



Higher Education Policy Institute

Students' views on the impact of Coronavirus on their higher education experience

Rachel Hewitt, HEPI Director of Policy and Advocacy

HEPI Policy Note 24

June 2020

Key findings

- One-in-five students (19%) say they have had 'very clear' communications on Covid-19 from their higher education institutions (down from 31% in March).
- Two-thirds of students feel positive about the communications, three times higher than the proportion who feel negative – 66% say the communications are 'very clear' or 'quite clear' against 21% who say they are 'quite unclear' or 'very unclear'.
- Nearly half of students feel they have received clear communications about the next academic year from their higher education institution – 10% say the communications about next year have been 'very clear' and 33% 'quite clear'.
- The majority of students are satisfied with the way their higher education institution has handled their remaining assessments for this academic year – 20% say they are 'very satisfied' and 43% say they are 'quite satisfied'.
- Fewer students are satisfied with the online learning that has replaced face-to-face teaching than they were in March – 42% are either 'very satisfied' or 'quite satisfied', compared to 49% in March.
- Just under half say they are satisfied with the delivery of support services, such as careers support and mental health support, during lockdown – 13% are 'very satisfied' and 31% are 'quite satisfied'.
- Just over half of students (57%) are living away from their usual term-time residence and nearly a third (30%) of all students say they have received a refund on accommodation costs or early release from a contract.
- There is a clear hierarchy of expectations among students on the measures that institutions are exploring for the next academic year: 75% expect increased hygiene, 71% expect some learning online and 71% expect social distancing measures but only 26% expect limitations to courses, 25% expect a delayed start to term and 18% expect all learning to be online.

Introduction

Coronavirus has shaken up higher education, like so many other sectors. When the crisis began, universities rapidly moved to provide online teaching and ensure support was in place for students. It has been a challenging period for both students and universities, but as Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister, says, they have responded with 'resilience and resourcefulness'.¹

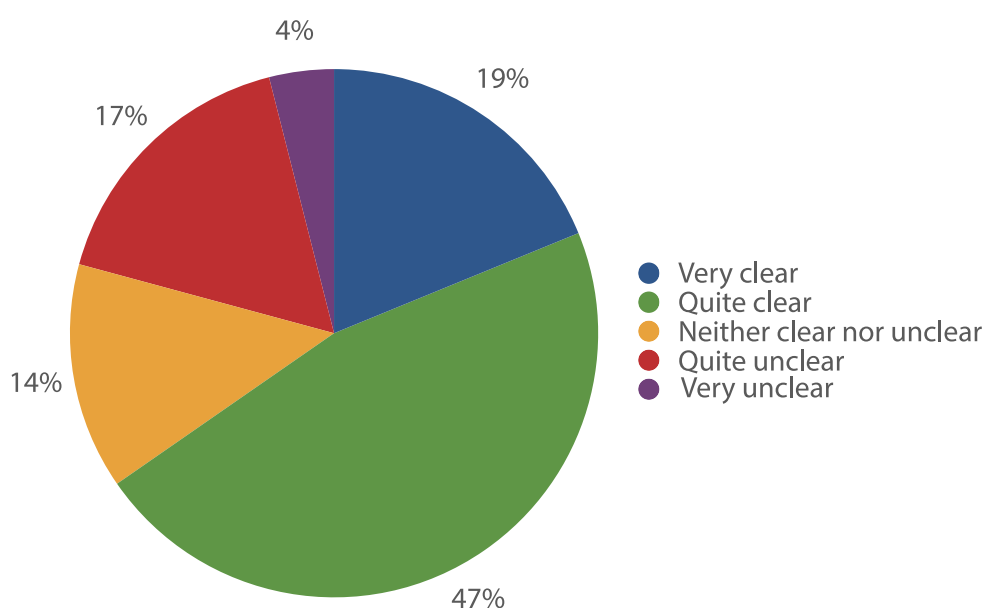
As we come to the end of one academic year and consider plans for the next, we have sought students' views on how the pandemic has impacted their higher education experience. These results are, in places, compared to previous polling conducted in March this year to see how student views have changed over time. The findings also provide students' views on how the next academic year should be handled, to feed into universities' planning.

The survey of over 1,000 full-time undergraduate students and was undertaken between 12 and 16 June 2020. Weights have been used to ensure the sample is representative by age, gender and university type.

Communication

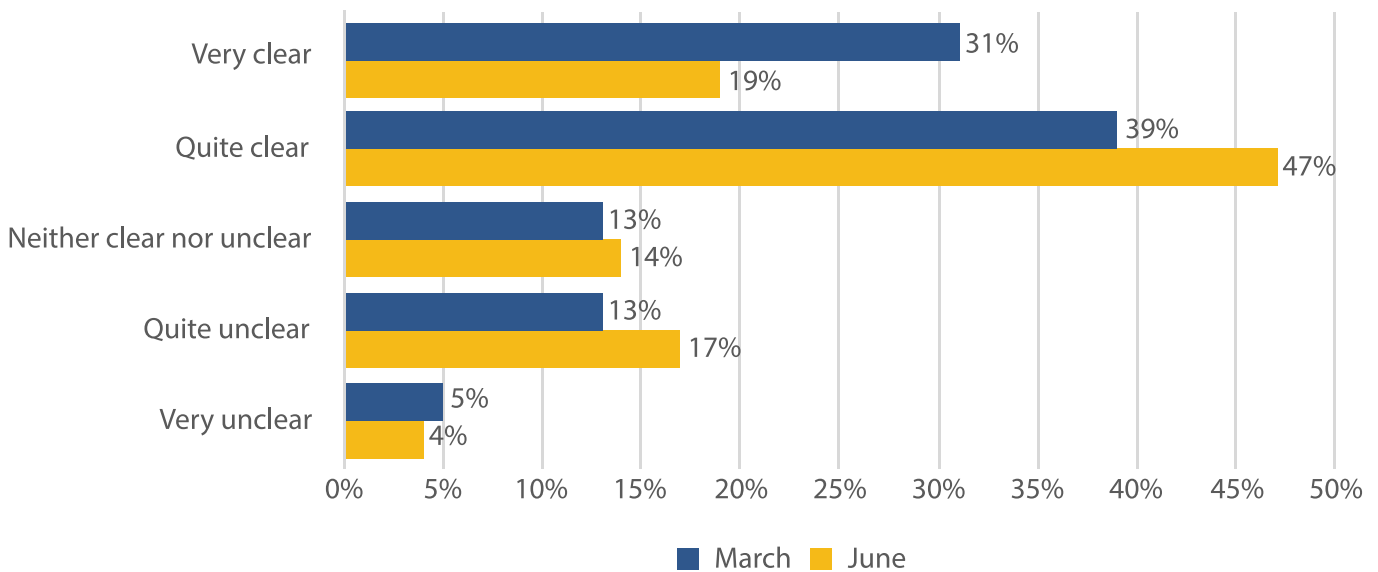
Two-thirds of students (66%) feel the messaging from their higher education institution on Coronavirus for this academic year has been quite clear or very clear. Around a fifth (21%) feel it has been quite or very unclear and 14% feel it has been neither clear nor unclear.

How clear has the messaging around the impact of Coronavirus on this academic year been from your higher education institution?



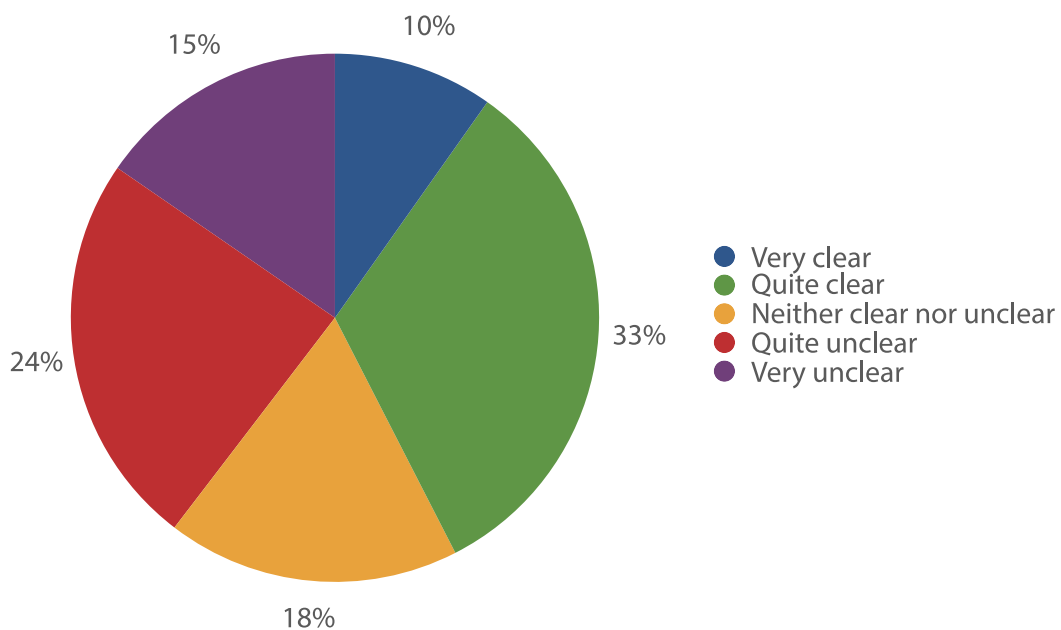
When compared to the polling we conducted in March a slightly lower proportion feel the messaging has been very or quite clear (66% now compared to 70% in March).

How clear has the messaging around the impact of Coronavirus been from your higher education institution?



Less than half (43%) of students now say the messaging about the next academic year has been quite or very clear, compared to 39% who say it has been quite or very unclear and 18% who say it has been neither clear nor unclear.

How clear has the messaging around the impact of Coronavirus on your next academic year been from your higher education institution?

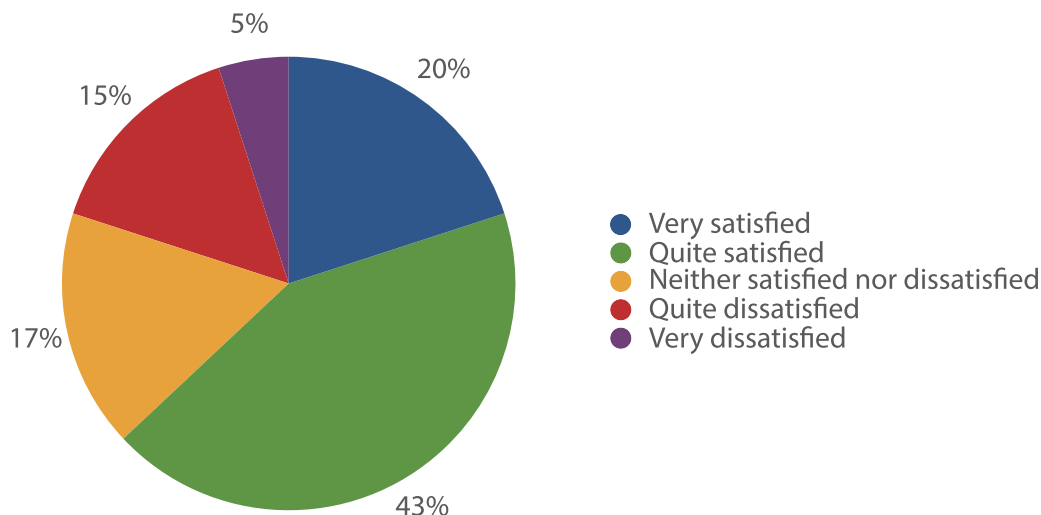


Satisfaction

The majority of students (63%) are very or quite satisfied with how their higher education institution has handled their remaining assessments for this academic year. A fifth (20%) are quite or very dissatisfied and 17% are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

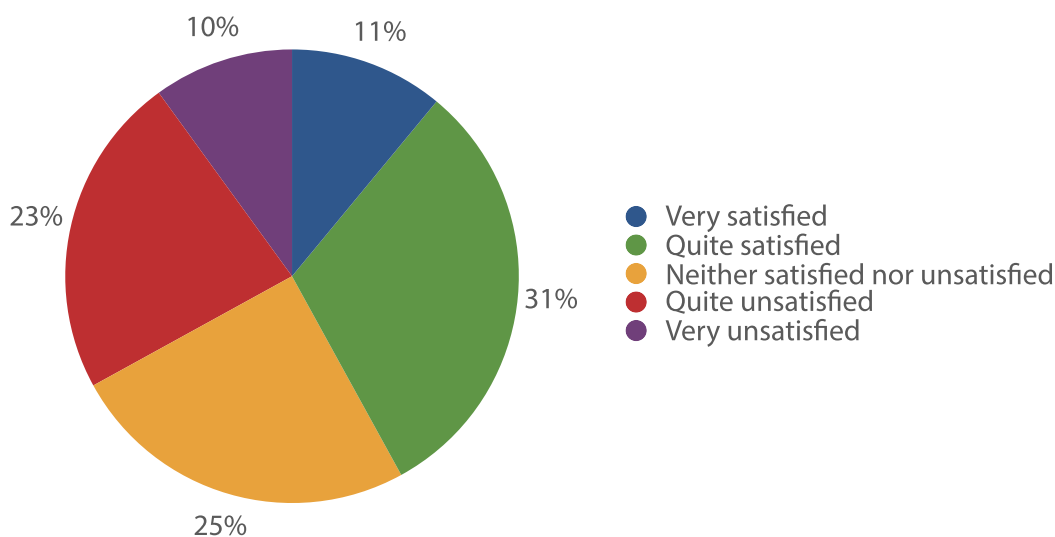
In the polling conducted in March, 42% said they wanted their assessments to be conducted online, 36% said they wanted assessments to be cancelled and a grade assigned based on their existing work and 17% said they wanted the assessments to be run once the current crisis is over.

How satisfied are you with the way your higher education institution has handled your remaining assessments for this academic year?

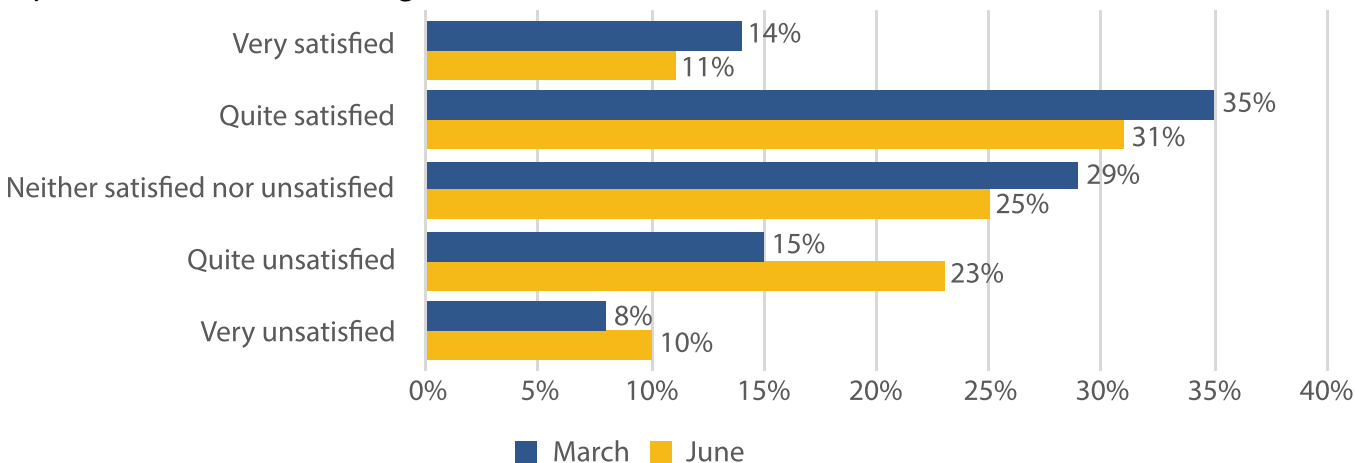


Less than half (42%) of students now say they are very or quite satisfied with the online learning that has been put on to replace their face-to-face teaching. A third (33%) say they are quite or very dissatisfied and a quarter (25%) say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

How satisfied are you with the online learning your higher education institution has put in place to replace face-to-face learning?



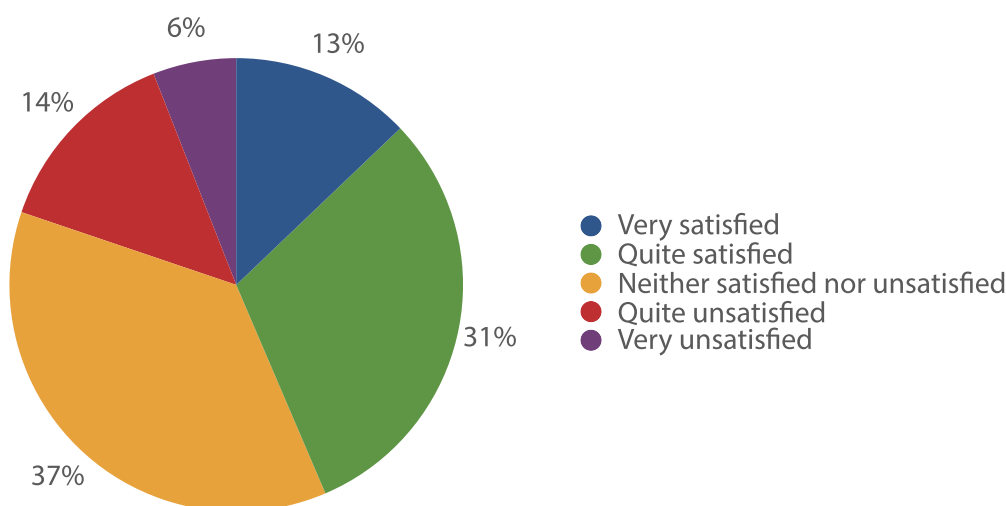
How satisfied are you with the online learning your higher education institution has put in place to replace face-to-face learning?



A slightly lower proportion of students say they are quite or very satisfied with their online teaching, compared to previous polling conducted in March (42% now compared to 49% in March).

Students were asked to consider the provision of non-academic support services, such as careers advice and mental health support, through lockdown: 44% say they are very or quite satisfied with their delivery, compared to 20% who say they are quite or very unsatisfied. Just over a third (37%) say they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

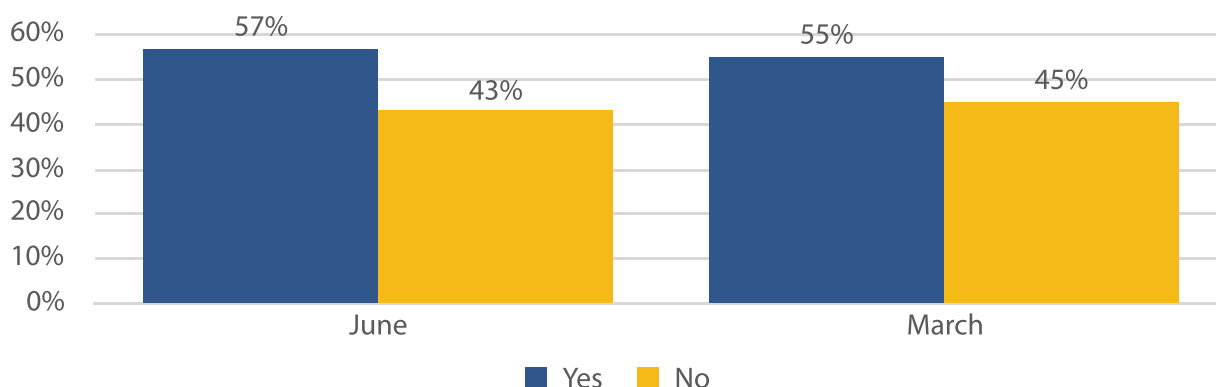
How satisfied are you with how your higher education institution is delivering support services (such as careers support, mental health support or other advice) during lockdown?



Accommodation

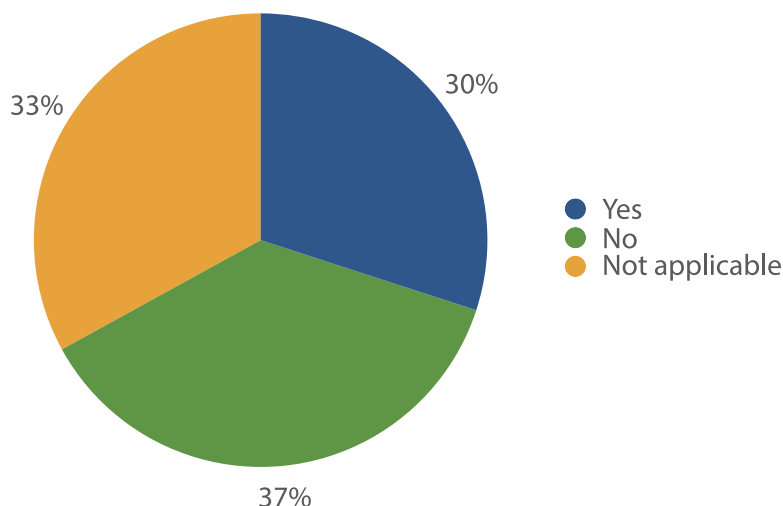
When asked whether they are living away from their normal term-time residence as a result of Coronavirus, 57% of respondents say they are and 43% say they are not. This is largely unchanged from our previous polling conducted in March, when 55% said they were living away from their term-time residence and 45% said they were not.

Are you currently living away from your normal term-time residence as a result of the Coronavirus crisis?



Around a third of all students surveyed (30%) say they have received a refund on accommodation or early release from a housing contract. Slightly more (37%) say they have not and 33% say this is not applicable.

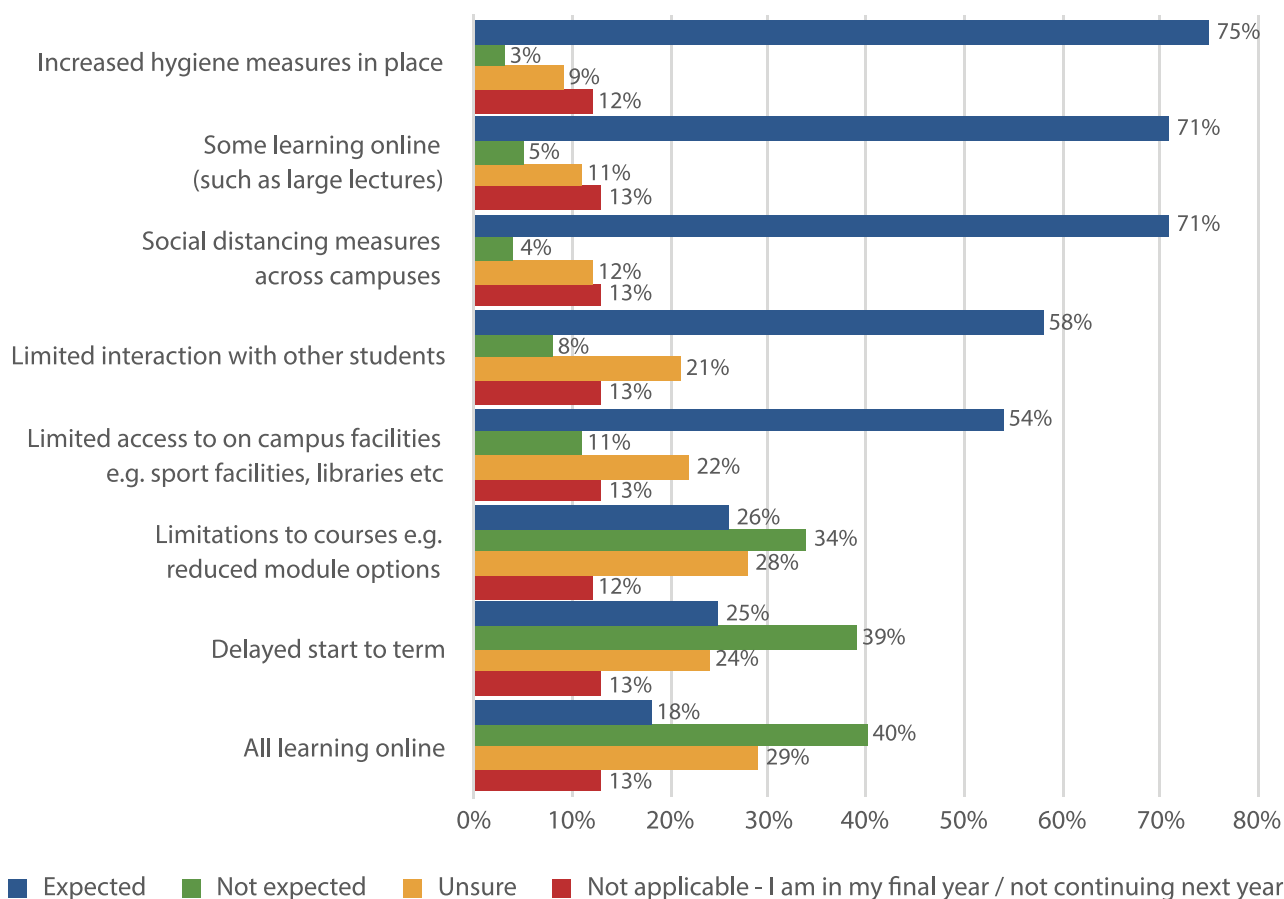
Have you received a refund on accommodation costs or been granted early release from an accommodation contract?



Provisions for the next academic year

Thinking about the next academic year, around three-quarters of students say they expect increased hygiene measures to be put in place (75%), some learning to be online (71%) and social distancing measures across campuses (71%). Just over half expect limited interaction with other students (58%) and limited access to campus facilities, such as sports facilities and libraries (54%). Around a quarter expect limitations to their courses, such as reduced module options (26%) or a delayed start to term (25%), and less than a fifth expect all learning to take place online (18%).

Thinking about the next academic year, what is your expectation of how your higher education institution will operate?



Conclusion

These results show a mixed picture on how Coronavirus has impacted students' higher education experiences. In some ways it is unsurprising that students are not completely satisfied with a model that has been created in such extraordinary times. Both staff and students have been trying to get to grips with how to operate in a global pandemic, and delivering clear communications while so much remains unknown is not without its challenges. Nonetheless, the results show that students are looking for more in terms of delivery of online delivery and support services.

It is also clear that, in some ways, universities have exceeded expectations. As the 2020 HEPI / Advance HE *Student Academic Experience Survey* found, students reported higher levels of satisfaction with some forms of support from teaching staff after universities moved online than before.² These results show students are also satisfied with how universities have handled their end-of-year assessments and largely content with the communications they have received on this academic year.

The results also show that students are realists. They understand their higher education experience for the next academic year is likely to be very different from what they have had to date.

We hope these results will provide useful evidence for universities in their planning for the next academic year. It will be particularly important to address where students' expectations differ from reality.

Methodology

1. Wave 9 of the HEPI / YouthSight Monitor was answered by 1,013 full-time undergraduate students and undertaken between the 12 and 16 June. Weights have been used to ensure the sample is representative by age, gender and university type.
2. The margin of error is + / - 3% for students. This is calculated at a 95% confidence level for both groups.
3. Respondents received a £1.50 Bonus Bond gift voucher for answering these questions and others on a different topic.
4. Results may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Endnotes

1 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/06/12/hepi-webinar-with-michelle-donelan-minister-for-universities/>

2 <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/The-Student-Academic-Experience-Survey-2020.pdf>



hepi

Higher Education Policy Institute

99 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6JX

Tel: +44 (0) 1865 284450

admin@hepi.ac.uk

www.hepi.ac.uk