
11	Identifying skills for research (introducing basic research methods, basic data analysis etc) Constructive critical thinking and literature reviewing Searching for relevant literature and use of e-journals Making informed decisions on career choice Career planning.
12	in my particular area more artists and art+ design students in school placements throughout the curriculum.
13	Involvement usually means consulting the elite universities and/or high-flying researchers. I think ordinary university teachers certainly should be consulted, but it is something the system seems designed to exclude. Also, these qualifications must remain coherent and worthwhile in their own right, as many students from ordinary homes still do not go on to university, and to turn the whole of secondary education into a focused, dedicated HE preparation system would be quite wrong.
14	It is dangerous for HE to dominate discussion about School level qualifications. It reinforces the 'treadmill' that drives all sixth formers towards University when many would be better suited to workplace education both financially, emotionally and academically. There needs to be more work on integrating workplace education with HE, and recognition of non-accredited skills.
15	It would be nice to have a say in the curriculum; but if other colleagues are as hard-pressed as I am, I can't see HE having a hands-on role
16	Open-Ended Response.
17	Specifications could be assessed by subject tutors in HE to consider suitability as preparation for degree level courses.
18	There needs to be more cohesion between qualifications gained at 16/18/19 and the demands of HE. A2 levels and their equivalents are seen largely as an entry route to HE, but when students arrive, they do not possess the basic skills they need to succeed. This suggests that entry requirements are not fit for the purpose they are meant to serve.
19	Working to promote a higher level of numeracy and literacy in University entrants and trying to get these skills embedded as testable parts of the A level syllabuses.

## Appendix J: Stretch & Challenge Summary

Which component of Stretch & Challenge do you consider best contributes overall to the evidencing of skills qualities and other characteristics required for successful transition in the demands of HE study? (1 being most relevant and 5 the least relevant)

Stretch & Challenge Component	1	2	3	4	5	Average Score
Integration of AEA demand into A2 assessment	8	14	30	6	8	2.88
Grading differentiation at top end of A level (e.g. introduction of A* grade)	27	14	11	13	9	2.5
Use of more open-ended questions	18	16	19	16	6	2.68
Study of HE modules alongside Level 3 qualifications	11	8	32	11	10	3.01
Introduction of an Extended Project	9	12	26	15	12	3.12
Use of unit information and grades	12	19	22	11	11	2.87
Introduction of structured overarching awards which include a number of different components (eg Specialised Diplomas)	5	21	27	5	13	3
Use of admissions tests	8	14	17	19	13	3.21

Total Respondents	77
(skipped this question)	155

Are there any other admissions tests that you currently use or plan to use?

1	All of our students undergo a formal individual interview.
2	Group interview process.
3	I have developed my own range of admissions tests: in particular, a range of advanced language tests (in several languages) for using primarily with mature candidates who may lack formal qualifications.
4	In some cases, use internal admissions tests.
5	It is not Nottingham Trent University policy to apply admissions tests to entrants. However, we do test and interview applicants for one course (BSc Hons Applied Biomedical Sciences) since this is part externally funded. We will also begin to test APEL applicants but the nature of this test is not yet determined.
6	Local test.
7	LSE Entrance Exam.
8	No.
9	No.
10	No.
11	No.
12	No plans to introduce admission tests.
13	No, but personal and referees statements are marked according to strict marking criteria by a minimum of 2 members of the academic staff.
14	No.
15	No. Who has time? And anyway the personal statement is more important and useful.
16	None - have considered them but administrative burden would be too heavy and we have concluded that they would not tell us anything more than what traditional qualifications and personal statement/references could tell us.
17	Often we get our HE applicants to sit initial assessments in literacy and numeracy to determine the levels they are at.
18	Open-Ended Response.
19	Our own personal statement test, on the interview day.
20	Own written test, group activity and discussion.

## Stretch & Challenge in the 16-19 Curriculum

21	Oxford has developed an English test (piloted in 2006) in conjunction with Cambridge Assessments to be taken prior to selecting interview candidates, and has developed pre-interview tests in History and Physics that have already been used. A Mathematics test is currently under discussion, and discussions are taking place to determine if an appropriate test can be developed for Philosophy, Politics and Economics (PPE). Note that graduate entry to medicine uses UKCAT.
22	Pbl.
23	Some other departments within my institution may use these, but I don't at present.
24	Students have to do a written piece based on watching a DVD on a topic relevant to social work when they come for interview.
25	Use of portfolios that include visual, written and research/contexts of practice and understanding of relevant cultural material. Plus interview.
26	We ask for written work, which has been very successful and causes minimal disruption to the applicants.
27	We ask students with no formal qualifications, or only some which are very old, to write a trial essay for us, based around subjects where any person should have adequate knowledge. It seems to work well.
28	We currently use (and have done so for 9 years) GAMSAT.
29	We have been trialling the use of the Thinking Skills Assessment (TSA) - produced for us by Cambridge Assessment - in a number of subjects for several years. This is presently taken by applicants when they attend for interview.
30	We have introduced our own English Language test in addition to IELTS for international non-English speaking students.
31	We have our own maths test for diagnostic purposes used for applicants with non-standard qualifications for entry to engineering.
32	We make conditional offers to science students - we do not interview or require tests.
33	We use SAT for applicants from the US system.
34	With the under-funding being given to BTEC/ABC Foundation Studies in Art & Design a big advantage to us would be to offer admissions tests but this would be detrimental to the poorer students wishing to study Art & Design.
35	Would like to use admission tests, we do not currently use them.

What additional skills, knowledge, understanding, qualities or other characteristic do you consider admissions tests offer over and above other Stretch and Challenge components?

1	Ability to perform there and then at interview
2	An independent means to assess students' ability to perform tasks which will be required of them when they commence the course. We would probably use testing as a diagnostic tool, rather than as an admissions criterion - would assist us in making alternative offers and carrying out remedial work, rather than turning down applicants.
3	Applicants for Nursing should write a short essay on interview day following arrival to determine their ability to write clearly and produce work free from mistakes.
4	Basic comprehension tests: people need to read and think quickly to maximise their time at university and many students are not confident readers.
5	Consistency. Measure potential better.
6	I know what my tests cover but am sometimes appalled at the gaps in the knowledge of A level candidates.
7	I would not be happy with tests that measure performance on the day. Am not convinced of their predictive qualities.
8	In an ideal world I would interview everyone who applied and offer EE to those I really wanted - and they would understand the significance of an EE offer and accept it instead of feeling insulted.
9	In an ideal world we would not feel the need to use Admissions Tests. The public examination system (PES) should test the skills needed by HEIs and provide the necessary differentiation. However, at present the PES does not adequately test critical thinking, problem solving, synthesis or extended argumentation skills, provides limited opportunity for students to demonstrate originality, and does not differentiate adequately at the top end of the ability range. It must be added that even if the PES is changed to address these multiple deficiencies there may still be a need for Admissions Tests to provide a common comparator across the gathered field of applicants in the face of the growing fragmentation of the UK PES - the introduction of the Welsh Bacc, Specialised Diplomas, increasing use of the IB, the possible introduction of the pre-U etc. - and the growing numbers of applicants from the rest of the world (particularly as a consequence of EU enlargement).
10	Key use of admissions tests appears to be differentiation at the higher ability end.
11	Likelihood to succeed.
12	N/a.
13	None.
14	None.
15	None.
16	Open-Ended Response.
17	Performance under interview stress, working with others in action, time management.
18	Subject-specific and can combine numeracy, ICT and written skills.
19	Subject- specific knowledge - hard facts, not general principles.
20	The ability to do the sorts of things that we need our undergraduate students to be able to do is tested better by written work than anything else. Knowledge, understanding, reading, writing and arguing skills, as well as essay construction, are all particularly well tested by this method.
21	They seem largely redundant to me. We should reform our own system.
22	This depends upon the test. Note that there are two types of admissions test - some which hope to identify latent ability and potential that the existing examination and qualification regime does not indicate. The other is the type of test which primarily serves to demonstrate subject-based knowledge (or its application) and which are primarily used to cut down on the number of candidates that need to be invited for interview. Note that given the emphasis that is placed on interviews as an element of the selection process, any development of stretch and challenge would need to provide evidence of the applicant's ability and potential prior to the admissions process if it was to diminish the dependence on many of the existing admissions tests.

23	Too uninformed about 'Stretch and Challenge' to comment.
24	Until all qualifications can be studied equally by all applicants, there is an inherent unfairness in the system. We should not be introducing A* or AEA unless every child at every school has an equal opportunity to study for them.

## Appendix K Glossary

Glossary

GAMSAT Graduate Australian Medical School Admissions Test