Covid-19 Survey of Undergraduates

Executive Summary

The survey focuses on students’ experiences of digital learning in the last three to four months and on students’ well-being and priorities outside their studies. The survey forms part of a range of student voice activities planned over the next few months, with the aim of ensuring that our response to covid19 is responsive to and adequately reflects student concerns.

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the number and for some exacerbated the level of challenges our students face in effectively engaging with their studies. For example, students are reporting increasing levels of mental ill-health and are having to support friends and families with caring, education and work. “Working from home” may be extremely challenging for some of our students, much as it is for some of our staff. As we plan for next academic year, we have an opportunity to help students address these challenges. For example we may be able to offer new or other forms of support with mental health, or extend our financial hardship support. We are aware that many of these initiatives are already under active consideration.

There is a significant equality, diversity and inclusion issue identified in the survey responses; across almost all areas in the survey, students from groups with protected characteristics are finding things harder, or are less satisfied, than other students. The student body is likely to diversify further over the next year with students accessing teaching and support services in different ways. As student needs become more complex, the University’s ability to support them all appropriately will come under increasing focus. In previous surveys students have fed back that they find it difficult to navigate the university and this difficulty is likely to increase unless clear strategies and communications are put in place to support our students and to meet their individual needs in their particular circumstances.

1. **Students don’t understand what ‘hybrid’ is and what it will mean for them and their learning.**

   There are a range of responses from students, from those who are desperate to return to face to face teaching on campus to those who are deeply nervous about the prospect and would prefer to stay at home. For some this isn’t a preference, studying from home will be necessary. Students who are shielding themselves or who have family members who are at risk will need to access teaching and learning and university services remotely.

   Students are largely dissatisfied with the experience of remote learning they experienced at the end of the 2019/20 academic year. The university needs to demonstrate how going forward, students will be supported to engage with their studies whether they are studying online or taking part in a mix of face to face and online activities.

2. **Supporting students to become confident digital learners.**

   Levels of confidence with learning digitally are extremely low. Scaffolding and skills development will therefore be vital. Some students have had a poor experience of digital learning so far whilst others have had no exposure to this way of studying as their teaching was cancelled. There is a demand from students for the university to deliver high quality teaching and learning that can be seen as to be equivalent to face to face teaching.
Comments indicate that there is a perception that online teaching and learning represents poor value for money. Some students express anger about the cancellation or reduction in teaching and the perceived drop in quality of the teaching that was delivered with calls for fee remissions or rebates. International students are particularly sceptical about online teaching being ‘worth’ the fee they pay.

3. **We can’t assume that every student has the space or resources to study off-campus.**

Even students who are able to be on campus for some of the time will need to access some digital teaching and learning content. When developing approaches to digital study the university will need to consider the fact that not all our students will have access to fast broadband, a desk or a quiet space in which to study. Students who return to Edinburgh to live in shared accommodation will need to share their wifi access. Students who live in their own or family homes may have to share space with partners, children, siblings or parents who are working from home.

For many students the library was the quiet space they had to work in. How will the university provide quiet study spaces under social distancing and how will the university ensure that students aren’t disadvantaged if they do not have a room of their own?

There is likely to be an increase in levels of financial hardship (see below) that may act as a barrier to some students accessing the technology that will be required to access online / digital resources.

A barrier to effective study for students at the end of the 2019/20 academic year was a lack of digitised texts.

4. **Education, understandably, sits behind other priorities for students at the moment.**

It isn’t clear whether this will change as the new academic year begins but the University should consider and clarify to students how it will support students who may have to care for others or who have health issues that will prevent them from accessing on-campus services.

5. **Mental health and wider student support is critical.**

There is a perception that mental health support is underfunded and not meeting students’ needs. This research suggests that there is likely to be an increase in demand for this support in the coming academic year. Students state that they are feeling anxious about returning to study next year. Students are looking for more pro-active outreach from support services and from their Personal Tutors. Positive comments refer to incidences of Personal Tutors or other staff making the effort to get in touch with students rather than waiting for students to ask for help. Building and clearly articulating an effective support structure could go some way to reassuring students that they will be supported.

Findings in this survey indicate that service use and satisfaction with services is low. Comments indicate that students don’t know some services are available or are unclear how to access them. As part of induction in 2020/21 can the University restate what services there are and take a more proactive approach to engaging students?

Experiences from the end of the 2019/20 academic year indicate that having a mental health condition or a learning disability is a barrier to accessing digital learning.
6. **A safe environment to learn in.**

Students have expressed concerns about their health and safety as campus re-opens. Some students based outside the UK are under pressure from family not to return as the UK is perceived to be an unsafe destination.

Students have experienced racism or perceive that the UK has become an increasingly racist country. The University needs to consider how it will encourage all students and staff to create an inclusive environment and how it can communicate effectively that racism is not tolerated.

7. **Work and financial support.**

Graduating and soon to be final year students are unclear on the support they can get from the Careers Service so clearly communicating this would be beneficial to these students. (Note: this additional communications work is already happening.) Students are very aware of the downturn in the economy and are concerned that opportunities for work placements and internships may not appear.

Financial hardship is already a real issue for some students and with lack of part time work and a weak economy this issue is likely to grow in importance. Some students supplement their income with part time work in industries that are likely to be hard hit in any post-Covid-19 economic downturn – are there opportunities to provide students with part time work within the university? Can these be better advertised?

8. **Sense of belonging.**

Students do not, on the whole, feel that they are part of the Edinburgh community. Comments provided indicate that for some the transition to remote learning has exacerbated existing feelings of isolation. Developing a sense of belonging to the University as a whole is further hindered by inconsistent approaches to applying university policies and poor communications. Examples given in this research include inconsistent applications of the no detriment policy that caused students on joint honours degrees more stress and confusion.

Students have asked for more engagement from the university over the summer. Providing reading lists or free language courses have been suggested as ways students could continue to engage.

9. **Pockets of good practice.**

Whilst the findings of this research have been negative and point to many areas for improvements to services and communications there are pockets of good practice. Students from the School of Chemistry have complimented the approach taken – could these approaches and good practice lessons be summarised and shared with other Schools?

10. **Open exams have been positively received (with caveats).**

Another encouraging response has been to open exams. Many students have found these to be a positive development with some caveats around fear of others cheating and some confusion around expectations (where communications have been inconsistent). There is a risk that some students will be put at a disadvantage if they do not have an appropriate space in which to study or if they cannot commit the same amount of time as others due to caring or other responsibilities.
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Introduction

This survey was developed with the aim of understanding how undergraduate students at the University of Edinburgh have adapted to the changes introduced as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The survey focuses on students’ experiences of digital learning in the last three to four months and on students’ well-being and priorities outside their studies. The questionnaire was developed by the Student Analytics, Insights and Modelling team in consultation with academic colleagues across the university and it is intended that the insights generated from this research be used to help shape the delivery of hybrid teaching and learning and student support in the 2020/21 academic year.

This paper provides a summary of the findings from the survey including analysis of the free text comments. Key themes emerging from open comments at a School level have been included in the Appendix. An app containing the results drillable to School and Programme level has been released and is available here1. Comments have been grouped by School and whether the respondent is studying at an honours or pre-honours level and have been published in a searchable format in the app.

Any questions or requests for further analysis should be sent to student.analytics@ed.ac.uk.

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1 The standard publication threshold of 10 or more respondents or 10 or more comments has been applied to all published data to protect respondent anonymity. Comments have been redacted to remove names of staff or students.
Methodology
The survey was conducted online and all currently matriculated undergraduate students were surveyed (25,343 invitations). There were 3,670 respondents – a response rate of 14.5%. This is a good response rate for an online survey run over a limited period of time.

Female students and students from CAHSS are slightly overrepresented in the sample whilst students from MVM are underrepresented (see below). Data have not been weighted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Population (%)</th>
<th>Sample (%)</th>
<th>Diff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CAHSS</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>-0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVM</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>-2.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where confidence intervals have been applied these are at the 95% level.

Detailed Findings
Respondents’ accommodation and adjustment to lockdown
A quarter of respondents are still living in Edinburgh and 30% are living outside the UK. Of those respondents still living in Edinburgh, 57.5% are originally from countries of domicile other than Scotland. Just over 15% of respondents are living in either university or private halls of residence and 43.4% have stayed in their term time accommodation.

Comments indicate that some students have belongings in Edinburgh as they had to return home at short notice and they are not sure how to arrange removal or storage as travel restrictions remain in place. Having to relocate at short notice has increased levels of stress and anxiety for some of our students.

Respondents were asked how well they had adjusted to their local government restrictions on movement and advice on social distancing. Only 14 respondents stated that they did not have local restrictions. Just over half of respondents had found they had adjusted easily or very easily to restrictions.

Particular groups of students have found the adjustment less easy. Female students are significantly more likely to report that adjustment has not been easy (25.9% compared to 20% of male respondents). Female students are also more likely to report that they have caring responsibilities (12.4% compared to 9.8% of respondents). Students who have caring responsibilities are also more likely to report that adjustment has not been easy (32% compared to 23.2% of students with no caring responsibilities). It is not clear that having additional caring responsibilities is the reason why female students have found adjustment to lockdown less easy than their male peers but may be a contributory factor.

Students with learning difficulties and mental health conditions are significantly more likely to report that adjustment has not been easy than students with no declared disabilities (34.4%, 34.1% and 22.8% of respondents respectively).

Students in year four are more likely to report that adjustment has not been easy than students in other years (28.5% of fourth years found adjustment not easy).
In addition to adjusting to local lockdowns as a result of Covid-19, a small number of respondents related the impact of other political issues on their well-being. The political situation in Hong Kong and the Black Lives Matter movement were mentioned specifically.

Respondents’ priorities, sense of well-being and access to support services

The university asks students whether they have caring responsibilities at registration. Twenty-one respondents are flagged as being carers on the student records system. An additional 408 respondents stated that they currently had to care for others. Where data are segmented to compare responses from students who have and who don’t have caring responsibilities in this report this second larger number has been used as it better captures students’ current situations.

Respondents were asked what their priorities were from a list comprising: their health, friends and family, education, financial situation, housing and technology. Family and friends and health were the highest ranked priorities (with mean rankings of 3.7 and 3.5 out of 6 respectively). Widening Participation students rank concern with finances higher than non-widening participation students (mean rankings of 2.5 vs 2.1) although both groups ranked health, friends and family and education higher.

Overall, education ranks fairly low in students’ priorities. It is unclear how this will shift as the 2020/21 academic year begins (especially as a number of students in the sample state that they have received no teaching since February which may have skewed the results). It should, however, be borne in mind there is likely to still be some level of disruption in everyday lives by September and that our students have commitments and pressures outside university.

When asked about other priorities, students related that they were specifically concerned about their mental health. Throughout comments students speak of heightened levels of anxiety and stress. Few of the students who stated that they had concerns about their mental health in free text comments have a mental health condition recorded in their student record. As students will be asked to complete their annual registration task before continuing with their studies this year the University may see an increase in the numbers of students declaring that they have a mental health condition. Increasing the availability of support for students who are suffering from mental ill-health will be important in the coming year.

Graduating students are concerned about entering the job market and a small number of respondents have listed finding an internship as a priority. Respondents appear to be unclear about what support they could get from the Careers Service once they have graduated.

Returning students also mention concerns about finding part time work or have increased working hours as they have become key workers.

When asked if respondents had been able to keep in touch with university friends, 60% agreed that they had. Students from Widening Participation backgrounds and students with caring responsibilities were significantly less likely to report that they had been able to keep in touch with

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2 Until 2020/21 this data was only collected systematically when students enrolled so is likely to underreport the number of students’ with caring responsibilities.

3 Students who are Widening Participation are: UK domiciled full-time undergraduates who are: from the two most-deprived SIMD quintiles, or entered via a recognised Access programme or the Scottish Higher Education Programme, or receive an Access Bursary, an Accommodation Bursary or an RUK bursary, or are a verified Care Leaver, or attended a Low Performing School.
friends (57% of WP respondents vs 64.7% of non-WP and 50.1% of respondents who are carers vs 61.6% of respondents with no caring responsibilities).

Only 34% of respondents indicated that they knew how to access support services. Communications have been sent to students to let them know about the services that are on offer and there has been no waiting list for counselling services. This indicates that these communications aren’t landing.

Under a third (28%) of respondents agreed that they still feel part of the University of Edinburgh community. RUK students are significantly less likely to feel part of the community than overseas and EU students (22.6% of RUK vs 31.4% EU and 35.8% OS fee students).

Although numbers are extremely low (6 respondents from a population of 39) - it should be noted that no care experienced students agreed that they still felt part of the community.

Feeling part of the University of Edinburgh community decreases as students’ progress through their programmes. There is a significant difference between first year respondents (33.2%) and fourth year respondents (22.6%), albeit both are low.

Reported use of support services is low and satisfaction with services when they have been used is also low.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% used</th>
<th>% satisfied</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation services</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>34.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residence Life</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability support</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online wellbeing support e.g. Big White Wall, Feel Good app, Silver Cloud</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chaplaincy</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Association</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS helpline</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice Place</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>28.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A perceived lack of funding for and dissatisfaction with support services for students with mental ill-health is a key theme in comments. Comments indicate that students need increased levels of support and more proactive approach to out-reach on the part of the university:

Mental health outreach efforts will be very important through the next academic year. Having programs is simply not enough. There will be a huge percentage of students who have never used these programs before and won’t feel they’re for them, so contacting students to familiarize them with resources will be necessary.

Lack of certainty about what next year will look like appears to be increasing students’ uncertainty around returning to study in Edinburgh:

I am hesitant to come back to Edinburgh in the fall. If societies and clubs cannot take place due to social distancing and many lectures are online, I would much rather stay here and live with my family than by myself in a flat in Edinburgh. I would get very lonely, and my mental health would definitely decline.
Alongside concerns about living alone with the prospect of little social interaction students are having to plan their accommodation for next year. For some students flights appear to be scarce and expensive whilst others don’t perceive a benefit in paying high rents in Edinburgh if they will not have access to face to face teaching.

Some students have had positive and proactive engagement from their Personal Tutor but this does not appear to be the experience of many respondents:

The best support I have received is from my personal tutor, who asked how I was coping with the pandemic and I think it is important all students feel like there is someone working at the university who they can reach out to as I know not all people have a tutor who is as approachable and interested as I do.

Graduating students are very keen to have some form of graduation or celebration:

I am gutted that 2020 summer graduations are not taking place. I am hopeful that we will soon overcome Covid-19 and graduating students will be given their opportunity to have a graduation ceremony as we have all studied hard for 4 years and it is heartbreaking to know that graduations are not taking place this summer. I am hopeful the university will do us justice. Thank you.

Another key theme relates to a perceived lack of transparency and consistency around decision making. Students have fed back about the inconsistent experiences they have between Schools in previous surveys however it would seem that the negative impact of this has been exacerbated under current circumstances. Students are asking to understand the rationale for decisions that are made and for these decisions to be applied consistently:

I understand it’s an uncertain time and it’s difficult to make decisions about the next academic year, however I would find more transparency in regards to decision making helpful - particularly in the decision to cancel year abroads (I completely understand the decision was necessary, but would like to know the reasons why)

And:

I have not been able to participate in discussions as I usually would. I also feel like different tutors/lecturers are doing different things so not everyone is getting the same information or puts in the same amount of work to keep students informed. But, I believe this isn’t just a covid related situation either, this is a problem at the university as a whole.
Learning environment

Just over half the undergraduate students surveyed had space to study effectively. There are significant, although perhaps unsurprising, differences at School level. Only 40% of ECA students agreed that they had enough space:

*I study a practical subject (Illustration). My current study environment cannot replicate the facilities at ECA. Crucially, I believe the facilities/workshop spaces there are as important to my learning experience as tuition.*

![Figure 1 % agree - I have space to study effectively](image)

Widening Participation students are significantly less likely to have space to study effectively (43.8% compared to 52.8%).

Students with learning disabilities and mental health conditions are significantly less likely to have space in which to study effectively than students with no disabilities (33.3%, 37.1% and 53.8% respectively).

The value of the library in providing an effective study space is clear in comments:

*I would just note that it has been a major upheaval going from studying in the library with no distractions, to studying at home with a full house and parents working from home. It has definitely not been the quiet area I would usually study in.*

Students with caring responsibilities are also significantly less likely to have an effective study space than those with none (40.9% compared to 53.2%). Comments show that some students have had to take on responsibility for home schooling their children or siblings whilst partners or parents work from home.
Whilst 64% of respondents have the equipment they need to study effectively, there are particular issues for ECA students with only 34% of respondents having the equipment they need.

Students with mental health conditions and learning disabilities are significantly less likely to have the equipment they need to study effectively than students who have no disabilities (48.2%, 50.3% and 65.7% respectively).

Just under a fifth of students do not have access to reliable internet. One comment indicated that a student was coming onto campus and sitting outside the Library in order to access the University wifi as they did not have reliable internet access at home.

Students from China struggle to access some online resources due to that country’s firewall.

Only 58.8% of students with caring responsibilities have access to reliable internet compared with 69.6% who do not. Comments also indicated that even when students did have internet access they were sharing with housemates or family members who were also studying / working / home schooling.

_I think this may apply to quite a few students, but those of us living in flatshares will likely find that our internet will become very unreliable if 3+ people are trying to attend online seminars at the same time. Something to consider._

And:

_With my mother having to work from home now and my brother having to switch to online learning as well, internet access is very slow and unreliable and would cost extra to boost the speed, which is an additional expense that we don’t need._

Just over half of respondents had access to specialist software. Comments from students in ECA suggested that they had difficulty accessing Adobe packages whilst students in Informatics and Mathematics do not have access to high performing computers at home.

Only 40% of respondents indicated that they had access to the library resources they needed. A lack of digitised texts has been an issue for those students who took assessments in semester two. Students with learning disabilities were significantly less likely to have access to the library resources they needed than peers with no disabilities.

Only 40% of respondents had been able to make their learning a priority over other commitments. Prioritising learning has been particularly difficult for students with caring responsibilities (27.1% are able to make their learning a priority). All students with disabilities were significantly less likely to be able to make their learning a priority than students with no disabilities (26% of students with mental health conditions, 32.5% of students with learning disabilities, 31.3% of students with other disabilities and 42.0% of students with no disabilities).

Just over 28% of respondents were studying in a different time zone. Just over a quarter of those who were studying in a different time zone found that this had no impact on their ability to study. Comparing impact by time differences shows that significantly higher proportions of students are severely impacted when the time difference exceeds ±five hours or more. Open comments indicate that students particularly struggled when shorter exams were scheduled very early in the morning in their local time. Consideration needs to be given to any synchronous activity if there are students living more than five hours before or after GMT/BST.
Figure 2 % agreed time difference had a high or severe impact on respondents’ ability to study by time difference

Student comments indicate that whilst some students have been able to adapt to learning from home, for others this has been a real struggle. There is a very real risk that there will be significantly unequal levels of access to any online resources and for some students engaging with their learning in a safe and constructive space will not be a possibility next year. In developing teaching and learning for next year, colleagues should not assume that all students have access to quiet, space, desks and equipment and should think through how they will reach and enable students who may have to care for others so that they can engage with their learning in a way that fits around their other commitments. Without consideration of the broad range of challenges many students will face with hybrid teaching and learning there is a risk that more students will agree with this comment:

*The university's advice to try and separate living space and study space really shows how out of touch with their students they are.*

Experience of digital learning

Students are not clear what “hybrid” means or what it will look like for them. Comments indicate that some students have interpreted this as fully online. There is a real polarisation in opinion: some students call for a return to entirely face to face teaching as soon as possible whilst others would prefer an online offer as they may not be able or willing to return to campus as they are shielding, have caring responsibilities or concerns around their safety. For some international students there are real concerns around the safety of the UK and some practical issues like the availability of flights.

A small but concerning number of comments related to racism experienced or perceptions that there is an increased level of racism:

*But I also do not know if it is wise to go back to the UK, when the covid situation there is so much worse than in my home country. If anything happens to me in the UK, I feel that my health will not be prioritised because I am a foreign student, compared to if I am in my*
home country. Then there is also the issue of racism where I would feel unsafe because of my skin colour and how the Chinese in UK have been discriminated because of Covid.

Respondents were asked to reflect on their experiences of remote and digital learning so far. 55% of respondents had been able to speak to their peers. Students with mental health conditions were significantly less likely to report that they could speak to their peers than students with no disability (43.4% of students with mental health conditions compared to 56.2% of students with no disabilities).

Under half of the respondents were able to speak with academic staff (48.1%). There are significant differences between Schools for this question with the Vets School and Chemistry gaining the highest scores (64% and 61% respectively).

Figure 3 % agree I have been able to speak to academic staff by School

First and second year students are less likely to have been able to speak with academic staff than finalists (46.6% of first years and 42.9% of second years compared with 55.8% of fourth years agreed that they had been able to speak with academic staff).

Some students on pre-honours courses report that they have had no teaching since before the strikes:

Haven’t had any communication from my course since lockdown began and have had no work to do since before the February strikes

Students are unclear how they will catch up when they haven’t been taught courses that are pre-requisites for courses in the next year or if they feel they have skills gaps, for example:
As a student in HCA, I have been adversely impacted by both strikes and the cancelled lectures and tutorials after the lockdown began. As a result, I feel that I haven’t received the foundation I need to progress into Honours, so I would like increased support (and leniency, if possible) with essay-writing next year.

A third of respondents agreed that they had been able to actively participate in their learning in the last few months. Again, significant differences appear between Schools. Students in Medicine, the Vets School and Chemistry report significantly higher levels of support to participate than most Schools in CAHSS.

Figure 4 % agree I have been supported to actively participate in my learning

Students with learning disabilities and students with mental health conditions are significantly less likely to report that they felt supported to participate with their learning than students with no disabilities (23.6% of students with learning disabilities and 22.6% of students with mental health conditions compared to 34% of students with no disabilities).

Only 29% of respondents feel confident learning digitally and remotely. Only 21.8% of students with mental health conditions feel confident (significantly below students with no disabilities).

Students aren’t clear what they need to do to do well in their course (only 36% of respondents agreed). Again, there are some quite significant differences between Schools.

Comments from students in ECA and LLC express real concerns about how they will progress in the next year. For students in ECA access to studio space, tools and materials is considered critical alongside the ability to work collaboratively on creative projects. ECA students have asked what arrangements will be for their degree shows which are also seen as critical for their future career progression. Students in LLC who will be missing out on years abroad are extremely concerned
around their language level and their ability to become fluent without an “immersive” in country experience

Figure 5 % agree I am clear on what I need to do to do well in my course

Again, students with learning disabilities and mental health conditions score significantly lower than students with no disabilities (24.6% of students with learning disabilities and 26.8% of students with mental health conditions agree that are clear what they need to do to do well compared with 37.1% of students with no disabilities).

Respondents were asked whether or not they agreed that studying digitally and remotely wouldn’t negatively affect their grades. Overwhelmingly respondents felt it would. Only 24% of respondents agreed with the statement, 20% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed. Differences between Schools are significant but even the Schools with the highest scores have only just over a third of respondents agreeing that digital learning won’t negatively affect their grades.
Comments indicate that some students are extremely angry about paying fees to receive very little in the way of teaching. For those who have had some experience of remote, digital teaching and learning the experience has been unsatisfactory:

*I am hoping that the remote learning in September does not reflect the "remote learning" that we received at the beginning of the lockdown. The quality of that teaching did not meet my expectations of the teaching I should receive from a university such as Edinburgh, and it was not worth the tuition fees that I pay. I sincerely hope that by September the university and staff will have had sufficient time to prepare how to deliver high quality teaching remotely.*

Alongside concerns expressed about increasing mental ill-health, students are making requests for more structure to support their learning and developing positive habits whilst learning digitally:

*If you can help me keep to a regular schedule that would be good. Having a set time to go to lectures means I go to them every day, but recorded lectures are often only available hours later, so I forget to watch them. I work well in repetitive structures enforced by habit.*

Whilst comments have been predominantly negative; there have been some students who feel that they have benefitted from the changes that have enabled them to study in a more flexible way which fits around their lifestyle and other commitments like caring responsibilities.
Experience of Online Exams

Just over 38% of respondents took exams remotely. Only those students who completed exams were asked to feedback on their experiences. Just over 71% of respondents agreed that they understood how the exam process would work.

Just under two thirds of respondents agreed that the open book format allowed them to demonstrate what they had learnt (64.5%). Although the difference isn’t statistically significant, students with learning disabilities were most likely to agree with this question (67.1% compared to 64.7% with no disability).

On the whole, comments appear to show students have preferred open book exams:

I loved this exam format. Traditional examination formats often require students to demonstrate their memory rather than their understanding. Open book exams simulate a more realistic scenario in a work place - where resources are a click away if you need them.

Some comments express concerns around other students cheating. Negative feedback related to confusing and contradictory advice around the amount of time students should spend on answers, expected word counts and perceptions that exams would be marked more harshly.

The questions as a whole were noticeably more difficult. This is understandable. However, I am worried they will be marked much more harshly than the sit in exams despite the school stating they won’t be.

Over three quarters of respondents agreed that they were able to complete their assessments in the time given (77.7%). Students in Economics scored significantly lower than other Schools for this question (48.1%). Comments suggest that some students feel that they have been treated less favourably than students in other Schools.

Despite numerous requests from my class, there didn’t seem to be any rational explanation why Economics exams (empirical) were given the normal amount of time + 1 hour, whilst other heavily empirical exams such as engineering were given 48 hours. I worry that Economics students were not given the same leniency given the fact that we’re all at least adversely affected by the ongoing covid-19 situation to some degree.

Students with caring responsibilities were significantly less likely to agree that they could complete their assessments in the time given than those with no caring responsibilities (66.9% compared to 79.2% respectively).

The comments relating to some students’ lack of quiet and suitable study environments are repeated in the feedback around the online exams. How can the university ensure that students aren’t disadvantaged by their home lives in the future?

Whilst 41% of respondents agreed that they felt supported in completing their dissertations, experiences appear to vary greatly depending upon students’ School.
Students are unclear about what the arrangements will be for their dissertations next year:

I’m very worried. I will be a fourth year English literature student in September and would ideally use the intervening time for reading, but our lists of modules haven’t been released and nothing has been confirmed, so I have no idea what studying I can do in the mean time. I know that we begin our dissertation preparation in September but we’ve had no warning or instruction re: planning or ideas yet. I feel very lost.

Returning in September

Whilst many students are eager to return to face to face teaching next year the majority of respondents report feeling anxious, nervous and uncertain. Students often caveat comments with a note that they understand that approaches to delivering teaching, learning and support services are still in development it would appear that communications are not effective. Students are very unclear about what hybrid teaching will mean for them. Students relate that they would appreciate more and shorter communications even if it is just to reassure them that ‘we are working on it.’

To be honest, uneasy. Although there was a lot of communication leading up to online exams (I got like 20 emails a day), there has been none to little provided about the coming semester. Given other universities both in Scotland and the rest of the UK have given some info about their position, its seems that we are in the dark. I am hoping that the uni will announce soon on their position.

Students have very real concerns about returning to campus:

I am feeling anxious, I was unfortunate enough to experience death in my family due to the virus: and I have been struggling financially due to pandemic. I am very worried about the over-crowding of students on campus as well as a potential second wave of cases once
the new semester begins - as I will be entering my final year of study, I want to be able to have space to fully focus and perform to my full potential, I am worried my course will be negatively impacted by all of this.