



FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES



REPORT

Students' experiences of their studies during autumn 2020

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1. Background

In May 2020, a questionnaire was circulated to students of the Faculty of Social Sciences in order to assess their experiences of how the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their studies and well-being. This survey was initiated by the Sahlgrenska Academy. Among the survey's findings were that more than 60 per cent of respondents had experienced a poorer well-being following the University's transition to online studies. More than half the respondents stated that they felt less motivation to study and that their focus had waned during lectures and seminars.¹

In light of the fact that national and university-level restrictions and the shift to online studies continue to apply, the Faculty of Social Sciences management decided to conduct a follow-up study based on the spring survey in order to obtain an updated and enhanced overview of the students' study situation. Once again, the Faculty worked in partnership with the Sahlgrenska Academy. Some questions remained the same as they were last spring, while others were adapted to the experiences of distance education since May 2020 and the revised understanding of the potential duration of the pandemic.

The survey results provide a foundation for the Faculty's, departments' and teaching staff's ongoing planning and development of their activities.

1.1 Data collection

The questionnaire was sent out by e-mail to all first- and second-cycle students in the Faculty of Social Sciences. A total of 8,148 people received the questionnaire. The questionnaire was made available in a Swedish-language version and an English-language version and it was possible to switch between these versions. Four reminders were sent out to recipients who had not responded. The survey was carried out during the period from 24 November to 13 December 2020. A total of 1,770 students, 22 per cent, responded to the survey. The corresponding figure for the spring survey in 2020 was 23 per cent.

1.2 Summary

The survey results show that many of the students who responded have found their studies during the autumn to be difficult. Their studies appear to have functioned, but perhaps not much more than just this. Despite the difficulties, many of the students who responded expressed understanding for the fact that the University has been obliged to respond to the strict restrictions imposed during the autumn of 2020.

In comparison with the survey conducted in the spring of 2020, students rated their well-being as being poorer across all criteria. Just as was the case in the spring, older students seem to have experienced their well-being as being better than younger students. Around half the respondents found their workload to be *high* during the autumn of 2020. Among these respondents, students aged 18-24 were at the top. Among those students who reported their workload to be *very high*, students aged 40+ dominate. This group of students more frequently stated that they lived with children and that they had a high workload alongside their studies. This may have had an impact on their perceptions of their

¹ See the report [in Swedish] [Studenters upplevelse av distansundervisning med anledning av COVID-19](#) [Students' experiences of distance education due to COVID-19]

workloads. Younger students more frequently stated that they lived in single households, which may result in a different type of stress and contribute to experiencing a lower level of well-being.

With regard to support and information, 60 per cent of students who responded were satisfied with the information available about their studies via the University's websites. The majority were satisfied with the information from their course coordinators/Canvas. In response to the question about what they thought of the information provided by the students' unions, 42 per cent responded "Don't know". This may indicate that they did not have much contact with the students' unions during the period in question and/or previously. Around half of the students who responded reported that the support, service and information provided by administrative staff, the University Library and the University's service functions had been good.

With regard to the quality of courses and study programmes, the vast majority of respondents seem to have experienced the practical and technical challenges as having been handled well. Compared with the spring of 2020, more respondents in the autumn survey indicated that they had access to a quiet place to study and course materials.

When students were asked to rate how different aspects of their studies had functioned during the autumn of 2020, a majority of respondents reported that *lecturing online in real-time* had worked well. Half stated that *pre-recorded lectures* had worked well. Among those who had participated in *recorded lecturing online in real time*, 75 per cent of responses were positive about this experience. More than half the respondents felt that the handling/use of technology during teaching had worked well. Most students seem to have experienced that examinations and seminars/discussions had worked well. More than half the students who responded had perceived the instructions to students to have worked well and felt that teaching staff had been available.

The results of the students' ratings of their own learning demonstrate that the majority of those who responded were satisfied with their efforts, results, and being present during classes. A majority (60 per cent) felt they had participated/engaged well in discussions/seminars. The students still appear to find it difficult to maintain their interest/motivation and focus, as was the finding in the spring survey.

In response to questions about their experiences of ongoing courses, more than half responded positively in relation to most statements. The exceptions to this related to the students' experiences of being able to influence their own learning, getting practice and receiving feedback without grading, receiving regular feedback that helps students to see their own progress, and feeling a sense of social connection with others enrolled on the course. The results indicate that these remain areas that the Faculty ought to continue prioritising.

2. Results and analysis

2.1 Participants

Of the 1,770 students who responded to the questionnaire, 1,321 (75 per cent) were women and 407 (23 per cent) were men. 15 people (0.8 per cent) indicated that they were genderqueer/non-binary, while 23 people (1.3 per cent) preferred not to say (see Figure 1).

Students from all departments in the Faculty of Social Sciences responded to the questionnaire (Figure 2). The greatest number of responses to the questionnaire came from the Department of Social Work (336 people), followed by the School of Global Studies (301 people), with the Department of Psychology (295 people) coming third.

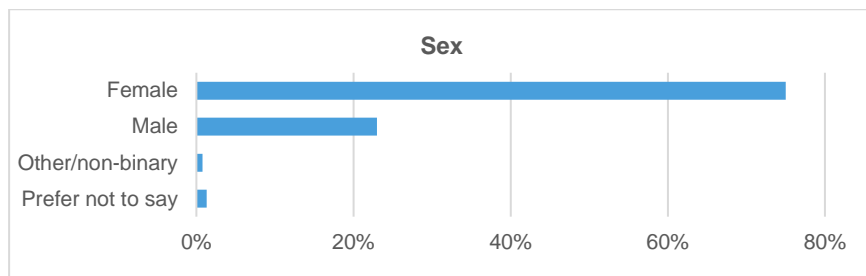


Figure 1

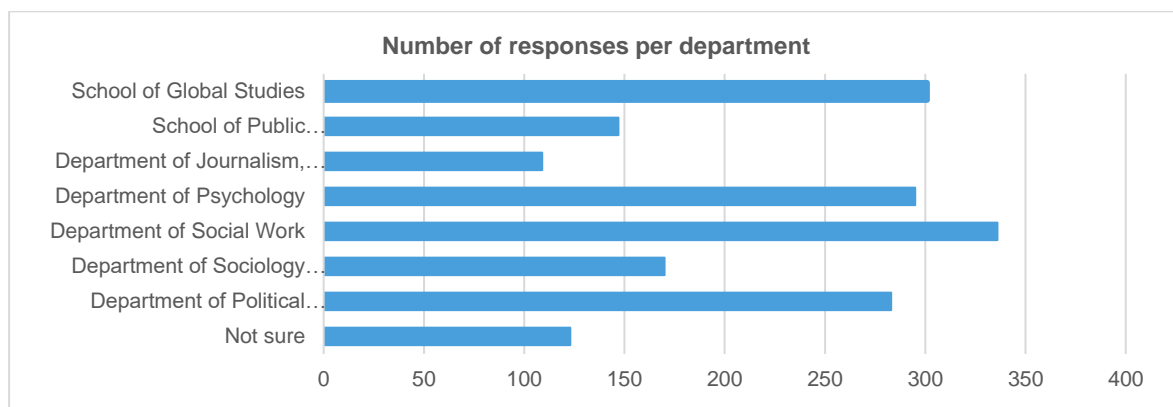


Figure 2

The majority of respondents were aged 21-29 years old (Figure 3) and 29 per cent of respondents were in semester 1 of their studies during the period in question, i.e. they started in autumn 2020. In second place were students in semester 3 of their studies (21 per cent) followed by those in semester 5 (16 per cent).

The majority, 79 per cent of respondents, were studying at first-cycle level, while 86 per cent were studying a programme. Out of the students who responded, 90 per cent reported that they had Swedish citizenship or a permanent residence permit.

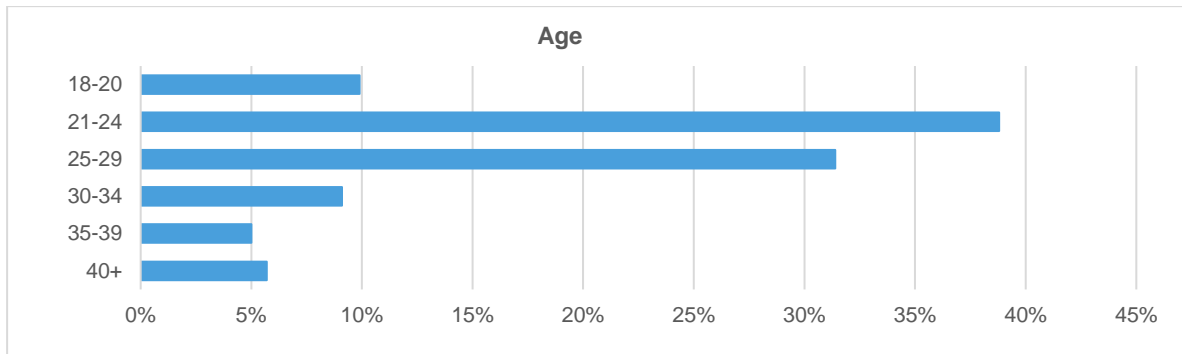


Figure 3

2.2 Health and living conditions

In response to the question about the student's household, it was possible to select multiple options (Figure 4). One third of respondents stated that they lived alone. Approximately 40 per cent stated that they lived together with a partner/husband/wife. A smaller percentage of students, 18 per cent, reported that they lived with their parent/parents. This group consisted primarily of students aged 18-20, as well as a small proportion of students aged 25-29 (Figure 5). More students in the 18-29 year old category stated that they lived in a single household than other students. With regard to living together with children, it was largely students aged 34 and older who indicated this type of household. Living together with a partner/husband/wife was most common among students aged 25 and older.

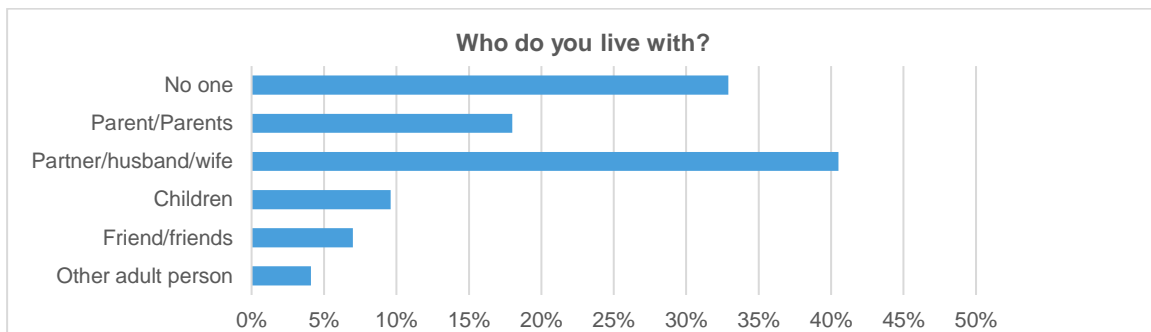


Figure 4. Respondents could select more than one option.

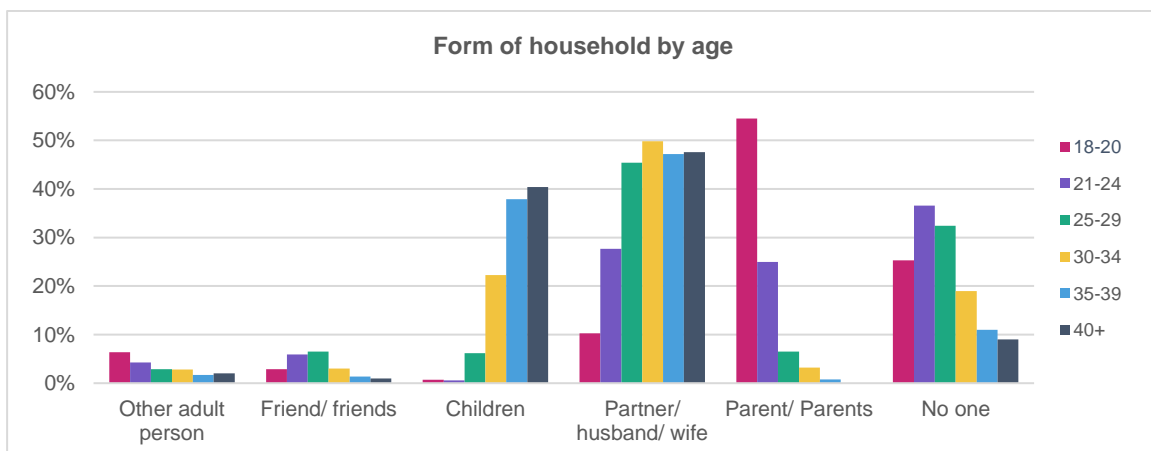


Figure 5

Not quite half of respondents, 45 per cent, stated that they had paid work alongside their studies (Figure 6). Among the students who did have paid work, a majority (68 per cent) stated that their paid work was not more than 20 per cent of full-time.

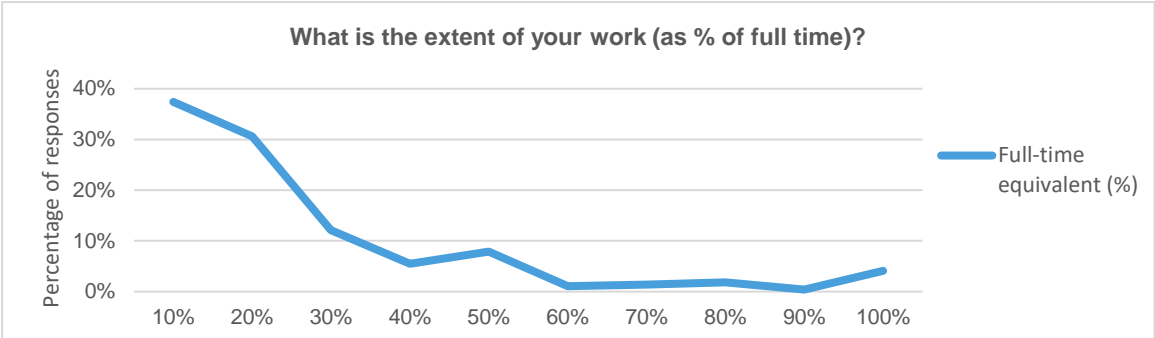


Figure 6

Of those students who responded, more students in the older demographic (35 and older) reported having paid work alongside their studies that constituted either 50 or 100 per cent of full-time (Figure 7). Among the younger students (18-29 years old), it was more common to have paid work with a lower percentage of full-time.

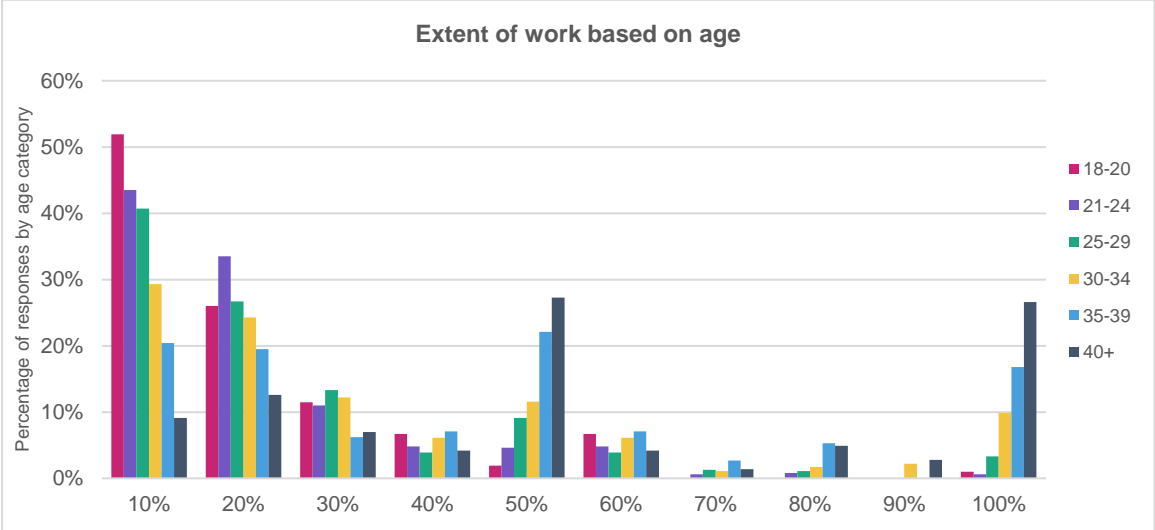


Figure 7

The category that the highest proportion of respondents had contact with on a daily basis or several times a week was family, followed by friends. The majority of respondents also came into contact with fellow students once or several times a week. 29 per cent of students who responded reported that they had contact with teachers/course coordinators once a week, while 27 per cent reported contact once a month. More than half, 57 per cent, stated that they seldom or never had contact with administrative staff.

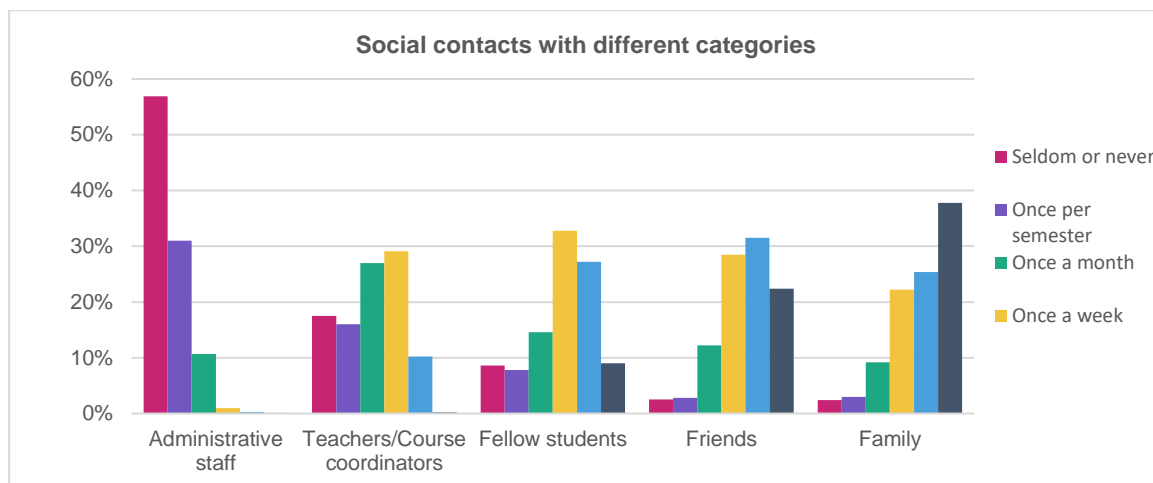


Figure 8

The questionnaire asked students to rate their mood and sense of well-being during the previous two weeks (Figure 9). In comparison with the survey conducted in the spring of 2020, students rated their well-being as being poorer across all criteria. In the autumn of 2020, 56.5 per cent of students indicated that they felt cheerful and in good spirits. The corresponding figure for the spring of 2020 was 65 per cent. In the autumn of 2020, 46 per cent of respondents indicated that they felt calm and relaxed (51 per cent in the spring of 2020). Barely one third of respondents to the autumn 2020 survey reported feeling active and vigorous (empowered) (44 per cent in spring of 2020). One third stated that they felt fresh and rested on waking up in the morning (47 per cent in spring of 2020). There was a tendency for responses to be more positive among men than women across all statements except for the one about feeling cheerful and in good spirits. However, it is worth remembering that 75 per cent of the respondents were women.

Finally, there was a standalone question about whether the students felt their lives were filled with things that interested them. In this case, 38 per cent of students responded “More than half of the time”. In the spring of 2020, 48 per cent of students reported that their daily lives were rewarding.

When reading this result, it should be taken into account that there was a large proportion of new university students who responded to the questionnaire. Approximately one third of respondents were in their first semester of studies. Being a new student can be trying, and it is possible that stress, anxiety and uncertainty affected their perceptions of their well-being. At the time of writing, those students who were in semester 3 of their studies during the autumn of 2020 have now been studying online for almost one year. These students might be expected to have found the prolonged distance education experience taxing. However, since no surveys of this kind were conducted prior to the pandemic, it is not possible to make any comparisons of well-being over time.

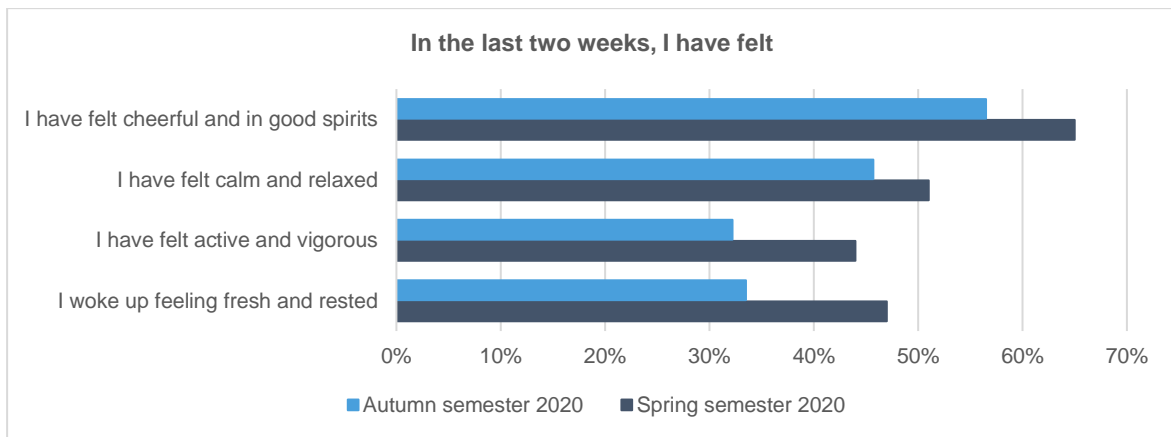


Figure 9. Percentage of positive responses.

The result when distributed by age highlights that older students experienced greater well-being than younger students. This is most noticeable in relation to students' ratings for whether they felt active and vigorous (empowered), as well as fresh and rested. Almost twice as many respondents in the 40+ category reported feeling active and vigorous (empowered) compared with students in the 18-20 years category. Around half the respondents, 47.5 per cent, in the 40+ category stated that they had felt fresh and rested when they woke up in the morning. Among those respondents aged 18-20, just 31 per cent had felt fresh and rested during the period of the survey.

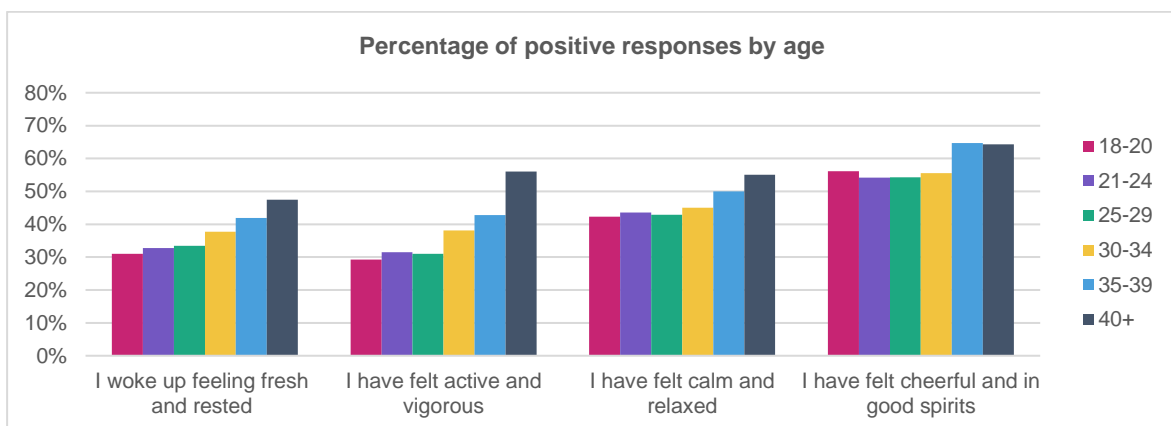


Figure 10

Not quite half the respondents, 45 per cent, perceived their workload to be *high* during the autumn of 2020, and 20 per cent found their workload to be *very high* (Figure 11). Approximately one third, 31 per cent, found it to be neither high nor low. Those respondents who rated their workload as very high were primarily students in the 40+ age category, followed by those aged 35-39 years old who selected this option (Figure 12).

One explanation for this rating may be that students aged 35 or older reported to a far greater extent than other students that they had paid work alongside their studies at 50 or 100 per cent of full-time employment (see Figure 7). Form of household may also be another factor that affects a student's perception of workload (Figure 13). The results show that the category in which the most respondents stated that their workload was very high were those who reported living with children. This may well correlate with the fact that it is the 40+ category that is likelier to live with children (see Figure 5).

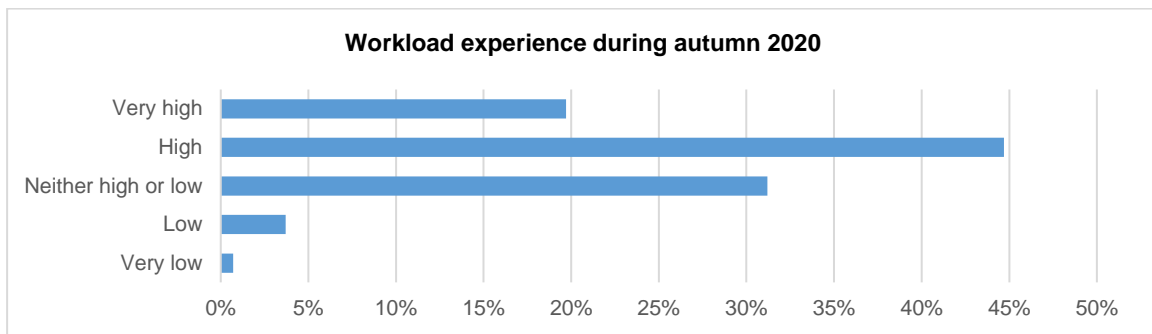


Figure 11

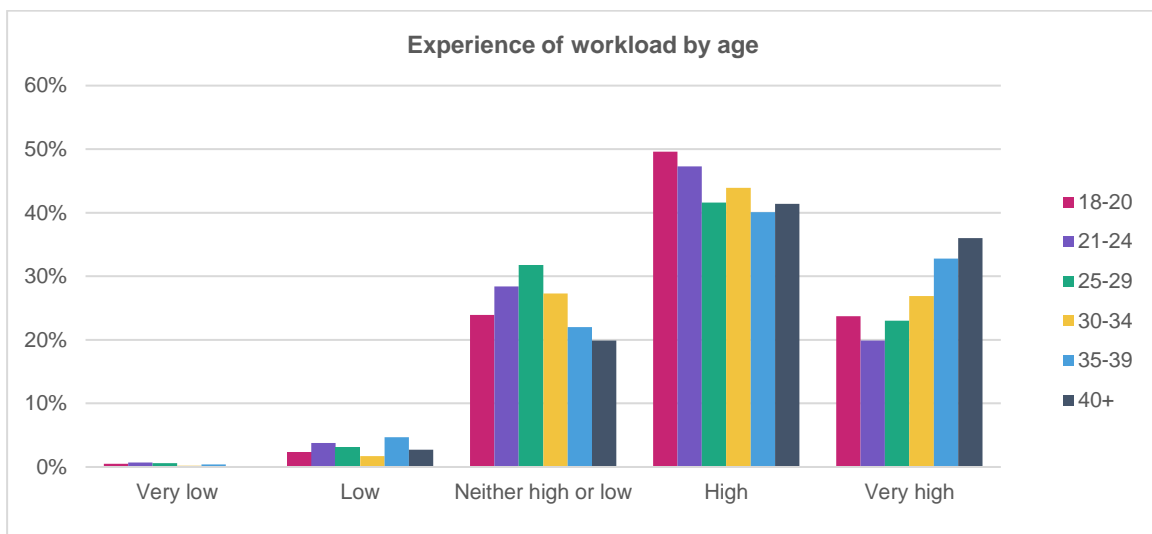


Figure 12

However, among those who rated their workload as high, it was students aged 18-24 who were in the top group. As the younger students who responded to the questionnaire did not report having paid work to the same extent as the older respondents, this result is likely to be due to other causes. Here again there may be a potential connection to household type (Figure 13). The results show that the category in which the highest number of respondents stated that their workload was high were younger students who reported living with another adult, their parent/parents or alone. This may correlate with the fact that younger students often rent a room in the home of another adult, live at home with their parent/s or otherwise live alone in student housing.

Other factors that may have an impact on workload perception can include support networks, study habits formed during previous higher education, or underlying motivations for studying.

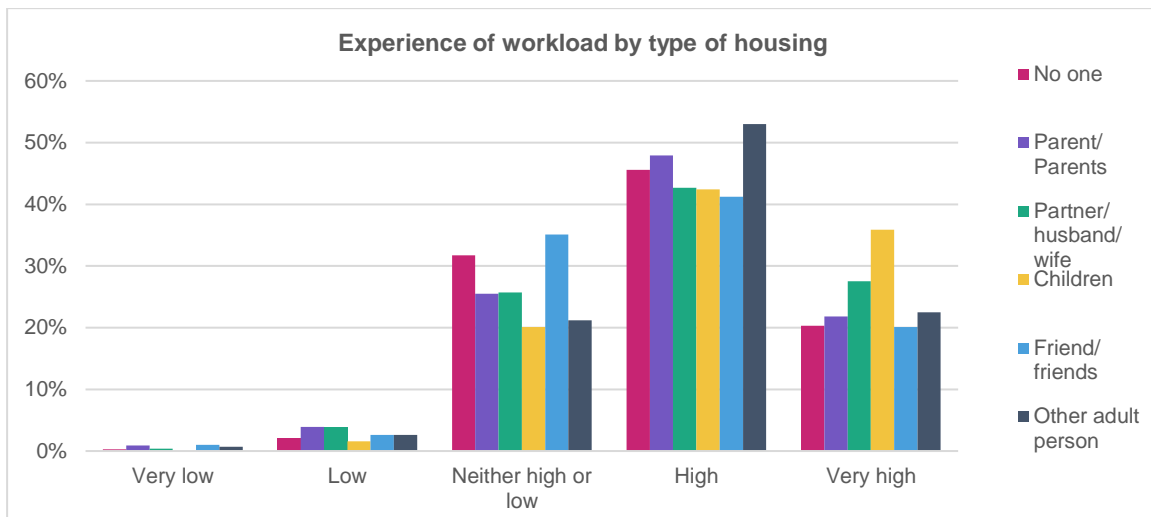


Figure 13

The results in Figure 14 demonstrate that one third of the respondents engaged in regular exercise (walking, cycling, etc.) several times a week. Around one quarter engaged in regular exercise on a daily basis. With regard to physical exercise (higher intensity/heavier weights), 27 per cent of respondents reported working out several times per week during the autumn. The group that reported training once or twice a week was approximately the same size. 16 per cent (282 people) reported that they seldom or never worked out during the autumn.

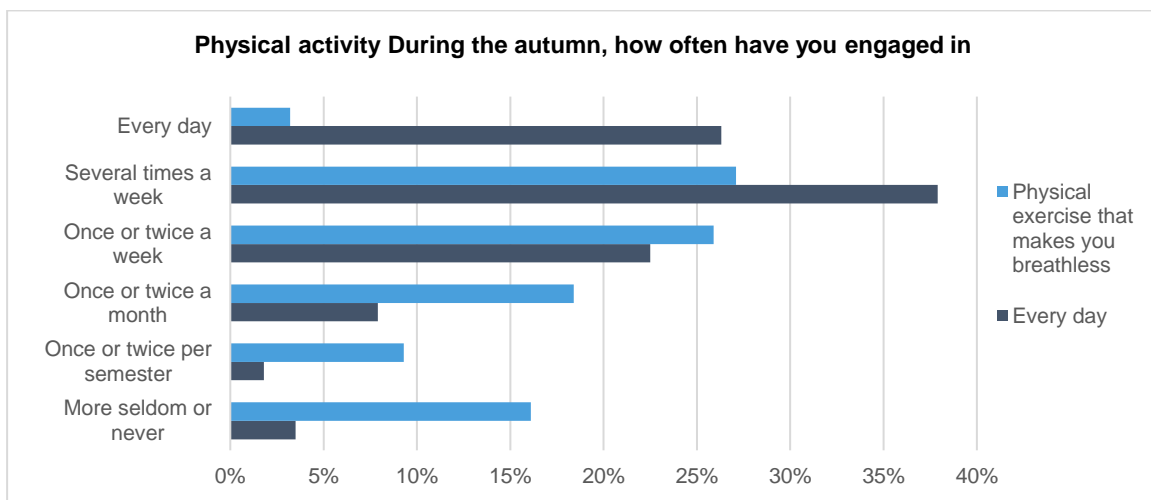


Figure 14

2.3. Support and information

The results show that 60 per cent of students are satisfied with the information provided about their studies via the University's websites (Figure 15). The majority were satisfied with the information from their course coordinators/Canvas. At the same time, 16.5 per cent responded that the information provided by course coordinators/Canvas had been poor. In the Comments field, some students described having experienced inadequate communication with course coordinators. For instance, timetables, articles and Zoom links were reported as missing. One student noted that shortcomings in information during their course had created a great deal of stress and confusion. Another student

outlined their difficulties in “finding information about the programme at all, e.g. relating to placements or requirements for writing an academic paper.”

42 per cent of respondents replied “Don’t know” in relation to the information provided by the students’ unions. This may indicate that they did not have much contact with the students’ unions during the period in question and/or previously.

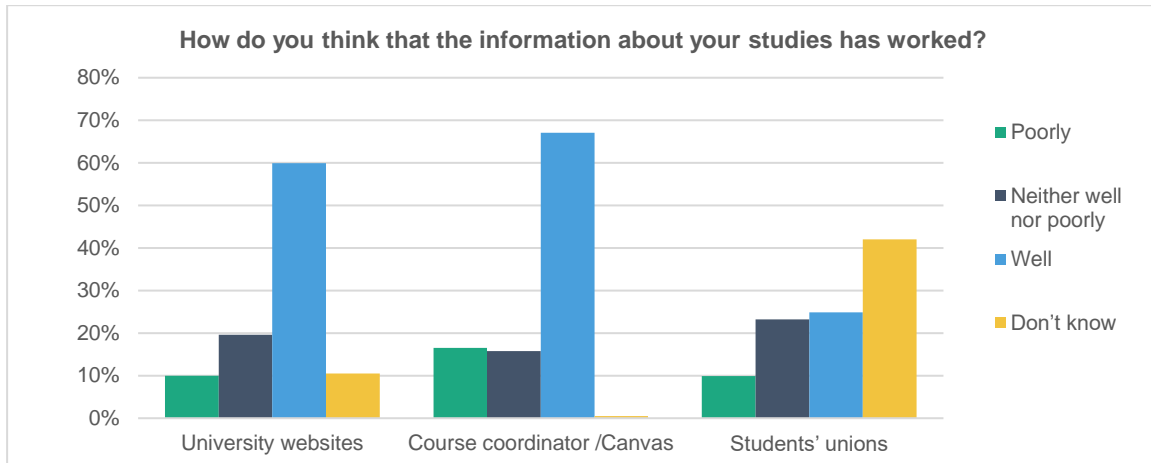


Figure 15

A presentation of the results following the removal of the option “Has not been used” are shown in the graph in Figure 16. A large percentage of students responded that they had not used the support, service and/or information provided by any of these functions. With regard to the information and support provided by administrative staff, 28 per cent of respondents stated that these had not been used. Deducting these responses, 52 per cent reported that information and support had worked well. Just under half the respondents, 45 per cent, stated that the University Library’s support/services and teaching had not been used. Of the remaining respondents, 53 per cent stated that this had worked well.

With regard to information and support provided by the University’s service functions (student services, international office, study counselling, etc.), 42 per cent reported that these had not been used. Of those who had used the services, 46 per cent stated that this had worked well. Finally, 66 per cent of students responded that they had not used the support or help provided by the students’ unions during the period surveyed. This may be interpreted to mean that they had no contact with the students’ unions. Of those who had received help and support, 36 per cent stated that this had worked well. Around half responded that this had functioned neither well nor poorly.

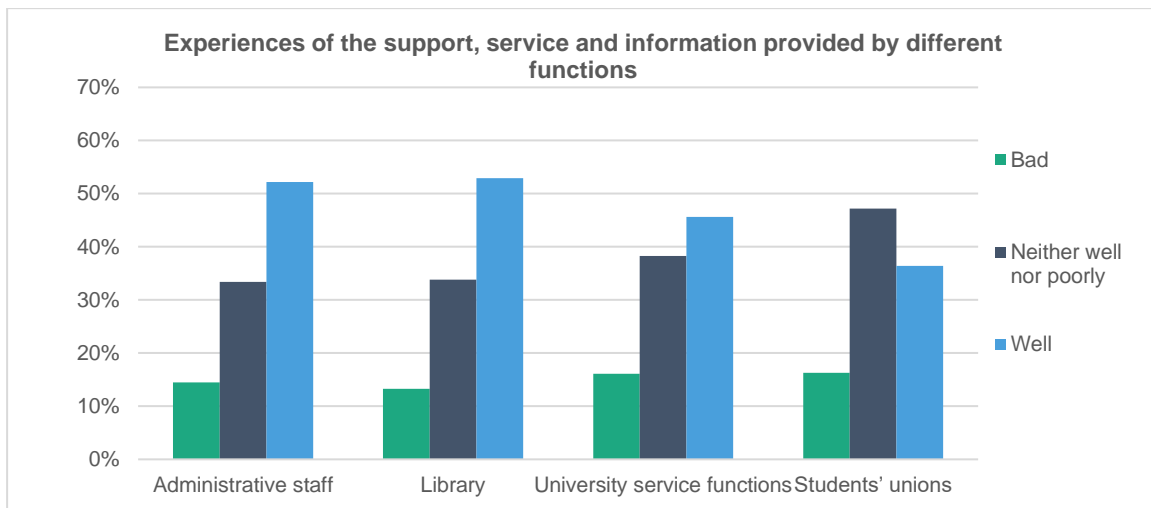


Figure 16

2.4 Quality of education

For the vast majority of students, the practical and technical aspects seem to have worked well (Figure 17). Compared with the survey conducted during the spring of 2020, conditions among students who responded appear to have been similar in terms of network/internet connections and computer access. More respondents in the autumn survey stated that they had access to a quiet place to study (75 per cent compared to 69.5 per cent during the spring) and to course materials (95 per cent compared to 76 per cent during the spring). The result may also indicate that students' expectations of, preparations for and/or management of their studies differed in the autumn when compared with the preceding spring.

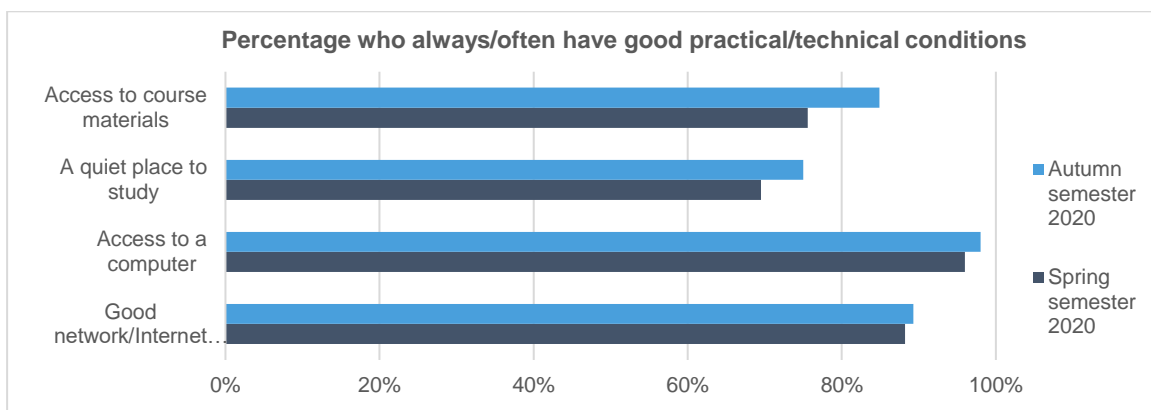


Figure 17.

In the Comments field, respondents described a variety of shortcomings in their study/learning environment that had an impact on their learning. Frequently recurring issues mentioned included the physical learning environment in ergonomic terms. The social study environment was mentioned in connection with poor mental health (stress, limited participation, a lack of community/feedback and/or difficulties concentrating due to living situation). A few examples of comments are set out below:

- *Due to coronavirus, my kids have to stay at home every time they have a minor cold. It has been tough studying and looking after them.*

- *My computer's microphone sometimes doesn't work. This has happened several times during seminars, which means I can't participate fully.*
- *The limited opening hours at the Library have made things really difficult for me.*
- *Uncomfortable chair/workspace means that I get a sore back and neck and suffer from headaches.*
- *I have a fairly small laptop which is not ideal for all this distance education. Very strenuous for the head having such a small screen.*

Figure 18 shows the results of respondents' evaluations of how different aspects of their studies worked during the autumn of 2020. A majority reported that live lectures online worked well. Half stated that pre-recorded lectures worked well. In relation to hybrid education (teaching on campus with the option of participating online), the majority of respondents stated that it had not been used during their studies. Likewise, slightly less than half the respondents, 45 per cent, reported that the recording of live lectures had not been used. With the result "Has not been used" removed for recorded lecturing online in real time, 75 per cent of students were positive about their experiences of this.

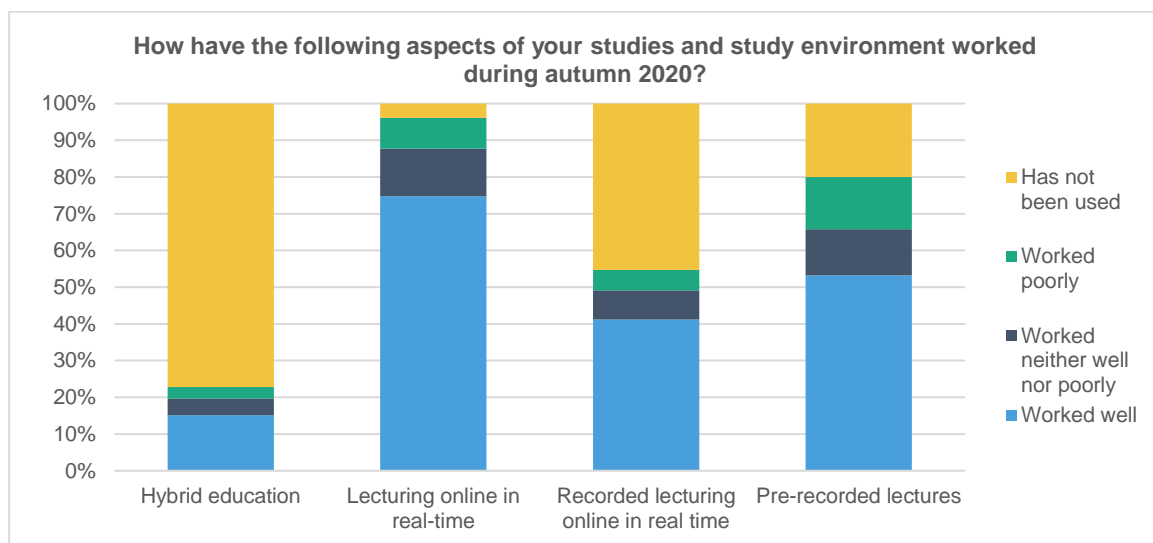


Figure 18

Figure 19 shows that more than half the respondents felt that the handling/use of technology during teaching had worked well, while 28 per cent felt that it had worked neither well nor poorly.

Most students seem to have found examinations and seminars/discussions to have worked well. Of those students who responded, 57.5 per cent stated that their study instructions had worked well. Teachers' availability via e-mail, chat, Canvas, etc. was perceived as good by 61 per cent of respondents.

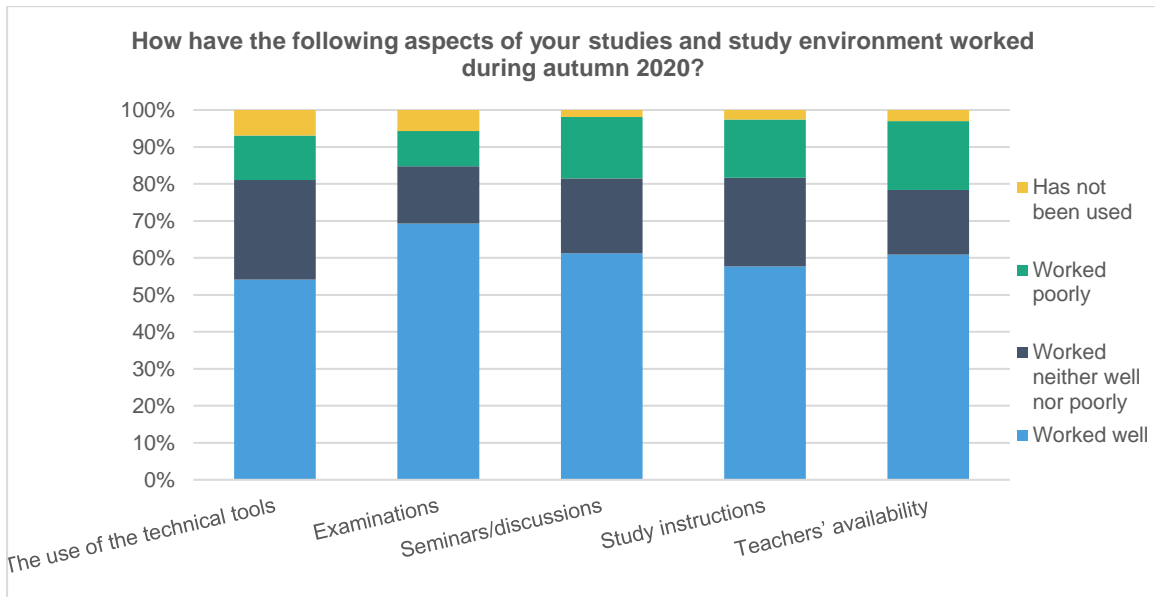


Figure 19

With regard to placements, fewer students had engaged in these, as is shown in Figure 20. For more information about the experiences of students who undertook placements, see section 2.6. The question pertaining to supervision was also not relevant to the majority of students. Among those students who had received supervision, 60 per cent (762 out of 1,255 respondents) reported that it had worked well.

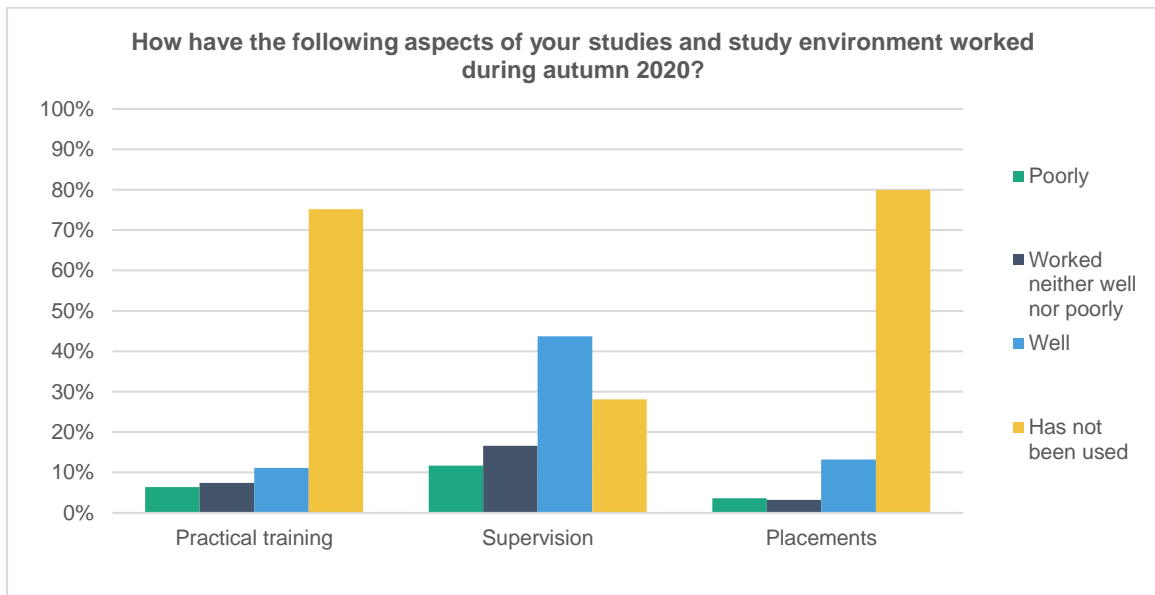


Figure 20

Students were encouraged in the questionnaire to submit proposals for improving their study environment. The following is a selection of student responses:

- *Time to chat after lessons is completely gone. This means that teachers have to make an effort to communicate much more clearly what students are expected to do, as well as how and when assignments are meant to be done.*

- *Review the online methods available for seminars. It's totally okay to have a workshop if there's a handful of you working together, but seminars based on the active participation of many people just fall flat. It's impossible to translate the way that seminars work IRL into a digital environment right off the bat.*
- *I know that a lot of international students and those who have just moved here would have liked to be more involved in student life. One suggestion would have been some kind of open lecture (on Zoom) where the students' unions gave presentations and told people about plans/activities for the semester, etc.*
- *More interactive teaching, more cameras on, more interaction. More use of Mentimeter or something similar.*

Recurring suggestions related to various forms of technical skills development for teaching staff and that the University should provide technology and aids such as cameras and microphones to ensure good picture and audio quality.

2.5 Students' learning

The questionnaire posed a number of questions in which students were asked to rate their own learning and learning situation (Figure 21). The majority of the students who responded considered that they had performed well in terms of their efforts and results. In terms of being present during classes, a majority, 89 per cent, reported that this had functioned well. Over half, 60 per cent, felt they had participated in/engaged well with discussions/seminars. With regard to interest in/motivation for their studies, those students who responded were less positive. Slightly less than half stated that their interest/motivation had been strong. Maintaining focus during lectures and seminars was something that only 43 per cent of respondents felt had worked well.

As with the survey conducted during the spring semester of 2020, respondents in the 40+ age category were more likely to rate their learning as being somewhat more stable than the younger students. Younger respondents (above all those aged 21-29) stated that they had struggled to maintain interest/motivation and focus on their studies.

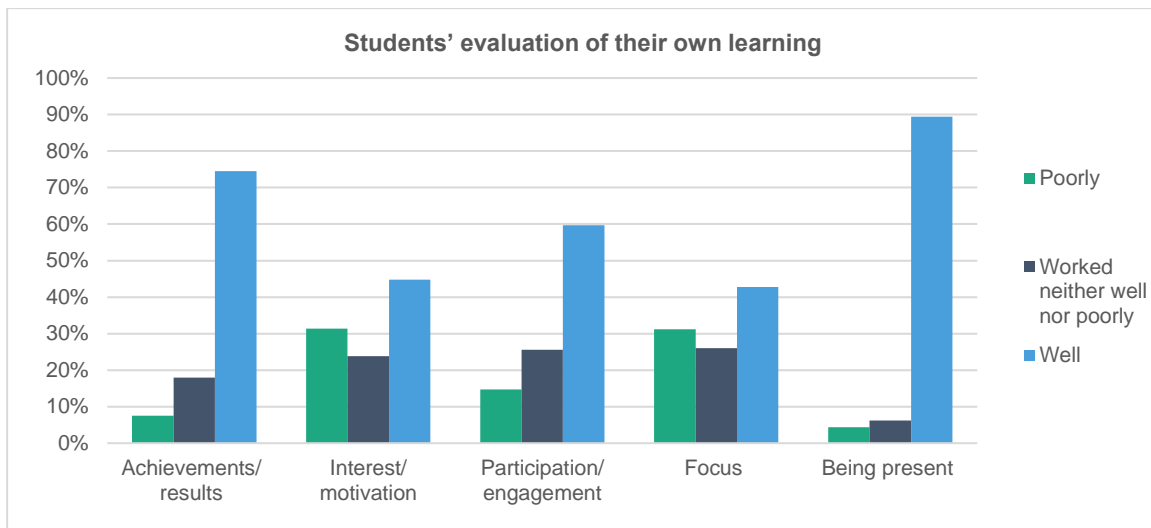


Figure 21

Regarding opportunities to achieve the intended learning outcomes for courses (Figure 22), almost 60 per cent of respondents stated that they had had good opportunities.

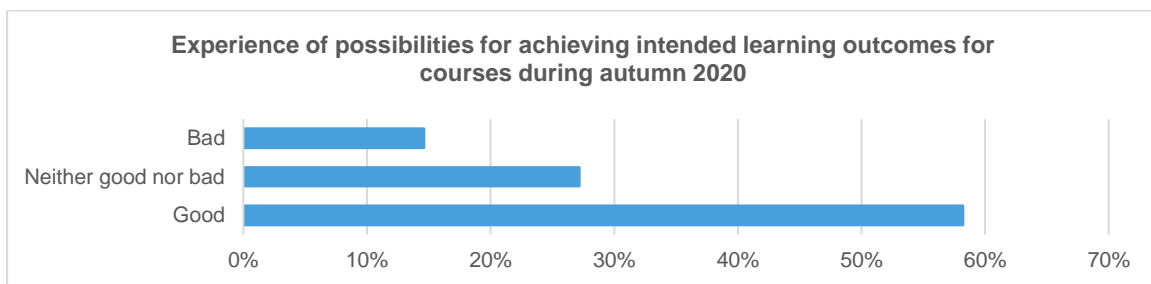


Figure 22

Students were asked in the questionnaire to reflect on the course they were studying at present and to indicate whether they agreed with the statements about the course or not (Figure 23). In the case of most of the statements, more than half the respondents replied that they agreed with the statements. The exceptions to this concerned students' experiences of:

- Their opportunity to influence their learning (48 per cent said they agreed)
- Getting practise and receiving feedback without grading (38 per cent said they agreed)
- Receiving regular feedback that helped them see their own progress in their studies (37 per cent of responses were positive)
- Feeling socially connected with others in the course (38 per cent of responses were positive)

These questions were also included in the questionnaire circulated during the spring semester of 2020, although they pertained to students' experiences of the transition from on-campus education to distance education. There is little difference between the results from the spring and autumn semesters in 2020. In other words, these are areas that the Faculty ought to continue prioritising.

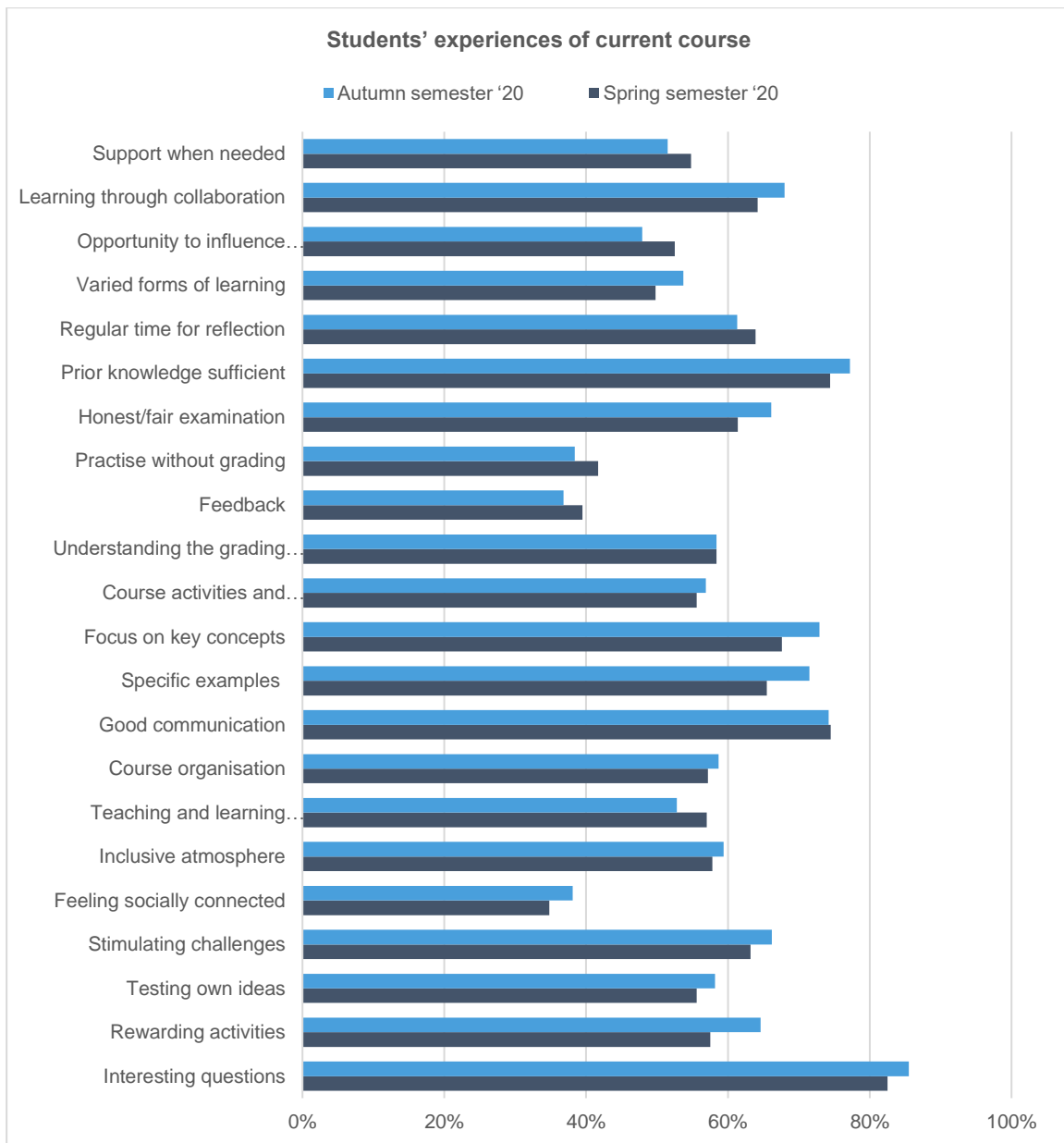


Figure 23

2.6 Essays/dissertations/research work and placements

279 people (16 per cent of respondents) were writing Bachelor's essays or Master's (120 credits) dissertations during the autumn of 2020. The questionnaire did not target doctoral students. The results in Figure 24 show respondents' experience of essays/dissertations/research work. Of those students who were writing a Bachelor's essay or Master's (120 credits) dissertation, 55 per cent felt that data collection had worked well. With regard to supervision, 67.5 per cent stated that it had worked well. Almost half reported that they had been able to stick to the schedule for their essay/dissertation project.

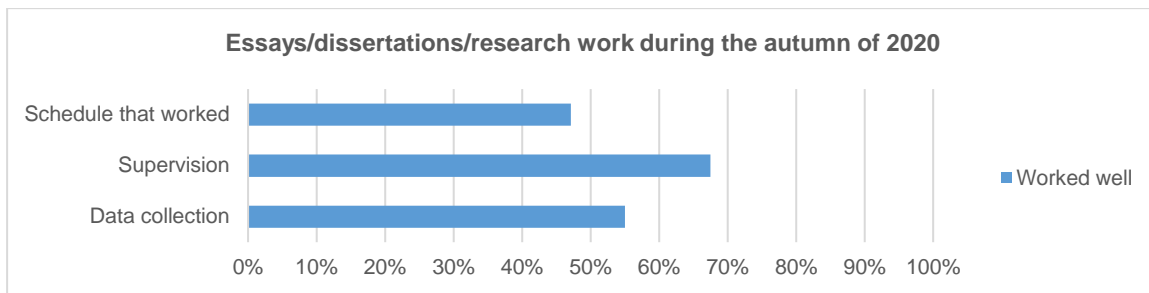


Figure 24

215 people (12 per cent of respondents) were on placement during the autumn of 2020. The results in Figure 25 show respondents' experiences of essays/dissertations/research work. Of the students who responded that they had been on placement, 61 per cent reported that they had found it possible to achieve the intended learning outcomes. With regard to continuity in supervision, 59 per cent reported that it had not been necessary to change supervisors due to the prevailing situation. Supervisors' engagement was experienced as positive by 76 per cent of respondents. In relation to the ability to participate in various aspects of placements, 56.5 per cent reported that it had been easy to feel empowered. Of those students who responded, 44 per cent stated that it had been easy to accommodate all aspects of their placement in their schedule.

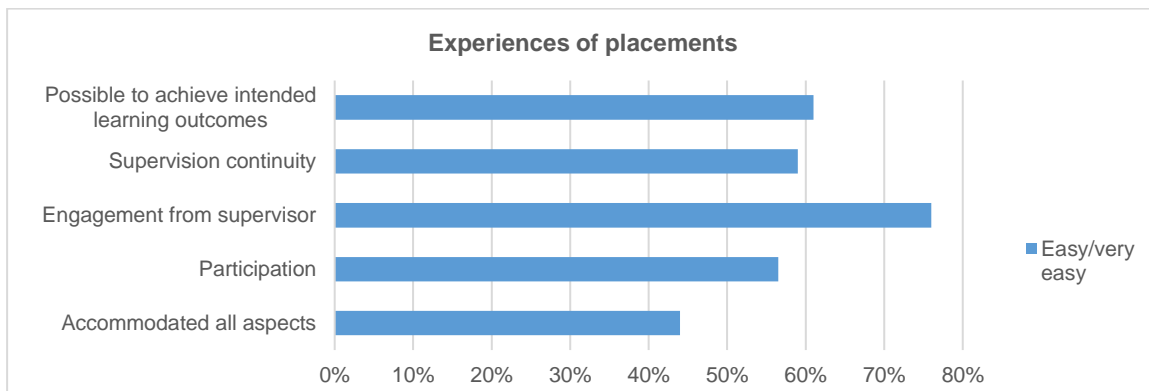


Figure 25

Below are comments from some of the students who responded and shared their placement experiences:

- *Despite the pandemic and reduced client contact, my supervisors and I have ensured that I have been stimulated in my placement workplace. My supervisors have really prioritised me. I'm very pleased with my placement.*
- *My supervisor is very passive and it's hard to make my course coordinators more active and get them to offer more support or push my supervisor.*
- *All placements ahead of the spring semester should have a clear plan in place for how to do the placement at a distance or how the placement student's role and presence in the workplace should be prioritised in the event of tighter restrictions.*

- *I think the department has been hesitant in its response to COVID-19 during the latter part of the autumn semester. It doesn't feel like they're taking responsibility because they're leaving students on placement.*
- *It's great that this course has an exemption and is allowed to take place on site. Having to rely on placements having their own recommendations that students can follow as well as the digital transition in terms of working with clients and confidentiality is an experience in itself.*

2.7 Experiences of studying during autumn 2020

At the end of the questionnaire, there was space for students to describe their own perceptions of their studies during the autumn of 2020. The responses from the Comments field can broadly be divided into the following points:

- Their studies had worked (well) given the prevailing circumstances.
- Loneliness/reduced social contact had negatively affected students' motivation and focus.
- It appears to be particularly important that students receive feedback when studying online.

A number of respondents emphasised that their studies had been difficult in various regards. At the same time, many students also noted that they were aware that the situation had been challenging for teaching staff and other staff. One student commented: "The staff and teachers are the best. It's the situation that's difficult." Another student wrote: "All praise to our lecturers and course coordinators, who are doing everything in their power to help us during these times!"

Several respondents reported experiencing loneliness, and that this had contributed to difficulties in maintaining motivation and focus on their studies. Another student said that their studies during the autumn had been "more boring than usual" and that they "miss the social aspect tremendously".

The Comments field also turned up examples of students who had found it easier to focus on their studies during the autumn semester. One student commented that it was in many regards "easier to attend lectures at home as it is a calm environment" and that they wished this would remain an option after the pandemic. It is conceivable that new students with no previous experience of higher education to compare with might perceive the situation altogether differently to students who are accustomed to on-campus education. One student wrote: "Fun, so weird to do the first semester at distance, but it's worked much better than I thought."

3. Reflections, measures undertaken and future work

The results from the student survey conducted in the autumn of 2020 are largely equivalent to those obtained from the survey conducted in the spring of 2020. However, the qualitative data in the form of the comments field responses indicate a certain shift from an emergency situation to a degree of acceptance. The desperate tone in evidence in the results from the spring survey is more subdued in the autumn survey. This may be the result of the Faculty remedying some of the shortcomings described by students during the spring semester.

International students

In the spring survey, a majority of international students expressed worry and disappointment about unclear information. This group did not focus as much on inadequate information in the autumn survey, focusing instead on the lack of social connection. This may indicate that the Faculty/Departments have succeeded in disseminating information to students clearly. Once there are structures in place, the focus shifts to other challenges – in this case the lack of social connection, and experiences of loneliness. Collaboration with the students' unions and disseminating information about health-promotion activities and forums are among initiatives that the Faculty has been engaged in and is continuing to develop.

University Library

A large percentage of comments in the spring survey related to the Library's limited opening hours. Many of the respondents talked about difficulties accessing course materials and a deterioration in their study environment as a result of being unable to access the Library's premises. In the autumn survey, there is not anywhere near the same number of comments related to the Library as found during the spring.

One of the measures implemented by the Faculty based on the spring survey was to initiate dialogue with the University Library about issues such as access to e-books. This dialogue resulted in the Library working to communicate information more clearly to students about how e-loans work, terms and conditions, etc. The Faculty also worked to disseminate the results of the student survey by a variety of means including a networking meeting for the Library's learning environments, which were initiated by the University Library.

Teaching staff's technical and digital skills

Unlike the spring survey, fewer comments in the autumn survey related to shortcomings in the teaching staff's handling of the technology required for distance education. Comments in the spring survey related to issues such as students' experiences of the use of technology in lectures and seminars via Zoom, as well as the extent to which Canvas pages were clearly structured. The results indicate that the teaching staff have improved their digital competence in online teaching. However, there were still some comments about Canvas pages that were unstructured or were not updated, which had presented students with difficulties in pursuing their studies.

Ergonomics

In the autumn survey there were more comments about poor ergonomics than there were in the results of the spring survey. The comments related to eye strain, neck pain, back pain and headaches due to uncomfortable working positions. For example, these included comments that it was difficult to read on a small screen, which causes eye strain and muscle strain, as well as comments noting that students lacked furniture that would enable them to vary their working position. It is likely that shortcomings which could be ignored over a shorter period of distance education may be transforming or already have transformed into physical musculoskeletal problems. Spending long days studying in front of a small computer screen is not optimal for good health. In this regard, the Faculty needs to work more to disseminate information to students about health-promotion measures.

Mental health

Throughout the autumn survey, respondents noted that their mental health had been negatively affected during their studies in the autumn semester. There were also recurring comments in the spring of 2020 pertaining to a deterioration in mental health. The Faculty also needs to work more to disseminate information to students about initiatives that can improve their health. In the longer term, the Faculty has initiated a two-year project entitled *Sustainable and Accessible Learning Environments*. The aim of this project is to develop learning environments that promote physical health as well as improving access to higher education. As part of this project, the Faculty intends to learn from the experiences that have come out of the educational developments resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic.