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MACASKILL, Ann <<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9972-8699>>

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Published version

MACASKILL, Ann (2018). Undergraduate mental health issues: the challenge of the second year of study. *Journal of Mental Health*, 27 (3), 214-221.

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Undergraduate mental health issues: the challenge of the second year of study

Ann Macaskill

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Correspondence: Ann Macaskill, Psychology Research Group, Sheffield Hallam

University, Unit 8 Science Park, Sheffield S1 2 WB, UK. Phone: +44 (0)114 225. E-mail:

a.macaskill@shu.ac.uk;

Abstract

Background: Student mental health is a global issue. Macaskill (2012) reported that the second year was associated with the most significant increases in psychiatric symptoms in UK students. Qualitative data were collected to explore this further.

Method: Twenty-three second year undergraduate students were interviewed using a narrative interviewing method to explore their experience of their second year of study. They also completed the GHQ-28. Students were grouped according to their psychiatric caseness scores, giving two groups, a well group with scores ≤ 5 and a clinical case group with scores ≥ 6 and their interview data were compared.

Results: Using thematic analysis, various themes and subthemes were identified. While both groups identified the same issues namely, the first year concerns impacting on the second year, course issues, careers and future employability and student debt, the groups reported very different coping styles.

Conclusion: There were shared anxieties across both groups. The majority related to institutional practices and the unintended impact they may be having on student mental health. While specialist interventions would help the clinical caseness group, arguably the anxiety levels of both groups would benefit equally from relatively easy to implement, inexpensive institutional changes and/or additions to current practices in universities.

Keywords: University students, student mental health, anxiety, worry, second year students

Undergraduate Mental Health Issues: The challenge of the second year of study

Background

The transition to university has been recognised globally as a stressful time for students (e.g. Guney et al., 2010; Kadison & Digeronimo, 2004; Karam et al., 2007; Montgomery & Côté, 2003; Stallman, 2008). The challenges faced are significant and well-documented with family and friends left behind, new social and academic environments to engage with, all while living independently for the first time (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013; Scanlon et al., 2010). However exciting it may seem, change is challenging (Lazarus, 2006). In response universities have developed induction and support systems to assist students in their transition year (e.g. Pitkethly & Prosser, 2010). The assumption is that by supporting the transition students will develop coping skills and adjust to university life.

However, student mental health continues to be of concern in the UK as predicted by the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2003, 2011) who linked it to the increasing financial pressures faced by students since the introduction of student loans and the government agenda requiring universities to encourage more students from traditionally under-represented lower social class groups to attend university. This widening participation in university education means that students are no longer an elite group with good levels of economic and family support and it is suggested that this has increased their vulnerability to develop mental health problems. Indeed, Macaskill (2012) in a survey found that the incidence of psychiatric caseness in a UK student population was 17.3%, not significantly different to the 17.6% reported for the general UK population (McManus et al., 2009).

However, it is a global problem with Blanco et al., (2008) in the United States finding that almost half the students in a national survey met the clinical criteria for psychiatric disorder.

Other researchers have reported similar concerns in other countries notably Australia (Stallman, 2008), Canada (Adlas et al., 2001), and Turkey (Guney et al., 2010).

The diathesis-stress models (e.g. Ingram & Luxon, 2005) demonstrate that the probability of occurrence of a psychiatric disorder is the result of complex interactions between genes, biology, psychological factors, culture and stressors. The age of university students is a contributing factor as mental health problems are most likely to emerge before the age of 24 years (Kessler et al., 2007). Rutter, (2001, 2007) has identified that factors such as intelligence, academic achievement, self-esteem, temperament, a supportive family, caring friends and a good social network can help prevent the development of mental disorders in the face of multiple stressors and other vulnerabilities. These protective factors were more prevalent in the student body before participation in university education was widened. While the transition to university was always potentially stressful; students now face more financial stresses due to the introduction of fees and student loans, they are taught in much larger groups making it more difficult to develop a sense of belonging and make friends and they have less one-to-one contact with their academic tutors as the students numbers have grown (Scanlon et al., 2010). Support services have not kept pace with the increases in student numbers so personal support is more difficult to access with Macaskill, (2012) reporting that only 5.1% of those with mental health disorders were receiving treatment.

The annual survey of the American Association for University and College Counselors (2012) reported that anxiety was the commonest condition for American university students followed by depression. Macaskill (2012) in a survey of UK student mental health found that levels of anxiety and depression stayed fairly constant in the first year but anxiety in particular increased significantly in the second year. Anxiety levels reduced in the third year, but were still significantly higher than in the first year. This finding provided the rationale for the present study. The aim was to examine in some depth the student experience of their

second year of study using qualitative methods to see whether this can help explain the increased anxiety levels in second year students.

Method

Participants

Twenty-three second year students (16 female, 7 male, mean age = 20.81 years, $SD = 4.49$, $CI_{95} 19.71, 21.01$, 20 white British, 2 British Asian, 1 Afro-Caribbean), volunteered to be interviewed. Inclusion criteria were that they had successfully completed the first year and were not carrying over additional work from the first year. These were students on a range of three year degrees (criminology, law, geography, English, education, sociology, politics, and psychology) in a post-92 UK university. These universities were formerly polytechnics and their academic awards were accredited and quality assured by a central government body. A 1992 Act of Parliament awarded polytechnics university status with the right to accredit and quality assure their own awards.

Procedure

The advertisement for the study made it clear that the study aimed to try to understand better the second year student experience to inform the support offered to students in future. The aim was to collect a wide range of second year experiences so any student was welcome to come and discuss their experiences good, bad or indifferent. Students received the invitation from the researcher by email with a description of the study, stressing that data were collected anonymously. It was also advertised via the student union wellbeing support service to encourage the participation of students who may have experienced problems. The email went out six weeks before the end of semester two. The interviews lasted on average 50 minutes. Students were interviewed in a private room on campus. At the end of the interview the aims of the study were discussed again and students were asked if they would mind completing the GHQ 28 to provide a measure of their mental health to use for comparative purposes and all

agreed. The aim was to differentiate students in terms of their levels of mental health and compare their narratives.

After students had had time to read an information sheet and have any questions answered, they were asked to sign a consent form which gave permission for the interviews to be recorded and anonymised quotes used in research papers and conference presentations. As it was an exploratory study aiming to discover what was of concern to second year students a narrative interview methodology (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006) was adopted. In keeping with this method, students were simply asked to talk about their experience of second year, beginning with how they felt about entering second year and continuing throughout the year, considering the highs and the lows and how they coped with them. It was stressed that it was their experience that was of interest to see if there were things that could be learnt that might help the university to improve the second year student experience. Most students engaged with this approach but when necessary prompts were given and clarifying questions asked so communality of the experiences could be established. This seemed more appropriate than semi-structured interviews where the topics to be discussed would be pre-determined by the researcher. The interview finished on a positive note by asking about something they had particularly enjoyed in second year. This was to try to prevent students going away with a negative view of their second year. The research was approved by a university research ethics committee (DS- 238, 10/2015).

Measures

The age of the students, sex, ethnicity, course, and confirmation of second year status were collected. At the end of the interview students completed the General Health Questionnaire-28 (Goldberg & Williams, 1991), a psychometrically sound much used measure of symptomatic mental health designed for use in general population surveys with higher scores indicating poorer mental health. As the scores were to be used to differentiate the sample

according to their levels of anxiety, the responses were scored 0,0,1,1, according to the manual instructions for scoring for psychiatric caseness. The GHQ Manual (Goldberg & Williams, 1991) suggests 4/5 as a cut off for caseness but the more conservative score of ≥ 6 was used based on UK data from a North of England sample in a World Health Organization study validating GHQ scores against systematic clinical interviewing (Goldberg et al., 1997).

Analyses

Transcripts of the recordings were made and checked by the author. In line with narrative interviewing non-course related material was removed. Thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied inductively as the study was exploratory and independent of theory or epistemology. The six phases of analysis (data familiarisation, initial coding generation, search for themes based on initial coding, review of themes, theme definition and labelling, and report writing) to find ultimate themes was followed. The Well Group (WG) were coded first as this was the largest group. To check the reliability of the thematic coding a second post-doctoral researcher who was an experienced qualitative researcher but was not part of the research team read the transcriptions independently, beginning with the Clinical Group (CG) to counterbalance the analyses. The same themes were identified but with slight changes in the labels applied. Differences were discussed until a consensus was reached. These procedure followed Elliott, Fischer, and Rennie's (1999) criteria for assuring quality in qualitative studies with clear aims for the study, purposive sampling, a clearly defined methodology, independent analysis of transcripts, and consideration of the perspectives of the researcher.

Results

The GHQ caseness scores were calculated and classifying students with scores ≥ 6 or ≤ 5 resulted in 8 students (7 female, 1 male) in the Caseness Group (CG) and 15 students (9 female, 6 male) in the Well Group (WG). The themes identified will first be summarised,

tabulated, and briefly discussed. Next the way students approached the issues identified will be presented and discussed in more detail as they provide insights into how these events impact on the mental health of these students as the CG and WG used different coping strategies.

Positive experiences

In terms of positive experiences, both groups were still enjoying the experience of university, although several students commented that the initial excitement had lessened, "First year was really exciting, living independently, having lots of freedom and things but now I am used to it and take it for granted, it is just life now ... sometimes good and sometimes not so good." (F, WG). "I am glad to be at university, I worried about coming but I am pleased with myself for managing to come although I still worry. (CG:F4). All the students felt that they had been well supported in the first year. As one student said, " Everything was laid on and the tutors were really helpful... Maybe too good really. You kind of get to expect it." (WG:M4). Both groups also expressed many positive feelings about individual staff members. The commonest expressions concerned liking individual staff members and wanting to do well for these staff, with only a few in each group commenting on the quality of teaching. A third of the sample said that the second year of their course was more interesting as it had moved on from A-level material. It is not unexpected that reporting of positive experiences was limited as students were aware that the aim was to provide information that would improve the student experience.

- Table 1 here -

Issues encountered

Although the transcripts for each group were analysed separately the same themes emerged from both groups. These were first year performance concerns, second year course issues, careers and future employability worries, and student debt. The themes and sub-themes are

summarised in Table 1 with exemplar quotes from both groups. It is clear that students had felt well supported in the first year but the first year marks not counting towards their degree resulted in the majority of them not working as hard as they had in the first semester, creating gaps in their knowledge and thus causing problems in the second year.

Support being less readily available in the second year, less of it and the need to be more proactive were all concerns. Many had made their friends in the first year seminar groups where there was a fairly stable membership across the first year but this changed in the second year with option choices and they were no longer in the same seminar groups and missed their friends.

All agreed that the work and assessments were more demanding and less help was available from tutors. They wanted to achieve as their assessments counted towards their degree classification, although there was uncertainty about how the degree classification method worked. Some were now concerned about their future and careers.

Coping Strategies

1. First year concerns impacting on second year

Differences between the two second year groups emerged in relation to both the ways students reported feeling about the issues and how they coped. In relation to the theme first year concerns about only having to pass the first year and the marks not counting towards their degree classification, four students from the CG reported that they tried not to be influenced by the message and continued working hard in semester 2 but it was difficult:

"We did two group projects... and no one in my group was very bothered about them. I thought they were poor and wanted to rewrite them both but I worried what the others would say about me. I did nothing but I felt bad. We passed but I felt that I had let the lecturer down. I couldn't sleep I was so worried." (CG:F7)

"I did work hard (semester 2) but others were doing less so I worried about how well I was really doing. Was I really coping? (CG:F2) Others in the CG were frequently blaming themselves for having worked less hard in semester 2, "I should not be so easily led. I worry about fitting in so I follow the crowd I suppose." (CG:M1)

WG students also expressed concerns, "I'm annoyed at myself as I did well in semester 1 last year but I didn't work so hard in semester 2 as I knew I only had to pass." (WG:F6). Many students in the WG were much more philosophical, "I really enjoyed the second semester, I had more time to do other things and I think it got me more settled in. You can always catch up with work when you have to." (WG:F2)

2. Second year course issues

Students in both groups felt that there were times when they needed support but they adopted different approaches. The students in the WG were much more likely to take the initiative and ask for help as these quotes illustrate. A student with a family issue said, "I rang my support tutor right away and emailed the course leader and made appointments with them. They are there to help" (WG:M6). "When I did not know what to do I searched on Blackboard (virtual reality site) and the support material was all there with email addresses and numbers to use." The CG group tended to be much more passive and anxious about asking for help. "I worry about asking for help as tutors expect you to be more independent to know how things work. I tend to ask other students but they often don't know or tell you different things. ... All very worrying." (CG:F4). "I know it is silly but I worry so much about asking stuff, even silly stuff. You don't want to seem needy." (CG:F3). These more vulnerable students are clearly more easily intimidated by staff and worry about being seen as incompetent or as a nuisance.

Students were all aware that having option choices in second year meant that they would be in seminar groups with students that they did not necessarily know and while some took it in their stride or even welcomed it others found it problematic. "I have met loads of new

people this year in seminars. It has made a nice change. I still have a few good friends from first year too." (WG:M2) "There was no one I knew in any of my seminar groups this year and I haven't enjoyed it as much. I talk to one woman really - a mature student. We share our worries." (CG:F5)

All students agreed that the work was harder with less guidance but that they had been told to expect this. "We have to be more independent, go to the library and research topics. I like it now I am used to it and am in a routine." (WG:M2). "The jump from what was expected of you academically in the second seemed big compared to first year." (CG:M1). "I find it hard to judge how good an assignment is. I worry about it till I get the marks. Usually they're ok. I want to do better with marks counting now. I don't really know how to improve." (CG:F7)

Differences in proactivity between the groups were apparent in relation to the gaps in knowledge of the first year material that appeared in the second year with one WG student reporting, "When I realised there was material I should know from methods that I didn't know, I went back to my first year notes and I went over it all again. It really helped." (WG:F4). Others in this group were less independent but were still proactive. "We took turns to raise it in the seminar groups and our tutors were good and went over it again with us." (WG:M1). A small group of others in the WG seemed unconcerned, "When it comes to revision I will do the work and pick up on gaps in revision sessions." (WG:F3). In contrast more typical CG responses related to the student following up gaps in knowledge as they appear but then worrying that there was other material they did not know, as this student narrated, "When they say we should know things, I do follow it up but I'm sure there is a lot more. I worry about the multiple choice exams. Although to be honest mostly I try not to think about it". (CG:F3) Many of the students in the CG worried about how much work to do and typically did not ask for guidance simply worried whether they were doing enough.

"When you get essay feedback, I never like to ask if I have read enough or if I need more references. I think they expect us to know by now. I just worry" (CG:F7)

Differences were clearly exemplified in relation to the issue of degree classifications. None of the CG sought definitive answers on the issue but they were concerned about it as one student commented, "I try hard not to think about it but when it comes up I am worried, I don't like not knowing." (CG:F6). Half of the WG had been proactive and obtained definitive answers from a range of sources as these quotes illustrate. "I asked my academic tutor but she did not know so we looked on the web together and worked it out." "We discussed it in a seminar group but the amount is small and not worth worrying about really. Third years tell us you can recover if needs be." (WG: F9). "I am not bothered about how the degree is classified at this moment, I work hard and will do as well as I can." (WG:M3)

3. Careers and future employability

Only five students, (4WG, 1 CG) were totally positive about careers talks and the employability agenda embedded in courses. These were all students who had definite careers in mind and found the talks informative and reassuring as one said, "I've known what I want to do since before I came to uni but going to talks on other careers has been helpful. It's helped me be certain." (WG:M3)

All the students understood why careers sessions were held in second year and saw them as good in principle but for many who did not have a specific career in mind attending careers activities was anxiety provoking as several students reported from both groups. "I feel bad if I don't go to the careers sessions but when I do go I worry cause I haven't a clue about what I want to do." (WG:F8). "My mum is bothered about me choosing a career. I tell her when I go to the talks and she's happy. Then I feel guilty as she thinks I am making progress but I'm not." (WG:F1) "The talks are a nightmare as every time I think I may want to do this

and come away with nothing. I worry about it." (CG:F5). "I avoid the talks cause going would only worry me. I've no idea about future jobs." (CG:F1)

4. Student debt

Both groups contained students who worried about student debt as the quotes in Table 1 indicate. There was evidence in the CG group of students sharing their concerns more with parents and other family members and getting reassurance. "My father tells me not to worry about it. It's for the future so I try not to think about it. I'm careful what I spend and I work in the holidays and it all helps." (CG:F4). "My parents keep telling me I will only have to pay it off when I can afford to do so. I try to avoid discussing it." (CG:F2). Others were philosophical, "Everyone has it so you just get on with it. No point in worrying." (WG:M5). Similarly juggling university and employment was an issue for the seven students who had term-time work. Most of the others had some form of holiday work when they could get it.

Discussion

Although two groups of students could be identified, one meeting the criterion for GHQ caseness, the CG group and a well group (WG), a common set of themes were identified by both groups. In terms of incidence, the caseness group represented 34.78% of the sample, compared with the 23.1% found by Macaskill (2012) although the latter was in a much larger sample. Advertising the study through the student union wellbeing support services may have encouraged more students who experienced problems to volunteer to be interviewed although these figures are closer to those observed in American undergraduates (Blanco et al., 2008).

When asked for positive experiences in second year, all the students commented on the excellence of first year support and most reported that they continue to enjoy university although for some it had become less exciting. Individual staff members were identified as providing positive experiences by most of the students. This was expressed in terms of liking individual lecturers and being motivated to work hard because they liked these staff rather

than commenting on the quality of teaching on offer. Comments on teaching quality were rare but students did report that the material presented in second year was more interesting. Cofield and Edward (2009) reviewing what is thought to constitute excellent teaching suggest that it is the relationship between teacher and student that is core. It is about staff conveying that they care about students being able to learn and this is evidenced here.

Both groups of students identified a common set of four course related issues with sub themes that cause them worry. The four main themes were, 1) First year concerns impacting on second year, with subthemes of a) only a pass mark being required, b) motivation and performance in semester 2 and c) curriculum design; 2) Course issues in second year with subthemes of a) changes and reductions in available student support, b) changes in course structure, c) finding accommodation, d) reduction in academic support, e) gaps in knowledge of first year work, f) marks contributing to degree classification and g) uncertainty about degree classification regulations; 3 Career and future employability related to careers talks and 4) Student debt with subthemes of a) debt from first year and B) working life. These problems reported by the second year students were largely different from those identified by the first year students (Denovan & Macaskill, 2013), where many of the concerns related to the transition, like homesickness, adjusting to living independently, differences between school and university teaching and assessment styles and expectations, and difficulties with housemates. Students had clearly made adjustments to university by second year as evidenced by these different issues. Common concerns for both the first and second year students related to finances although the first year focus was on managing finances, in the second year the focus was on student debt. Balancing the demands of employment was a concern for students who worked in both years.

Institutional Actions

Many of these concerns can be addressed at an institutional level. Most students come to university motivated to work hard and achieve but the evidence suggests that the first year marks not contributing to their degree classification has a demotivating effect in the second semester. In a quantitative study of first year students in the same university Denovan and Macaskill (2017) found that grade point average for students in semester 2 was significantly lower than in Semester 1, academic alienation increased and self-efficacy decreased thus providing some empirical evidence for this effect. Tutors want to reassure anxious students of the need to achieve only a pass mark but stressing that new material that underpins second year work is introduced in semester 2 of the first year is crucial. Either that or make a small percentage of the first year marks count towards degree classifications. This latter action would remove the additional anxiety about marks suddenly counting towards their degree in second year. All the students mentioned this as a real concern amplified by an acknowledgement that they were expected to work more independently and that the work was more demanding. Gaps in student knowledge from the first year may have increased the perceived demandingness of the second year work so if steps were taken to ensure that students were motivated to give of their best throughout their first year it should help.

Students were clearly getting the message that they were expected to work more independently but many seem to interpret this as meaning that support is not available in second year. Universities need to clearly outline the support available for second year students and ensure that it is delivered appropriately. Perhaps some staff should consider the impression they convey to students so that they do not appear unapproachable given the contribution student support can make to attainment and mental health (Pitkethly & Prosser, 2010). Kandiko et al., (2013) in a national UK survey showed that students want to be taught in smaller groups and to have more one-to-one contact with their tutors.

The issue of degree classifications being complex or expressed unclearly may be a local issue but external examining experience suggest perhaps not. This can easily be addressed by producing short readily available student friendly summaries of university policies and checking that these are understood by students.

The anxiety generated for many students with careers talks and embedding employability in the curriculum is perhaps more difficult to address as they do need this information. Perhaps a health warning acknowledging that it is common for students at their stage not to know what they want to do post-university. Careers talks can then be badged as opportunities to become better informed. However, Kandiko et al., (2013) reported that students were quite critical of careers talks seeing that they are often delivered by staff with no experience of working in the area and that students valued more highly opportunities for placements, internships and other work experience. Universities should perhaps consider this. These issues may be different for student on vocational courses and this should be examined in future.

The issue of student finance and many students working as well as studying is difficult and universities need to continue to be aware of the demands that this puts on these students (NUS, 2008). Some flexibility with timetabling may be possible. It could help all students to include time management training in the employability related generic skills within the curriculum.

Clinical Group (CG)

There are particular issues related to the CG with evidence of high levels of worry throughout their responses. Currently there are four main models of Generalised Anxiety Disorder (Fisher & Wells, 2008; 2011) which can provide some insights into the strategies these CG students may be employing. In line with Cognitive Avoidance Theory (Borkovec, 1994) some students appear to have adopted worrying as a coping strategy. They report being

worried most of the time but talk about worrying as if it is an end in itself. They worry about things but do not ask for advice or take any action that might help solve the problem. The Intolerance-of -Uncertainty Model (Dugas et al., 1998) suggests that some worriers need certainty about events so things like uncertainty about their degree classification system and worries about appropriate levels of support to access makes it difficult for these individuals to function. However, worrying is seen to be a positive way of coping but it produces a lack of confidence in their problem-solving ability so individuals either avoid the issue or worry about it as this is perceived to be a problem-solving strategy but they do not actually problem-solve. There were many examples of this with these students. The Metacognitive Model (Wells, 1995) suggests that worriers may avoid issues to limit worrying and there is ample evidence of avoidance of issues in this study.

The remedial actions already discussed as being desirable would benefit this group of students equally. If these students can be encouraged to let their university know about their mental health problems, learning contracts could usefully alert lecturers to the reluctance of these students to proactively ask questions or seek more detailed feedback so they can be assisted. Support sessions could also help these students to develop more effective coping skills such as problem-solving.

Strengths and Limitations

Students in both groups were clearly committed to university with no signs of being disinterested or alienated from their studies, presumably why they volunteered to participate in the study. There will be students who are experiencing academic alienation and future studies should try to incorporate views from such students. These were students on a range of three year degrees in a post-92 UK university very committed to widening participation which therefore recruits a high number of students who are the first in their family to attend university. It may be that this lack of familiarity with university education contributes to

student anxiety. Future studies could explore if the issues differ for students in other types of university.

Conclusions

The course-related worries of the second year students were the same whether they were in the WG or the CG and differed from the concerns of the first year students. While the CG would benefit from specialist mental health interventions, the good news is the anxiety levels of both groups would benefit equally from relatively easy to implement, inexpensive institutional changes and/or additions to current practices.

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Table 1. Themes and sub-themes identified by students relating to issues relevant to their second year and their frequency of occurrence

Theme	Sub-theme	Explanation and frequencies	Example quote
1. First year concerns impacting on second year	a) Only a pass mark required	First year marks do not contribute to the degree classification system. This is in line with many other universities. (All 23)	"When I told my tutor I was worried about not doing well enough she kept telling me that I only had to pass first year. We all got the same message. They were being kind. "
	b) Motivation and related performance in semester 2	Many students reported that knowing they only had to pass resulted in a reduction in motivation which impacted on their performance. (Point made by all and only 4 students reported trying to work equally hard with varying success.)	"I came into university determined to work hard and do well. I did in Semester 1. Great marks. Then we heard that first year marks didn't count towards your degree. I took my foot off the pedal. I did enough to get by but I wasn't aiming for really high marks any more".

	c) Curriculum design	Curriculum content in Semester 1 tends to link to A-levels so there is an element of revisiting old knowledge. New material is introduced in Semester2 which provides the basis for second year work. (16 students)	"To start with the stuff we covered was much like A-level and that was re-assuring, I did not worry too much and I could do it. I did ok Looking back to Semester2, I now see there was a lot more new stuff taught but by then we knew you only had to pass and I didn't work as hard as in the first semester.
2. Course issues in 2 nd year	a) Changes and reductions in available student support	This university like many others has concentrated efforts on providing excellent support for first year students. The rationale being that students will then be prepared to be more independent in second and third year. (19 students)	"First year support was great! It was all laid on and easy to get. I took it for granted really. In second year it's there but there is much less of it. You have to go looking. Make appointments and things. You don't always know where to go but they (staff) expect you to know.

b) Changes in course structure	As part of first year support attempts are made to keep students in the same seminar groups for many of their modules but this is not done in second year, partly due to more option choices being available. (15 students)	"I was in different seminar groups from my friends and that meant I didn't see so much of them. It was more difficult to make new friends as every seminar group was different. I have health problems so I need my friends for support.
c) Finding accommodation	First year students are well supported to find accommodation. The system is still there for second year students but the student has to take the initiative. (11 students)	"First year was really easy it was all there for you. This year was much harder. I started a bit late as I didn't know. No one told me"
Reduction in academic support	In line with other universities students are expected to become autonomous learners across the first year so that by second year they can function independently. This results in changes in the demands made of them.	"Much more is asked of us now. It is harder. There's less guidance for assessments. In first year you could do an essay plan and get feedback but not in second year. You have to do it by yourself really. It is harder."

e) Gaps in knowledge of first year work	This refers to the impact of not working as hard in semester 2 in the first year when a lot of new material was introduced. Staff expect students to know the first year work as the curriculum builds on it in second year. (20 students)	"I passed first year ok but my second semester marks weren't so good. I slacked off. The tutors don't tell you how important knowing the first year material is for second year. They think we know but I didn't even think about it"
f) Marks contributing to degree classification	Students are made aware by staff, often in an attempt to increase motivation that their marks now contribute to their degree classification. (All 23 students)	"This year marks count and that has made me more anxious. I think we all are. It makes it more real. I want to do well and when I don't it bothers me."
g) Uncertainty about degree classification calculations	Degree regulations tend to be in lengthy legalistic documents often with different ways of calculating the final degree which can be confusing to the uninitiated. (20 students)	"There was a lot of talk about how much the second year counts. No one really seems to know. I looked at the regs. online but they are confusing. Even the tutors seem confused. It gets to me when I'm working on assessments "

3. Career and future employability	Presence of careers talks	In line with other universities the curriculum address employability skills and programmes of career talks are provided and students are encouraged to attend. (18 students expressed concerns)	"I know it is meant to help. Let you know your options and so on but I haven't a clue what I want to do. It scares me." "The talks are good but I worry I won't get a good enough degree to do a Masters.
4. Student debt	a) Debt from first year	Student loans for fees and subsistence. (16 students expressed concerns)	"Money is a problem and I try to manage. I worry about the future when you want to buy a house. Will you get a mortgage? My sister can't and her debts are much less than mine will be."
	b) Working life	(Seven students worked in term-time to help support themselves.)	"I have to work to afford to live. In a call centre, It's hard managing uni and work. When you have assessments to do work doesn't understand and so on. Both cause me a lot of grief."
