



# 2022/2023 HeppSY Partnership Report

(Post-16 students)

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Author: Helen Zhu  
Produced by the HeppSY Data & Evaluation Team

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# Foreword



This year's partnership report provides an insightful analysis of the first wave of the HeppSY Learner Survey in partner schools and colleges for our post-16 responses between November 2022 and January 2023.

Almost 5,000 complete responses, the survey and subsequent report offer HeppSY and the wider region valuable insights into young people's perceptions, attitudes, and knowledge of higher education. Furthermore, this report provides an extensive overview of young people's educational ambitions and perceived options following the disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced in previous years of study.

The outcomes and recommendations outlined here will inform HeppSY as we develop our core offer for 2023/24. We would like to extend our gratitude to our partner schools and colleges across the region for their instrumental support in administering the survey.

**Vicki Spink**

HeppSY Programme Manager

# Executive summary

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The HeppSY partnership report (post-16 students) is a detailed illustration of the learning outcomes that HeppSY post-16 students self-reported through the annual learner survey implemented in the last half of the autumn term. While celebrating success in the past academic year, this report highlights gaps between learner groups broken down by demographic characteristics to inform future intervention planning.

The key findings from this year's learner survey are outlined below.

- Generally, the post-16 students in sixth form schools or colleges in this survey are significantly more inspired to progress to higher education in the academic year 2022/23 than the year before. They also have a better understanding of higher education (HE) knowledge and HE benefits compared to their counterparts last year. Their sense of belonging and perceived fit with HE improved significantly compared to last year. Post-16 students appear more motivated and confident in getting their grades and progressing to university.

## HE aspiration

- Proportionally more students with multiple protected characteristics had applied for HE at the survey point compared to their counterparts such as White disadvantaged males. Year 13 and Year 12 students in sixth form schools are more likely to apply than their college Level 3 counterparts.
- Male students from a disadvantaged background are less likely to apply than all the other student groups broken down by ethnicity, gender and IMD.
- Concerns about HE prospects could be a barrier to post-16 student aspiration. Those least likely to apply to HE are also those who have the lowest confidence about securing a place at HE.
- A three-year comparison shows that Year 13 sixth form students who said they were most likely to "study at a local university" increased by nearly 10% from 2021/22 to 2022/23.
- Tracking the college students' progress shows that the number of Level 3 Year 2 students who planned to progress to HE leapt in one year, with a 12% increase from Year 1 to Year 2.

## HE Knowledge

- Proportionally more Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students said they knew “how to apply” or what “type of course I could take” than their counterparts in last year’s survey.
- All KS5/ Level 3 year groups show significant increases in the proportion of students who know about the five aspects of HE life. However, Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students’ knowledge level of “the financial support available” and “how to apply to study higher education” is particularly lower than other aspects of HE knowledge.
- Although many HE knowledge gaps have been closed, there are still gaps in specific HE knowledge between different groups; for example, the students with a disability have a lower knowledge level than their counterparts on three out of five aspects of HE life.
- When the post-16 students were classified into six groups based on gender, ethnicity, and IMD, BAME (Black, Asian, and minority Ethnic) non-disadvantaged females stood out with the highest scores across all 10 statements of HE knowledge. White disadvantaged males scored significantly lower on many aspects of HE knowledge.

## HE benefits

- The knowledge gap between UCP (Uni Connect Programme) and Non-UCP post-16 students in understanding HE benefits disappeared.
- Post-16 students with a disability and those identifying their gender as other are less sure that HE will improve their social life.
- Female students understand all six aspects of HE benefits better than Male students.
- Proportionally more Black students strongly agree with most of the statements on HE benefits, although the gaps between them and White students are not statistically significant.
- BAME and White males from disadvantaged backgrounds understand different aspects of HE benefits less well as their other peer post-16 students.

## Sense of belonging

- The post-16 students with a disability, those who identify their gender as other, and White males have the lowest sense of belonging compared to their counterparts.

## Academic self-efficacy

- Lower-year students (Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1) are more motivated to do well than higher-year students (Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2) in sixth forms and colleges. College students are more motivated than sixth form students.
- The post-16 students with a disability and those who identified their gender as other or did not reveal gender identity are less motivated to do well and less confident in their grades and prospects to progress to HE than their counterparts.
- The post-16 students identifying their gender as other are less confident in getting the grades and in the prospect of progressing to HE than their counterparts.
- In contrast to the BAME females from non-disadvantaged background, BAME males from non-disadvantaged background are the least motivated and least confident in HE prospects among all groups. On the contrary, BAME females from disadvantaged backgrounds are well motivated and confident about HE prospects but less confident in their grades than the other groups.

## Recommendations:

- We need a targeted approach to support the post-16 students who are less likely to apply for HE and have lower HE prospects. Helping them remove the barriers of their HE prospects could increase their likelihood of applying for HE. Support new Sixth form and college students to understand “the financial support available” and “how to apply to study higher education”.
- Provide specific targeted interventions for the post-16 students with certain characteristics, such as disability, to improve their understanding of HE life and benefits, sense of belonging, and motivation and confidence to progress HE.
- Provide comprehensive support for White males from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their understanding of HE knowledge and benefits, sense of belonging and perceived fit in HE, and academic self-efficacy to narrow the HE aspiration gaps between them and their peers.
- Do not treat BAME students as a homogeneous group when planning outreach interventions. This report reveals that BAME females from non-disadvantaged backgrounds might have benefited from previously targeted interventions. In contrast, BAME male students from disadvantaged backgrounds still need comprehensive support.

# Acknowledgements

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This report would not have been possible without the participation of students and school/college staff. A special thank you goes to those who completed the questionnaires. Your voice has been part of the reports that will be spread and acknowledged by the stakeholders, who will use the findings and recommendations to support students like you better.

The author also would like to thank all the HeppSY colleagues who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to enable young people's voices to be heard:

- Hepp Director Gemma Styles, and HeppSY Programme Manager Vicki Spink, for guidance and support to the HeppSY Learner Survey 2022/23;
- the School and College Programme Managers, Charlotte Rodbourne, Joanne Slater, and Jamie Taylor, Senior Administrator Nick Lewis, and the Higher Education Engagement Assistants for liaison with schools and colleges to implement the survey;
- the colleagues of the evaluation and data team, Daniel Fletcher, Jessica Whitby, and Lilith Roberts, for redesigning the survey questionnaire, administering the survey, processing and analysing data, and producing the reports.

Last but not least, a big thank you goes to Jamie Taylor and Suzanne Wilks for their valuable comments and proofreading.



# Introduction

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The HeppSY partnership report (post-16 students) is the annual evaluation report about the impact of HeppSY outreach activities on post-16 students' learning outcomes in HeppSY schools and colleges.

## About HeppSY

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the national Uni Connect Programme, funded by the Office for Students.

HeppSY is a partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, the University of Sheffield, and South Yorkshire colleges and target schools. HeppSY signed data sharing agreements with 45 schools and colleges to provide targeted outreach intervention for a sustained and progressive impact.

We believe everyone should be able to make informed and inspired choices about their future, whoever they are, wherever they're from. From college and university taster days to real-life projects with national partners, we give those who aren't sure if college or university is for them a new perspective on higher education.

## HeppSY outreach

HeppSY provides impartial HE information and progress advice to the students in 45 HeppSY schools and colleges. The outreach offers are designed to increase the students' understanding of higher education and how to progress to HE, enable them to make informed career decisions and support them in overcoming the barriers to their sense of belonging and HE aspiration. In line with the aims, bespoke content is developed for the students at different stages of study.

HeppSY adopted two ways to deliver outreach activities. Relatable role models present in schools and colleges. We recruit them from recent graduates or university students. Professional careers advisers provide a wide range of careers advisory services for the students. Their activities range from formal sessions for a year group to bespoke one-to-one or group advisory sessions.

Our partners, including Hepp, Sheffield Hallam University, and the University of Sheffield, also delivered outreach activities. We also commissioned educational providers, such as the Brilliant Club and the Linacre Institute, to organise mentoring and summer school programmes.

Additionally, HeppSY developed bespoke projects, such as SHE Can, HE Can, YOU Can, Amplify, and ElevatED, to support students with certain characteristics who need more specific support to improve their confidence, sense of belonging, and knowledge and skills to progress to HE.

Some students who participated in the current survey could have engaged in HeppSY outreach activities across two academic years provided by multiple organisations if they had studied in HeppSY schools and colleges.

## Evaluation aims

- To outline the HE aspiration-related learning outcomes of the young people at 45 HeppSY partner schools and colleges.
- To make evidence-based recommendations that support HeppSY in targeting provisions for the next academic year.
- To inform and influence outreach activity planning by partnership members, including local universities and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

## Evaluation methods

HeppSY adopts the CFE learner survey as the evaluation tool to measure key outcomes associated with learners' understanding of higher education (HE in short) and the likelihood of accessing HE in the future.

### Survey information

The survey was completed by students in Years 10–13 and College Level 2 and Level 3<sup>1</sup>, online and in HeppSY schools and colleges from 1st November to 5th January 2022/2023. Overall, 4,969 complete student responses across 38 schools/colleges (with a sample from 1 to 535) were included in the final dataset.

### Learning outcomes

The HeppSY evaluation and data team validated the scales in the CFE Learner Survey with past survey data before implementing the survey this year. We are confident that the five outcomes outlined in the following sections are the most suitable tools for evaluating targeted outreach and other HE aspiration interventions.

Learning outcomes such as the likelihood of applying for HE at age 18 or 19, sense of belonging, and academic self-efficacy can also inform attainment raising interventions. The literature shows strong correlations between these outcomes and attainment from GCSE onwards.

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1 Generally, Year 12 and 13 refers to students completing their A-Levels. Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 refers to students completing Level 3 courses other than A-Levels, such as BTEC and NVQ vocational qualifications. Level 2 is equivalent to GCSEs or First Diploma Level. Students' year groups were self-reported and not verified through any objective measure.

## Data analysis

In line with the evaluation aims, the data analysis for this report focuses on the following areas:

1. changes identified by comparing the outcomes between different academic years;
2. gaps of specific learning outcomes between different demographic groups;
3. the cold spots highlighted by statistical tests of the significant differences between different demographic groups.

The recommendations are based on the above analysis outcomes.

## Limitations

The most prominent limitation is that any positive changes found in the survey could not be owed to HeppSY and partners' outreach activities alone because many factors influence young people's knowledge, belief, and aspiration in a year whose impact is impossible to separate. The student cohorts in different surveys are different every year.

For a large cohort with thousands of students, the cohort difference in different years hardly causes significantly different outcomes without intervention. However, the cohort difference could cause significant differences between two years for a small group of students.

Although the large demographic groups such as male and female students, the students with or without disabilities, and the large ethnic groups' distribution in the survey have no significant difference to those in the student population, some small demographic groups in the survey might not be representative of them in the student population. For example, it is impossible to know whether the students who identified their gender as "Other" in this survey can represent those in the 45 HeppSY schools and colleges because "Other" is not recorded in the secondary student profile data.

To overcome the limitations, the HeppSY partnership report did not include some groups with a small number of responses, for example, those who did not respond to the demographic questions. However, it does include the significant difference between some small groups and their larger counterparts to enable the voices of small groups to be heard.

# 1. Future plans

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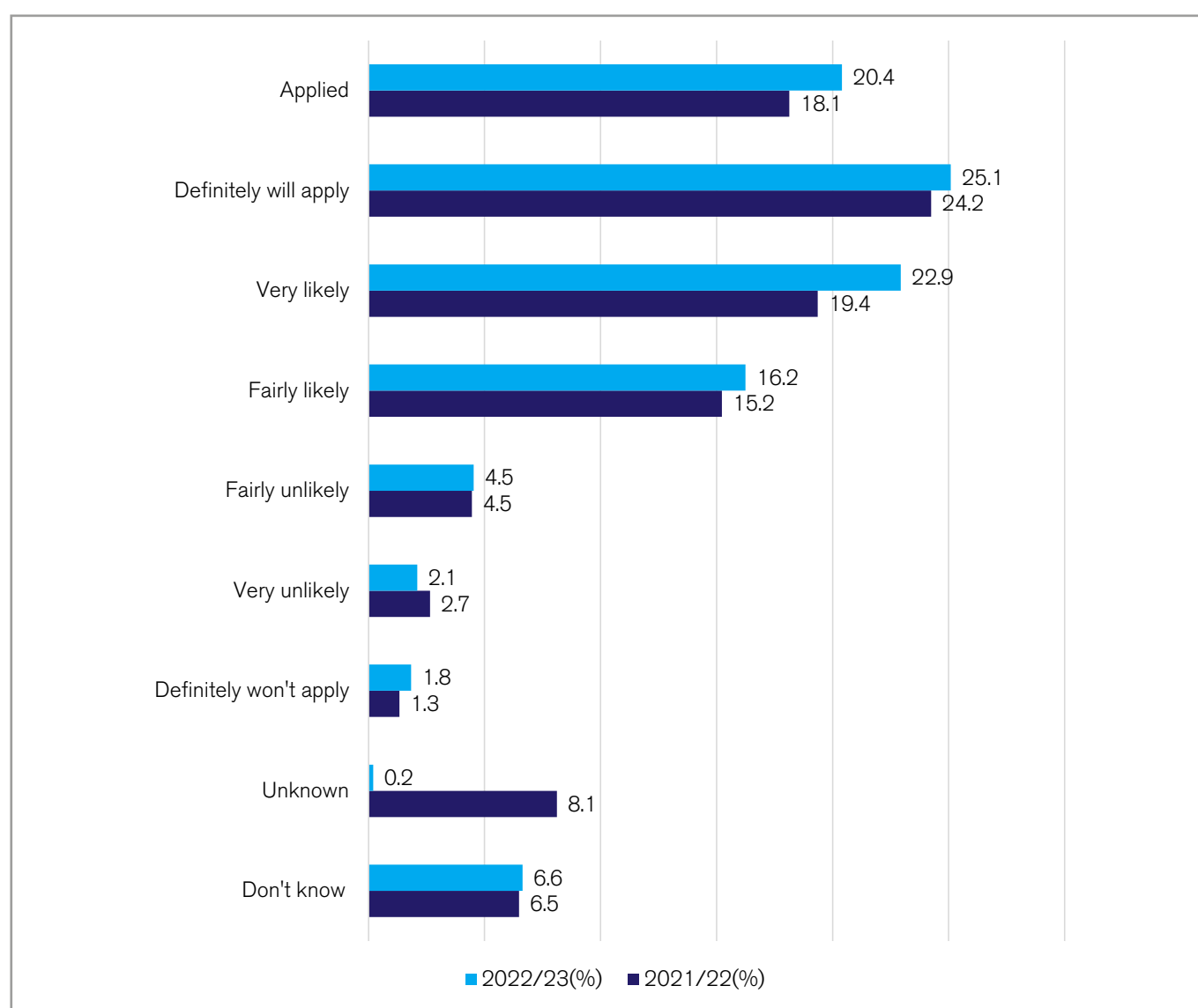
As with the previous CFE Learner Survey, three questions in the HeppSY Learner Survey in 2022 were used to produce the indicators of the students' inspiration to progress to higher education in the future:

- When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next? (Sixth form and college students will choose from a list of options, including higher education)
- Have you applied to study higher education? (For the students who chose any of the higher education options in the question above)
- How likely are you to apply to higher education at age 18 or 19? (On a scale of 1 to 6, 1 for "Definitely won't apply" and 6 for "Definitely will apply"; for the students who had not applied for higher education yet)

## Post-16 students' inspiration to progress to higher education

The survey outcomes reveal that the post-16 students in sixth form schools or colleges in South Yorkshire are significantly more inspired to progress to higher education in the academic year 2022/23 than the year before. Two out of ten post-16 students applied to higher education, and a quarter of them "definitely will apply" at the survey point this academic year.

Figure 1: HeppSY post-16 students' inspiration to progress to HE in 2021/22 and in 2022/23



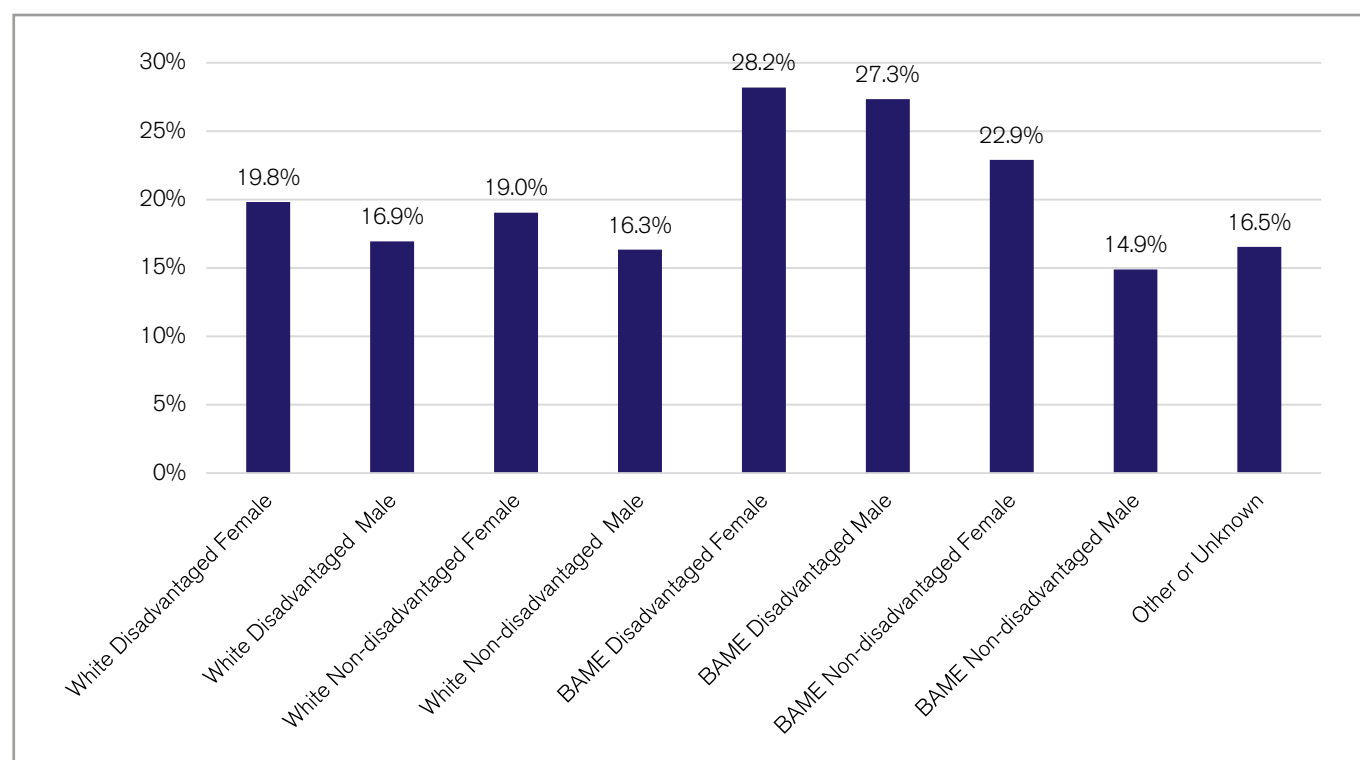
(2021/22: n=3,993, 2022/23: n=1,853)

## The applicants

Who are the applicants who have already applied for higher education at the survey point?

When the responses are broken down by demographic variables, significant differences appear between White and BAME students. Only 18.5% of White students have applied, 7.3% lower than their BAME counterparts. Significant differences are observed between the students who live in disadvantaged areas falling in the lowest quintile defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD Q1) and in the areas in higher quintiles. A significantly higher proportion of the students in IMD Q1 have applied for higher education (23.1%) than the others (ranging from 16.6% to 19.4%). Therefore, the students with multiple protected characteristics applied earlier than their peers (Figure 2).

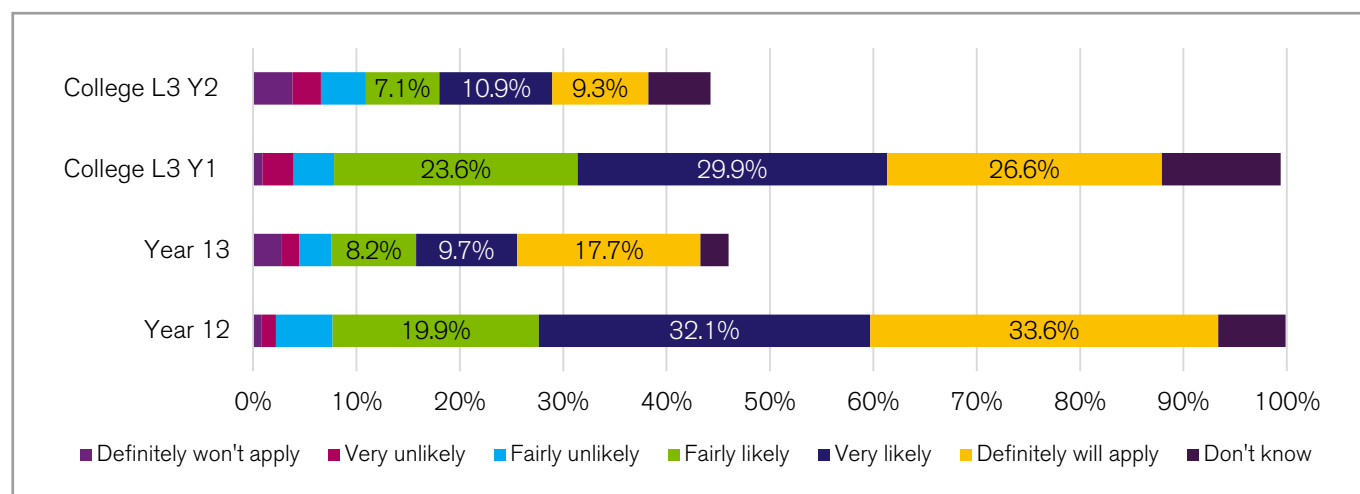
Figure 2: Post-16 students who have applied to HE broken down by ethnicity, gender, IMD



## Post-16 students' likelihood to apply for higher education

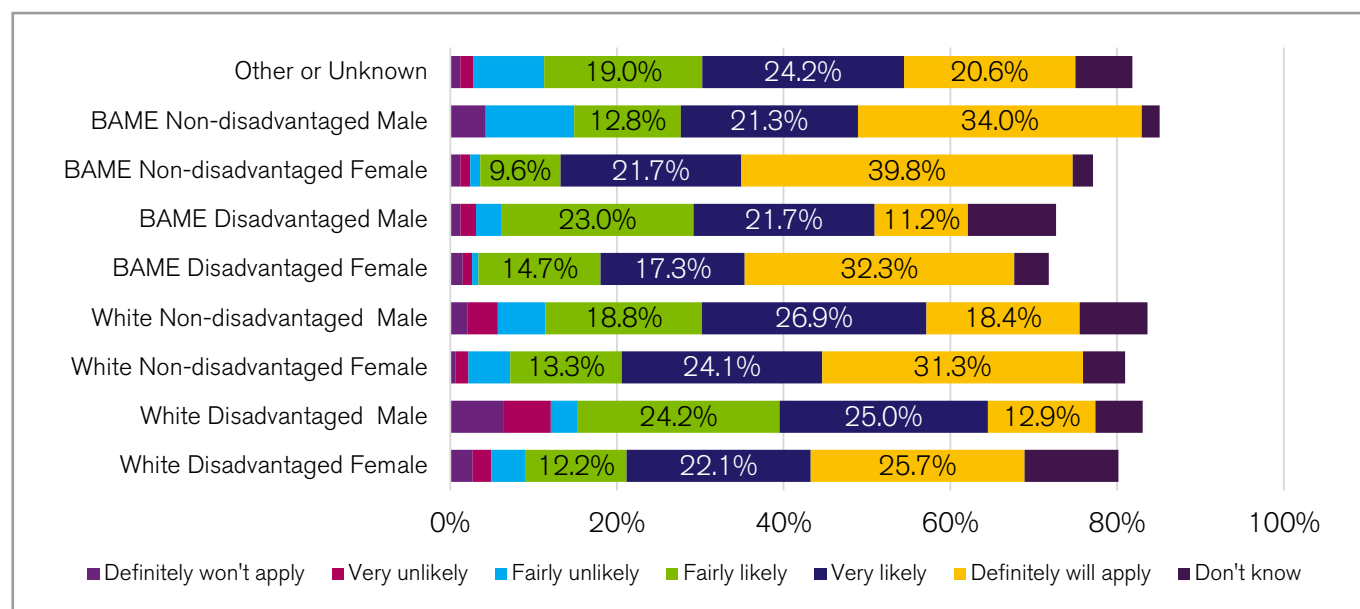
The significant gaps appear between sixth form and college students, male and female students, and disadvantaged male and other students.

Figure 3: Sixth form and College Level 3 students' likelihood to apply for HE



A significantly higher proportion of Year 13 and Year 12 students in sixth form schools said “definitely will apply” than their college counterparts (Figure 3). Only one out of nine BAME disadvantaged male students and one out of eight White disadvantaged male students said, “definitely will apply”, whereas other counterparts who said “definitely will apply” range from over one in six to over one in three (Figure 4).

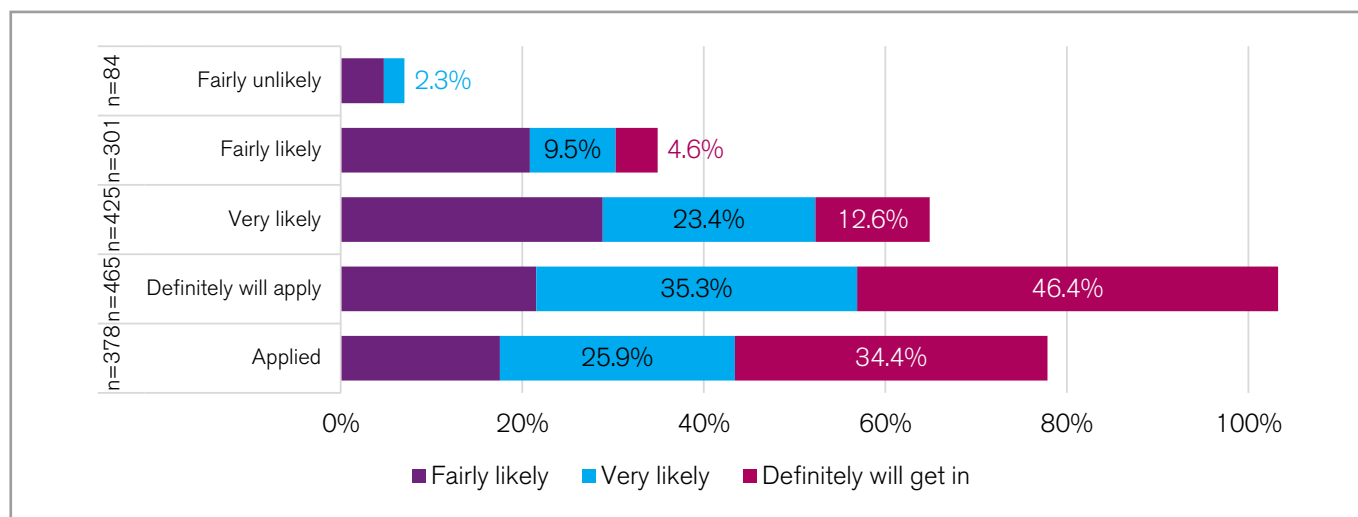
Figure 4: Post-16 students' likelihood to apply for HE broken down by ethnicity, gender, IMD



## Post-16 students' expectations to get in HE

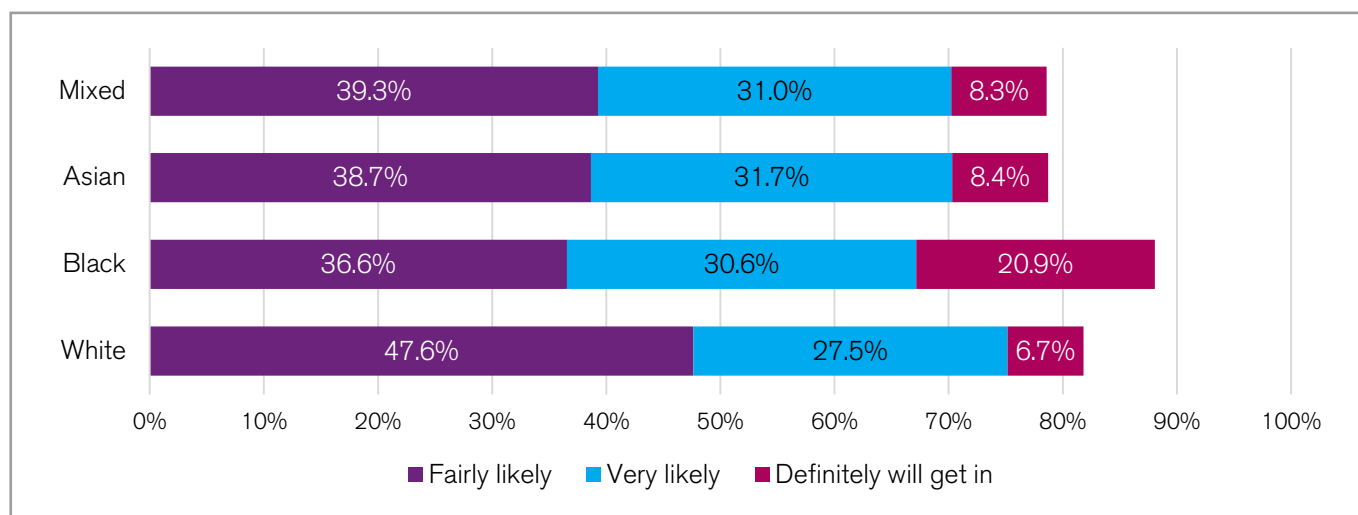
The post-16 students' expectations of getting into HE in this survey are not as strong as their likelihood of applying. Although only 8.1% of respondents thought they were unlikely to get in, only the same proportion of respondents selected the option "definitely will get in". Nearly a quarter of respondents thought they "very likely" or "fairly likely" would get into HE if they applied. When the numbers are broken down by their responses of whether they have applied to HE and how likely they are to apply if they have applied, it appears that the more likely the post-16 students are to apply, the more confident they are to get in (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Post-16 students' expectations to get in HE broken down by HE application likelihood



The difference between Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 is small when comparing like with like. So is the difference between Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2. Black students' expectations of getting into HE are much higher than White, Asian, and Mixed students (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Post-16 students' expectations to get in HE broken down by Ethnicity and gender



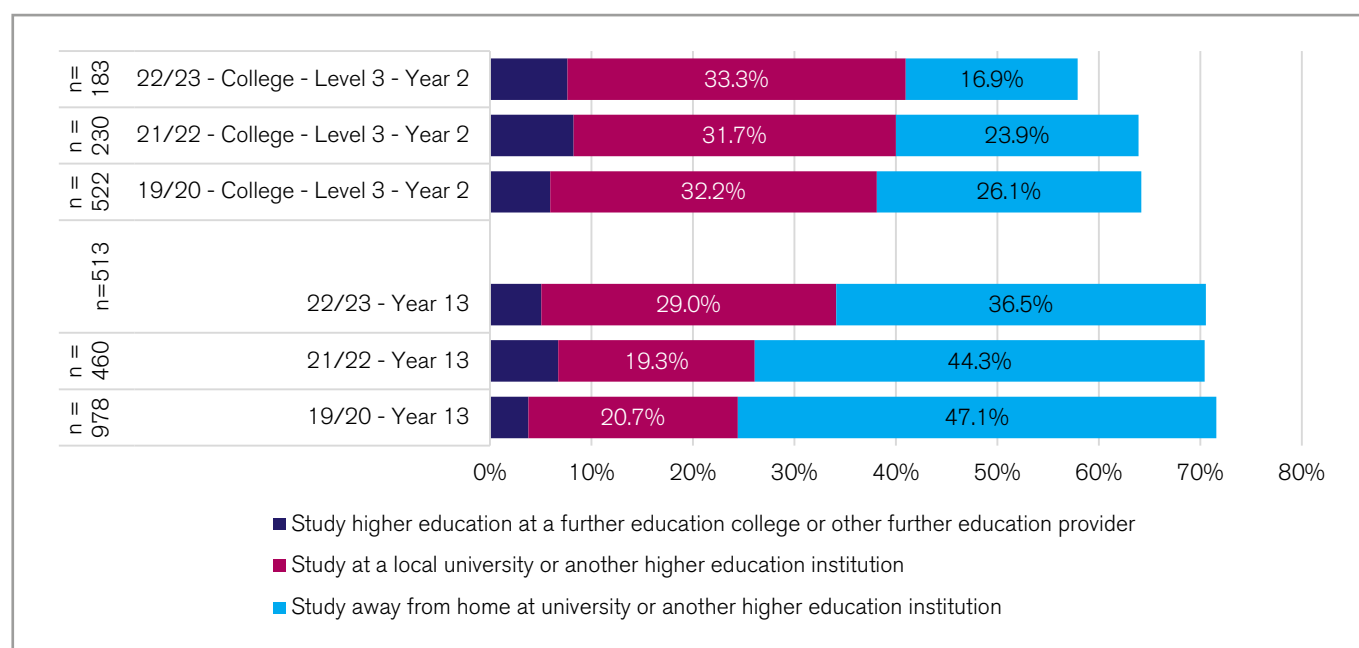


## Post-16 students' next-step plan

Compared to the previous survey in 2021/22, the proportion of post-16 students in this survey who would like to study higher education stays more or less the same. However, the proportion of students who would most like to “study at a local university” increased from 22.5% to 25.1%, whereas those who would most like to “study away from home” decreased from 34.2% to 31.4%. This change could result from the cost-of-living crisis many UK families have faced since 2022.

The evidence from comparing last year's sixth form and college students' responses across three survey waves supports the above assumption. As demonstrated in Figure 7, there is a significant decrease in the proportion of students who said they were most like to “study away from home” compared to the previous year. For the Year 13 sixth form students, this might suggest a shift from studying elsewhere to studying locally as those who said they were most like to “study at a local university” increased by nearly 10% from 2021/22 to 2022/23. However, it is a different tendency for the college students. Figure 7 suggests that the proportion of Level 3 Year 2 students who chose the HE path reduced by 6% compared to last year.

Figure 7: Comparison of last year's post-16 students' next-step plan in 3 surveys



## Positive impacts of outreach interventions

Level 3 Year 2 shifting away from HE was first observed from last year's Learner Survey outcomes, with 8% proportionally fewer Level 3 Year 1 students planning to progress to HE than their counterparts in the academic year 2019/20. However, the story is different if we compare the same cohort of students in two academic years. The number of Level 3 Year 2 students who planned to progress to HE leapt in one year, with a 12% increase from Year 1 to Year 2. The increase suggests

the outreach interventions in HeppSY colleges are highly likely positively impact this cohort of students' decision to progress to HE, despite the negative impact from uncontrollable factors, including the pandemic and the cost of living crisis.

The positive impact is also observed in other groups of students. For example, 58.7% of White students in this survey planned to study at university, with a 3% increase compared to last year's survey.

## Main reason to go or not go to HE

The 1,569 post-16 students who have applied or were likely to apply for HE reported their main reason for applying to HE. Nearly six out of ten of them chose "to get a well-paid job" and two out of ten "I enjoy learning". Most options are chosen by less than 5% of the respondents. Therefore, some options are regrouped as below for a better presentation of the findings.

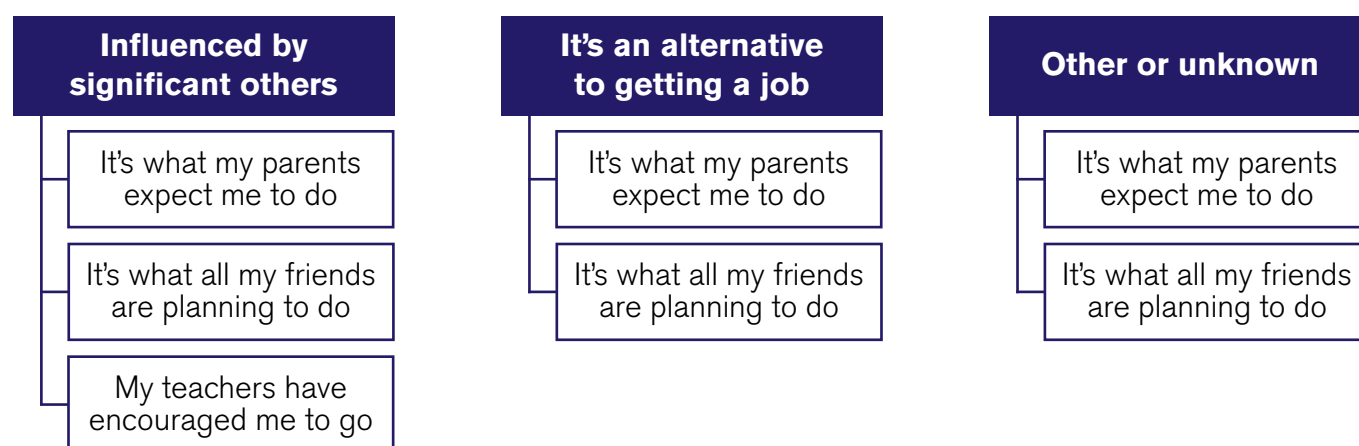
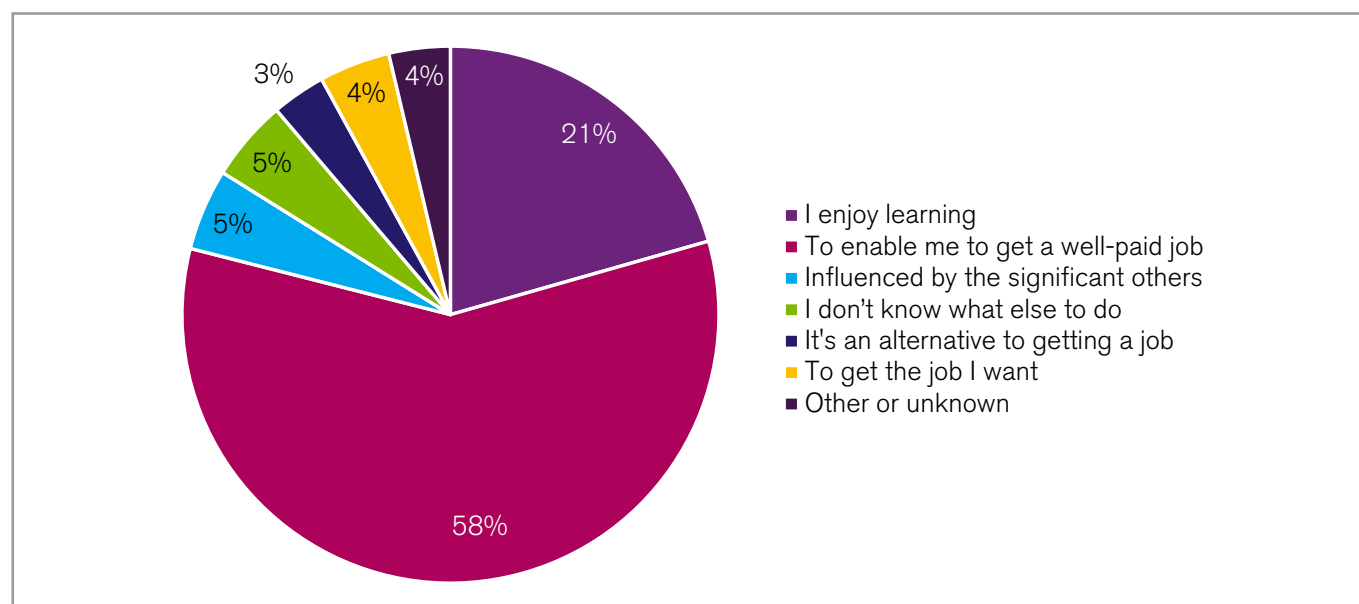
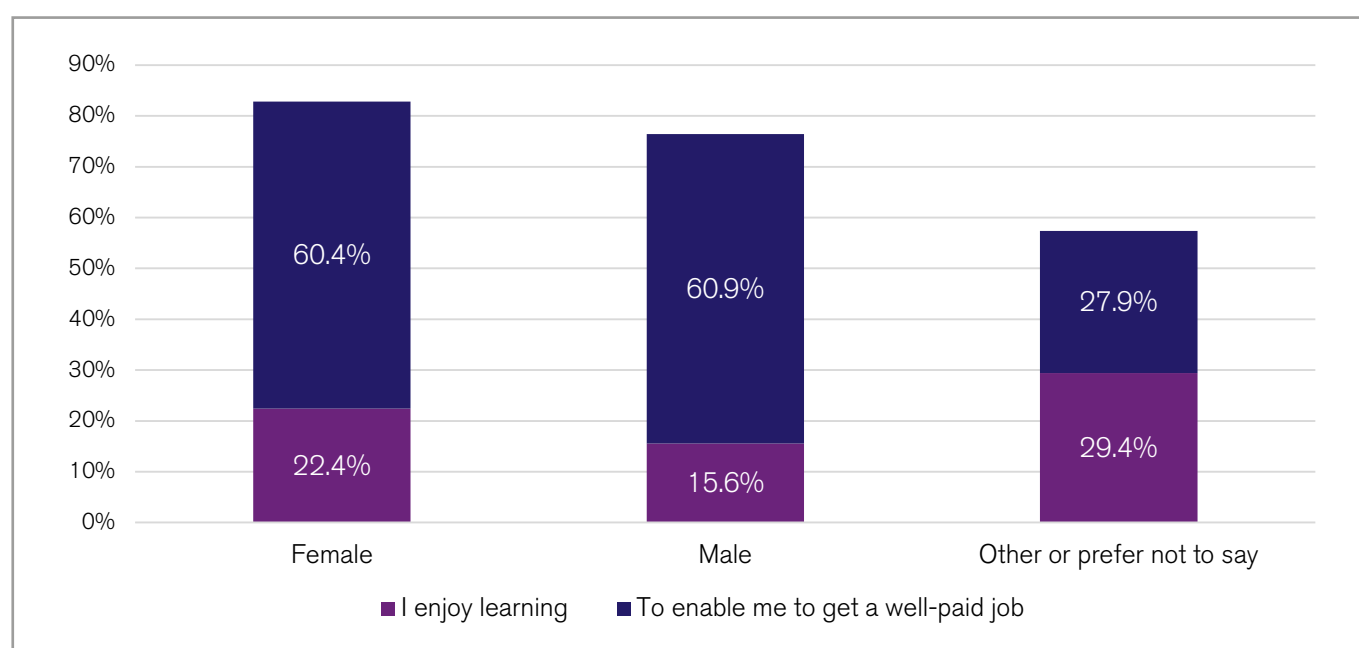


Figure 8: Post-16 students' main reasons to go to HE



Subgroups broken down by demographic characteristics show substantial differences in the main reason to go to HE. About half of Year 13 or Level 3 Year 2 students chose a well-paid job, whereas over 60% of Year 12 or Level 3 Year 1 students chose this option. Half the students with a disability choose a well-paid job as the main reason, nearly 15% fewer than their no-disability counterparts. About two-thirds of Black or Asian students choose a well-paid job as the main reason to go to HE compared to 55.4% of White students. The post-16 students who identify their gender as other or do not disclose their gender identity have different views of the main reason to go to HE (figure 9). UCP and Non-UCP students show no difference regarding the main reason to go to HE.

Figure 9: Post-16 students' main reasons to go to HE by gender



The post-16 students who specified their likelihood of applying for HE as “definitely unlikely”, “unlikely”, “fairly unlikely”, “fairly likely”, and “don’t know” (571) were asked to give the main reason why they didn’t want to go to HE. The top 6 main reasons and percentages of the students who choose these reasons are listed below:

- I want to work and earn money (17.3%)
- It depends on the grades I get (16.6%)
- I am still undecided (16.6%)
- I have decided on a specific career (that does not require further study) (11.6%)
- The cost is too much (10.7%)
- It does not appeal to me (10.2%).

For different subgroups, the main reasons can be different. The table below demonstrates the substantial difference in main reasons not to go to HE of different subgroups.

Table 1: Main reason not to go to HE in different subgroups

Subgroups	Main reason not to go	Percentage
Year 12	It depends on the grades I get	17.0%
Year 13	It does not appeal to me	21.5%
Level 3 Year 1	It depends on the grades I get	21.4%
Level 3 Year 2	I want to work and earn money	24.4%
Disability	It depends on the grades I get	18.5%
No disability	I want to work and earn money	19.4%
White	I want to work and earn money	18.6%
Black	I have decided on a specific career (that does not require further study)	20.7%
Asian	It depends on the grades I get	22.8%
Mixed	I am still undecided	39.3%
Female	I want to work and earn money	17.5%
	I am still undecided	17.5%
Male	It depends on the grades I get	19.5%
White Female	I want to work and earn money	17.9%
BAME Female	I am still undecided	24.4%
White Male	I want to work and earn money	19.5%
BAME Male	It depends on the grades I get	23.2%
White Disadvantaged Female	I want to work and earn money	22.2%
White Disadvantaged Male	I want to work and earn money	23.2%
White Non-disadvantaged Female	It depends on the grades I get	16.2%
	I am still undecided	16.2%
White Non-disadvantaged Male	It depends on the grades I get	17.0%
BAME Disadvantaged Female	I am still undecided	28.8%
BAME Disadvantaged Male	It depends on the grades I get	20.6%

## Indecisive barriers

When the analysis focuses onto the post-16 students who said they were fairly likely to apply to HE and those who did not know at the survey point, the top three main reasons not to go to HE reveal the barriers concerning their progress to HE.

*Table 2: Top three main reason not to go to HE for post-16 students who are fairly likely to apply for HE and who do not know*

Fairly likely	Don't Know
It depends on the grades I get (21.3%)	I am still undecided (31.4%)
I am still undecided (17.2%)	I want to work and earn money (18.2%)
The cost is too much (15.9%)	It depends on the grades I get (13.2%)

## Section summary

Proportionally more students with multiple protected characteristics had applied for HE at the survey point compared to their counterparts such as White disadvantaged males.

Year 13 and Year 12 students in sixth form schools are more likely to apply than their college Level 3 counterparts.

Male students from a disadvantaged background are less likely to apply than all the other student groups broken down by ethnicity, gender and IMD.

Concerns about HE prospects could be a barrier to post-16 student aspiration. Those least likely to apply to HE are also those who have the lowest confidence about securing a place at HE.

A three-year comparison shows that Year 13 sixth form students who said they were most likely to “study at a local university” increased by nearly 10% from 2021/22 to 2022/23.

Tracking the college students’ progress shows that the number of Level 3 Year 2 students who planned to progress to HE leapt in one year, with a 12% increase from Year 1 to Year 2.

## 2. HE knowledge

Two groups of statements were asked in the Learner Survey to evaluate the students' knowledge about HE application and HE life.

HE application	HE life
Subjects I could study	Student life
Type of course I could take	Careers
How to apply	Costs of study
Where to find info	Financial Support
Qualifications and Grades needed	Where to live

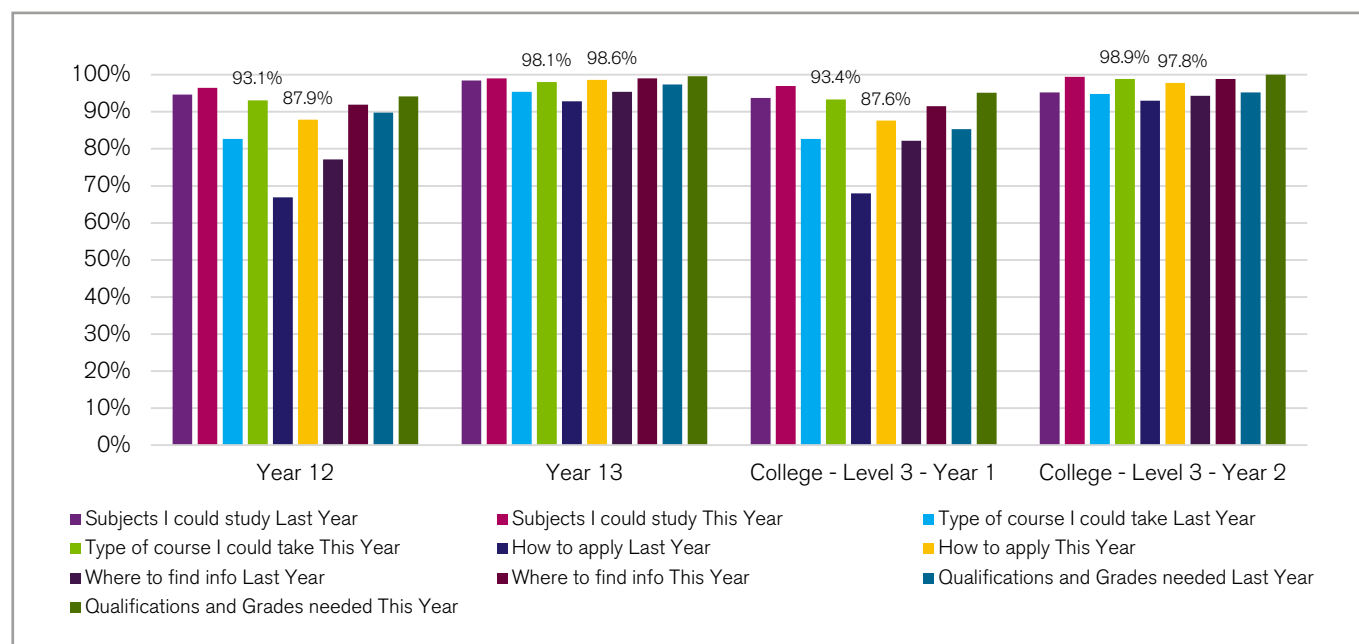
Students were asked to evaluate their knowledge level against each statement on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 representing 'nothing at all' to 5 'a lot'. This report calculates the percentages of students with a certain level of HE knowledge (the answer is 2 or above) to make it comparable with the previous annual report.

Similarly to last year's report, hardly any post-16 students knew nothing about HE. However, individuals reported different levels of knowledge on specific aspects. Therefore, knowledge gaps appear between different subgroups (demonstrated by subgroups' average scores of HE knowledge).

### Students' HE knowledge by year groups

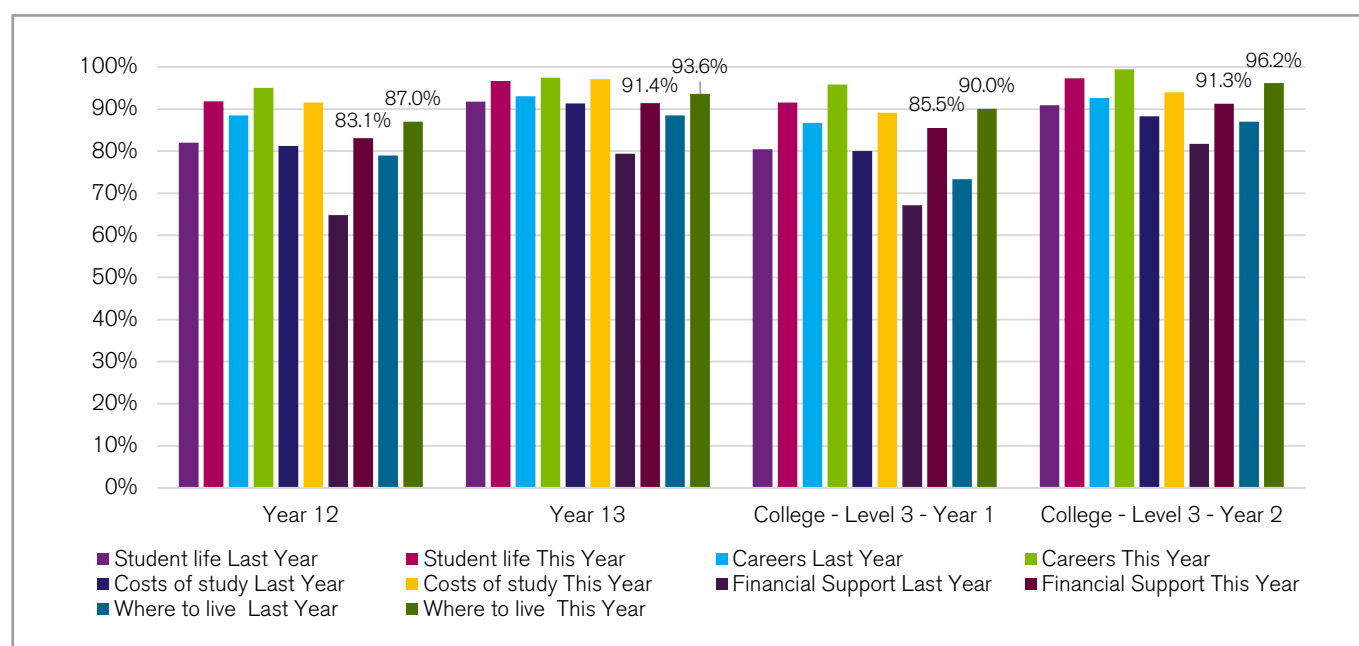
Post-16 students' knowledge of HE application is higher or the same across all the five aspects this year compared with their counterparts last year. Proportionally more Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students said they knew "how to apply" or "type of course I could take" than their counterparts last year.

Figure 10: KS5/Level 3 students' knowledge of HE application in two recent surveys by year groups



Last year, KS5/ Level 3 students' knowledge of HE life was a concern compared to the knowledge of HE application. This year, all KS5/Level 3 year groups show significant increases in the proportion of students who know about the five aspects of HE life.

Figure 11: KS5/Level 3 students' knowledge of HE life in two recent surveys by year groups



Although most students have certain levels of HE knowledge, the average scores of the four year groups are not high in all 10 aspects (ranging from 2.7 to 4.1)<sup>2</sup>. Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students' knowledge level on "the financial support available" is particularly low (2.7 and 3.0, respectively). The two groups also score low on "how to apply to study higher education" (2.8 and 3.0, respectively).

## The gaps between groups

Although the gaps between Year 12 and Year 13 students and those between Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students are not a concern because of the nature of the learning process, some other gaps linked to protected characteristics might indicate equality of opportunity risk.

### Disability

The students with a disability score lower than their counterparts on three statements:

- "What student life would be like",
- "The financial support available", and
- "The options about where to live whilst studying".

### Ethnicity

White post-16 students score lower than their BAME counterparts, especially Black post-16 students, on four statements:

- "The type of course I could take, such as: degree, foundation degree, higher/degree apprenticeships",
- "How to apply to study higher education",
- "The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education", and
- "The financial support available".

### Gender

Male post-16 students score lower than females on four statements:

- "The subjects that I could study",
- "The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education",
- "How it leads to careers that you may be interested in", and
- "The options about where to live whilst studying".

Male post-16 students need more support to help them understand the HE pathway and career choices.

Compared to male post-16 students, the respondents who chose "Other" or "Prefer not to say" options scored lower on two statements about HE life: "The financial support available" and "The options about where to live whilst studying".

2 The score ranges from 1 to 5, 1 meaning "know nothing" and 5 "know a lot".



## Gender and Ethnicity

When the post-16 students were classified into six groups based on gender and Ethnicity, BAME females stood out with the highest scores on 9 out of 10 statements of HE knowledge. The comparisons across the six groups reveal that White males, BAME males, White gender-unknown, and BAME gender-unknown score lower on different aspects of HE knowledge, as highlighted in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Average HE knowledge scores by gender and ethnicity<sup>3</sup>

	White Female	BAME Female	White Male	BAME Male	White Gender-unknown	BAME Gender-unknown
The subjects that I could study	<b>3.68</b>	<b>3.70</b>	<b>3.47</b>	<b>3.43</b>	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.35</b>
The type of course I could take, such as: degree, foundation degree, higher/degree apprenticeships	3.43	<b>3.60</b>	3.32	3.43	3.42	3.30
How to apply to study higher education	3.23	<b>3.38</b>	<b>3.15</b>	3.24	<b>3.10</b>	<b>3.13</b>
Where to find information about applying	3.48	3.56	3.44	3.41	<b>3.32</b>	3.48
The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education	3.70	<b>3.86</b>	<b>3.57</b>	3.65	3.65	<b>3.57</b>
What student life would be like	3.24	3.30	3.21	3.17	3.23	3.26
How it leads to careers that you may be interested in	3.52	<b>3.65</b>	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.39</b>	3.48	3.48
The costs of study	3.38	3.36	3.46	3.29	3.44	3.39
The financial support available	2.82	<b>3.09</b>	2.87	2.93	<b>2.58</b>	2.87
The options about where to live whilst studying	3.17	<b>3.25</b>	3.04	3.10	3.08	<b>2.61</b>

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3 Colour code of the tables: **green** means the figure in the cell is significantly higher than those in other cells in that row, and **yellow** means the figure in the cell is significantly lower than those in other cells in that row.

## Disadvantaged groups

UCP students fare as well as their counterparts on many aspects of HE knowledge except for three statements about HE life:

- “What student life would be like”,
- “The costs of study”, and
- “The financial support available”.

There are no statistically significant differences between the students from the IMD quintile 1 area and those from other areas regarding HE knowledge. However, when IMD quintile 1 is used to define disadvantaged backgrounds and used together with gender and ethnicity to classify the post-16 students into 9 groups, nuances about which group significantly scores lower or exceptionally higher are revealed. As demonstrated in Table 4, the BAME non-disadvantaged females score the highest across all aspects of HE knowledge. In contrast, White disadvantaged male students score the lowest on many aspects of HE knowledge.

Table 4: Average HE knowledge scores by disadvantaged indicator IMB Q1, gender, and ethnicity

	White Disadvantaged Female	White Disadvantaged Male	White Not-disadvantaged Female	White Not-disadvantaged Male	BAME Disadvantaged Female	BAME Disadvantaged Male	BAME Not-disadvantaged Female	BAME Not-disadvantaged Male
The subjects that I could study	3.64	<b>3.41</b>	3.7	3.53	3.65	3.43	<b>3.9</b>	3.45
The type of course I could take, such as: degree, foundation degree, higher/degree apprenticeships	3.52	<b>3.2</b>	3.38	3.44	3.59	3.45	<b>3.67</b>	3.38
How to apply to study higher education	3.23	<b>3.15</b>	3.21	3.2	<b>3.39</b>	3.3	<b>3.41</b>	<b>3.13</b>
Where to find information about applying	3.49	3.49	3.46	3.42	3.51	3.44	<b>3.73</b>	<b>3.36</b>
The qualifications and grades needed to get into higher education	3.76	<b>3.47</b>	3.68	3.65	3.84	3.7	<b>3.99</b>	3.57
What student life would be like	<b>3.09</b>	<b>3.1</b>	3.3	3.26	3.27	3.18	<b>3.39</b>	<b>3.09</b>
How it leads to careers that you may be interested in	3.45	3.37	3.53	3.42	<b>3.64</b>	3.38	<b>3.73</b>	3.4
The costs of study	3.33	3.4	3.39	3.47	3.35	<b>3.23</b>	<b>3.52</b>	3.43
The financial support available	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.81</b>	<b>2.82</b>	2.89	3.04	2.94	<b>3.34</b>	2.94
The options about where to live whilst studying	3.11	<b>2.98</b>	3.18	3.07	3.2	3.11	<b>3.48</b>	3.09

## Section summary

Proportionally more Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students said they knew “how to apply” or what “type of course I could take” than their counterparts in last year’s survey.

All KS5/Level 3 year groups show significant increases in the proportion of students who know about the five aspects of HE life. However, Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students’ knowledge level of “the financial support available” and “how to apply to study higher education” is particularly lower than other aspects of HE knowledge.

Although many HE knowledge gaps have been closed, there are still gaps in specific HE knowledge between different groups; for example, the students with a disability have a lower knowledge level than their counterparts on three out of five aspects of HE life.

When the post-16 students were classified into six groups based on gender, ethnicity, and IMD, BAME non-disadvantaged females stood out with the highest scores across all 10 statements of HE knowledge. White disadvantaged males scored significantly lower on many aspects of HE knowledge.

## 3. Perceived HE benefits

Perceived HE benefits are strongly correlated with students' likelihood of applying for HE at age 18 or 19, according to findings from the analysis of the previous waves of learner survey data, which means the more students understand HE benefits, the more likely students are to apply for HE at age 18 or 19.

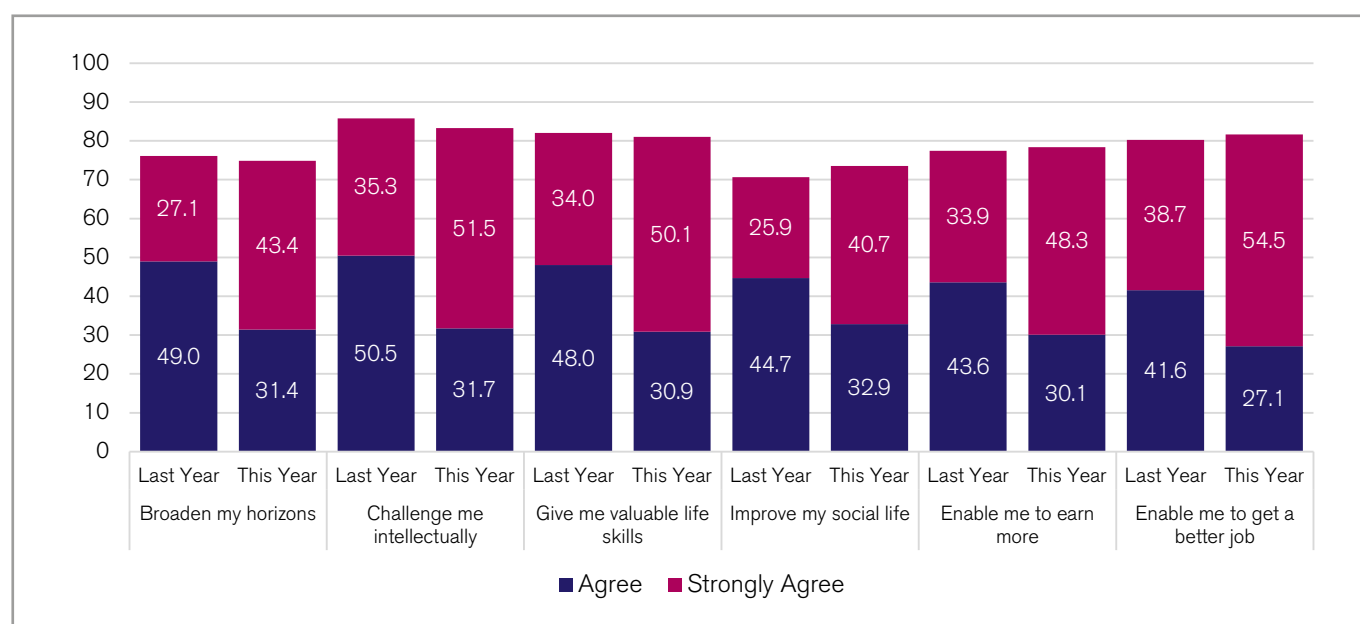
Six statements in the learner survey are used to measure the students' understanding of HE benefits:

- It will broaden my horizons.
- It will challenge me intellectually.
- It will give me valuable life skills.
- It will improve my social life.
- It will enable me to earn more.
- It will enable me to get a better job.

### Changes compared to last year

It appears that post-16 students have a better understanding of HE benefits compared to their counterparts last year because proportionally more students strongly agree with all six statements of perceived HE benefits.

Figure 12 Students' understanding of HE benefits in last two years (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



(Last Year: n=3,993, This Year: n=1,853)

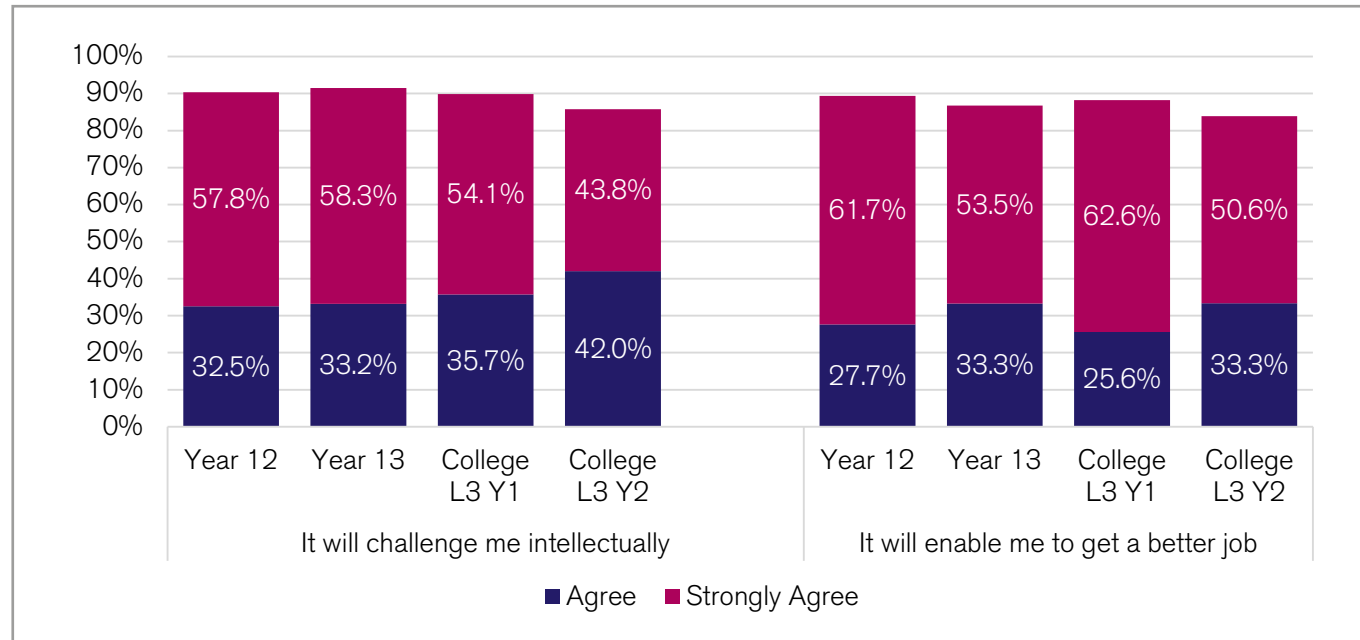
## The gaps between groups

Whereas no statistically significant gaps appear between UCP and Non-UCP students across all aspects of HE benefit, substantial gaps appear between other subgroups defined by demographic variables.

### Year groups

Distinct from the gaps between different year groups regarding their HE knowledge, the different levels of understanding of HE benefits that appear among the post-16 students from different year groups do not align with an increasing trend from the lower year group to the higher year group. Among the significant gaps in the two statements, the post-16 students' understanding of HE benefits on career decreases from the lower to the higher year group. The same trend appears between college Level 3 Year 1 and Year 2 students regarding "it will challenge me intellectually". The possible explanation is that a) post-16 students are more realistic about the careers the HE path leads to, and b) college Level 3 Year 2 students' academic self-efficacy increased.

Figure 13 Students' understanding of HE benefits by year groups (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



### Disability

No significant gaps between the students with or without disability appear in their understanding of all the HE benefits except for one, "It will improve my social life". Proportionally fewer students with a disability agree or strongly agree with this statement.

## Ethnicity

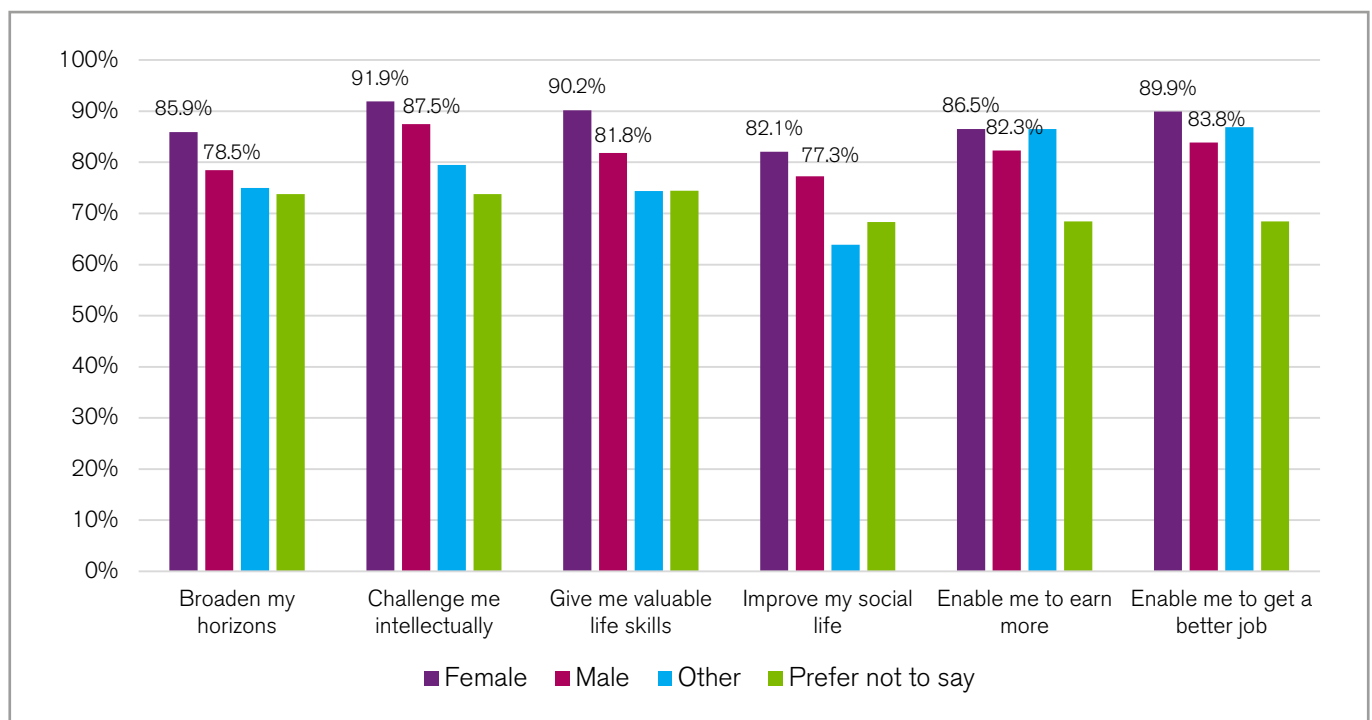
Proportionally fewer Asian students strongly agree with two statements than those from White, Black, or Mixed ethnic backgrounds: “It will broaden my horizons” and “It will challenge me intellectually”.

Proportionally more Black students strongly agree with most of the statements on HE benefits, although the gaps between them and White students are not statistically significant.

## Gender

The gender gaps are significant across all the statements on HE benefits. Proportionally more female students agree or strongly agree with all the statements on HE benefits. Proportionally fewer post-16 students who identify their gender as other agree or strongly agree with “it will improve my social life”.

Figure 14 Students' understanding of HE benefits by gender (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)



## Gender, ethnicity, and disadvantage

Although the post-16 students from IMD quintile 1 background do not show significant differences in understanding of HE benefits except for “it will broaden my horizons”, when the subgroups are broken down by gender, ethnicity and IMD quintiles, the disadvantage is revealed as an impactful factor on post-16 students’ understanding of HE benefits. Contrasting to BAME disadvantaged female students, BAME disadvantaged male students fare worse in understanding HE benefits, especially three statements:

- “It will broaden my horizons”,
- “It will challenge me intellectually”, and
- “It will give me valuable life skills”.

Although sharing the same characteristics of disadvantaged and male, White disadvantaged male students fare worse on different three statements:

- “It will improve my social life”,
- “It will enable me to earn more, and
- “It will enable me to get a better job”.

Table 5 Students’ understanding of HE benefits by gender, ethnicity, and disadvantage (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)

	White Disadvantaged Female	White Disadvantaged Male	White Non-disadvantaged Female	White Non-disadvantaged Male	BAME Disadvantaged Female	BAME Disadvantaged Male	BAME Non-disadvantaged Female	BAME Non-disadvantaged Male
Broaden my horizons	83.4%	78.6%	<b>89.9%</b>	82.9%	82.8%	<b>72.9%</b>	88.5%	83.7%
Challenge me intellectually	<b>94.0%</b>	87.1%	91.9%	92.1%	91.6%	<b>82.2%</b>	88.9%	88.9%
Give me valuable life skills	88.1%	80.2%	89.8%	84.7%	<b>93.3%</b>	<b>77.6%</b>	89.2%	88.6%
Improve my social life	81.7%	<b>72.3%</b>	82.0%	83.0%	83.2%	76.4%	<b>84.3%</b>	76.7%
Enable me to earn more	85.2%	<b>76.7%</b>	85.7%	82.6%	<b>89.3%</b>	83.6%	84.3%	89.1%
Enable me to get a better job	89.3%	<b>78.7%</b>	88.4%	86.3%	<b>92.5%</b>	84.1%	91.6%	82.6%



## Section summary

Post-16 students have a better understanding of HE benefits compared to their counterparts last year.

The knowledge gap between UCP and Non-UCP post-16 students in understanding HE benefits disappeared.

Post-16 students with a disability and those identifying their gender as other are less sure that HE will improve their social life.

Female students understand all six aspects of HE benefits better than Male students.

Proportionally more Black students strongly agree with most of the statements on HE benefits, although the gaps between them and White students are not statistically significant.

BAME and White males from disadvantaged backgrounds understand different aspects of HE benefits less well as their other peer post-16 students. BAME and White Males from disadvantaged backgrounds fare the worst in understanding different aspects of HE benefits among all post-16 students.

## 4. Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

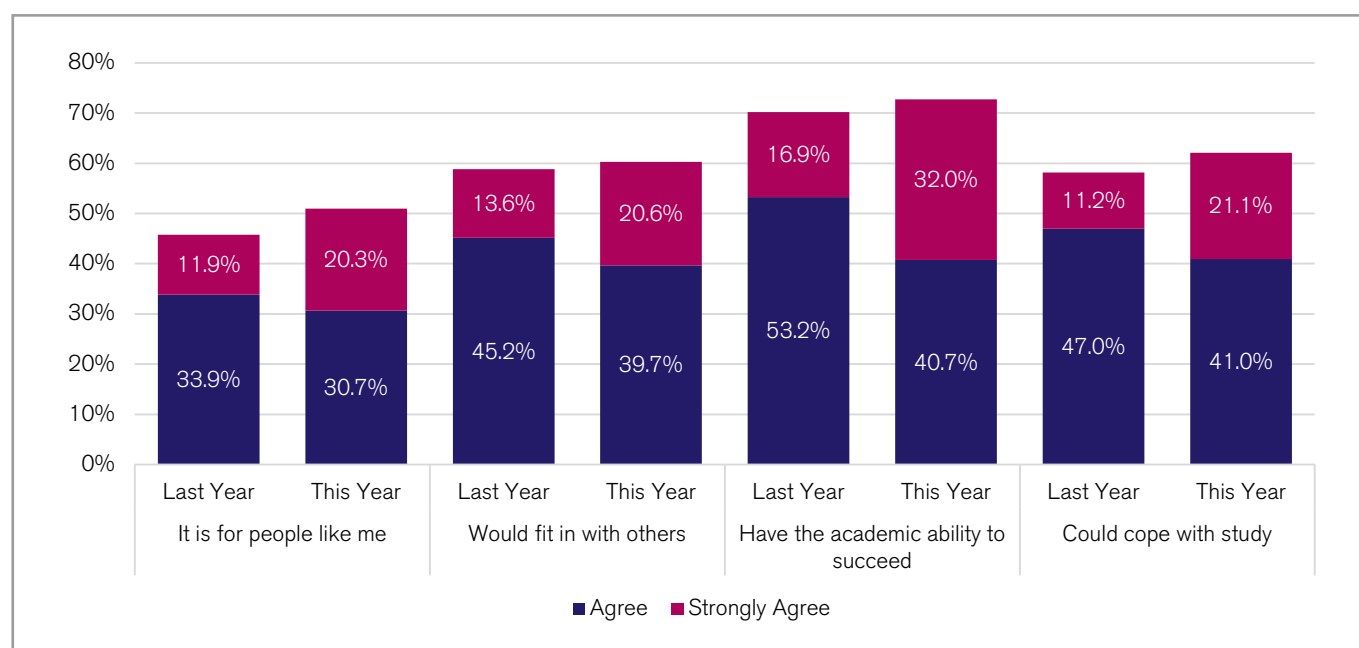
According to previous literature, sense of belonging (including students' perceived fit with HE) is a key indicator associated with students' attainment and likelihood to progress to HE. The learner survey uses four statements to measure students' sense of belonging:

- "It is for people like me"
- "I would fit in well with others"
- "I have the academic ability to succeed"
- "I could cope with the level of study required."

### Changes compared to last year

Last year's HeppSY partnership report found that the students were less confident in social life in HE, for example, a decrease in perceiving "would fit in with others" compared to their counterparts' responses before the pandemic. This year, post-16 students' sense of belonging and perceived fit with HE improved significantly compared with last year. Proportionally more students strongly agreed with the four statements concerning their sense of belonging and perceived fit (Figure 15).

Figure 15 Post-16 students' sense of belonging in recent two years (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



(Last Year: n=3,993, This Year: n=1,853)

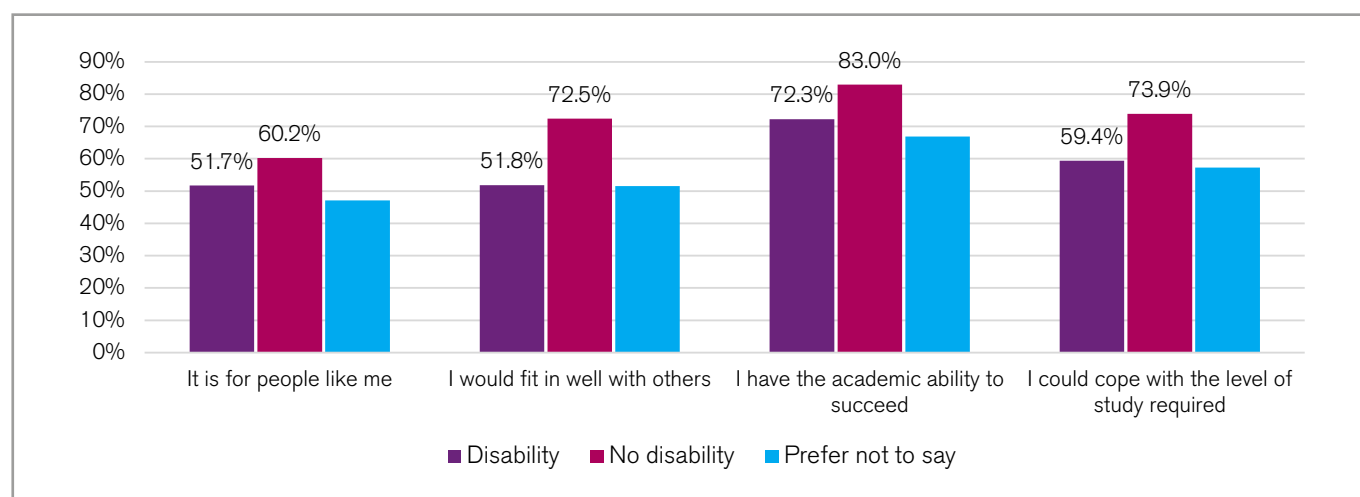
## The gaps between groups

One's sense of belonging is associated with one's identity and beliefs. Unsurprisingly, the analysis reveals significant gaps between subgroups classified with protected characteristics.

### Disability

A significantly higher proportion of the students with no disability have a good sense of belonging compared to those with a disability or those who did not disclose their disability status.

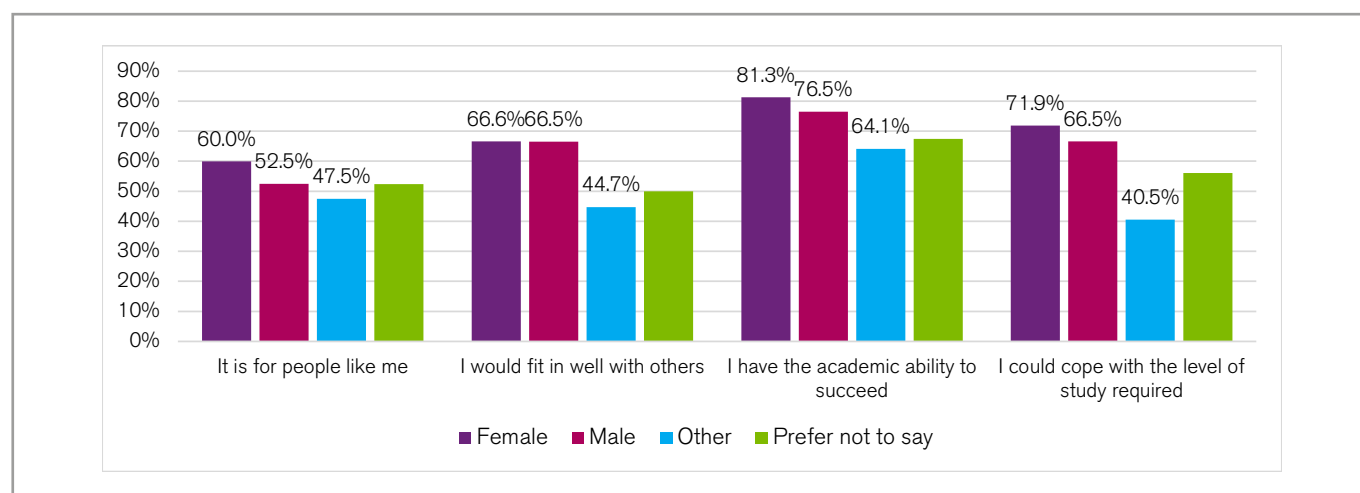
Figure 16 Post-16 students' sense of belonging by disability



### Gender

The post-16 students who identify their gender as other have the lowest sense of belonging compared to male students, female students, and the students who prefer not to say. Male students' sense of belonging is lower except for "I would fit in well with others".

Figure 17 Post-16 students' sense of belonging by gender



## 4. Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

### Gender and ethnicity

The gaps between ethnic groups classified as White, Black, Asian, Mixed, and Other are not statistically significant except for the students from mixed and other ethnic backgrounds, with a smaller proportion of them agreeing or strongly agreeing that “I could cope with the level of study required” than their counterparts. However, the gaps are significant between the subgroups broken down by gender and ethnicity. White male students’ sense of belonging is lower than BAME males.

Table 6 Post-16 students’ sense of belonging by gender and ethnicity

	White Female	BAME Female	White Male	BAME Male	White Gen-der-un-known	BAME Gen-der-un-known	All Post-16
It is for people like me	60.4%	59.2%	50.4%	56.1%	53.3%	40.9%	57.1%
I would fit in well with others	64.7%	70.6%	65.4%	68.4%	42.9%	59.1%	65.9%
I have the academic ability to succeed	80.9%	81.9%	75.1%	78.8%	68.3%	59.1%	78.7%
I could cope with the level of study required	71.7%	72.2%	62.0%	74.5%	48.2%	50.0%	69.1%

### Section summary

- This year, post-16 students' sense of belonging and perceived fit with HE improved significantly compared to last year.
- The post-16 students with a disability, those who identify their gender as “other”, and White males have the lowest sense of belonging compared to their counterparts.

## 5. Academic self-efficacy

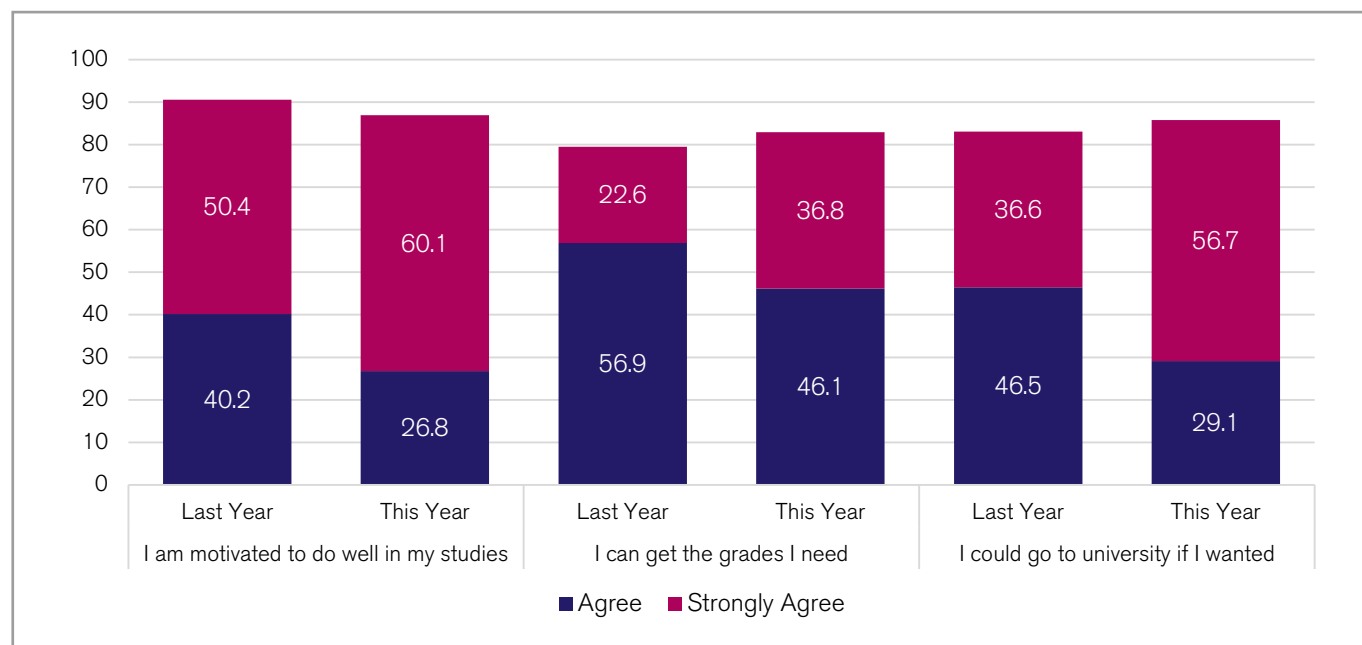
In this section, we report three statements that appeared in all the learner surveys to enable a consistent comparison:

- Motivated to do well
- I can get the grades I need
- I could go to university if I wanted.

### Changes compared to last year

Despite a 4.5% decrease in the students who agree or strongly agree that “I am motivated to do well in my studies” this year compared to last year, post-16 students appear to be more motivated and confident in achieving the grades and going to university. There is a substantial increase in proportionally more students strongly agreeing with all three statements.

Figure 18 Students’ academic self-efficacy in recent two years (% “strongly agree” + “agree”)



(Last Year: n=3,993, This Year: n=1,853)

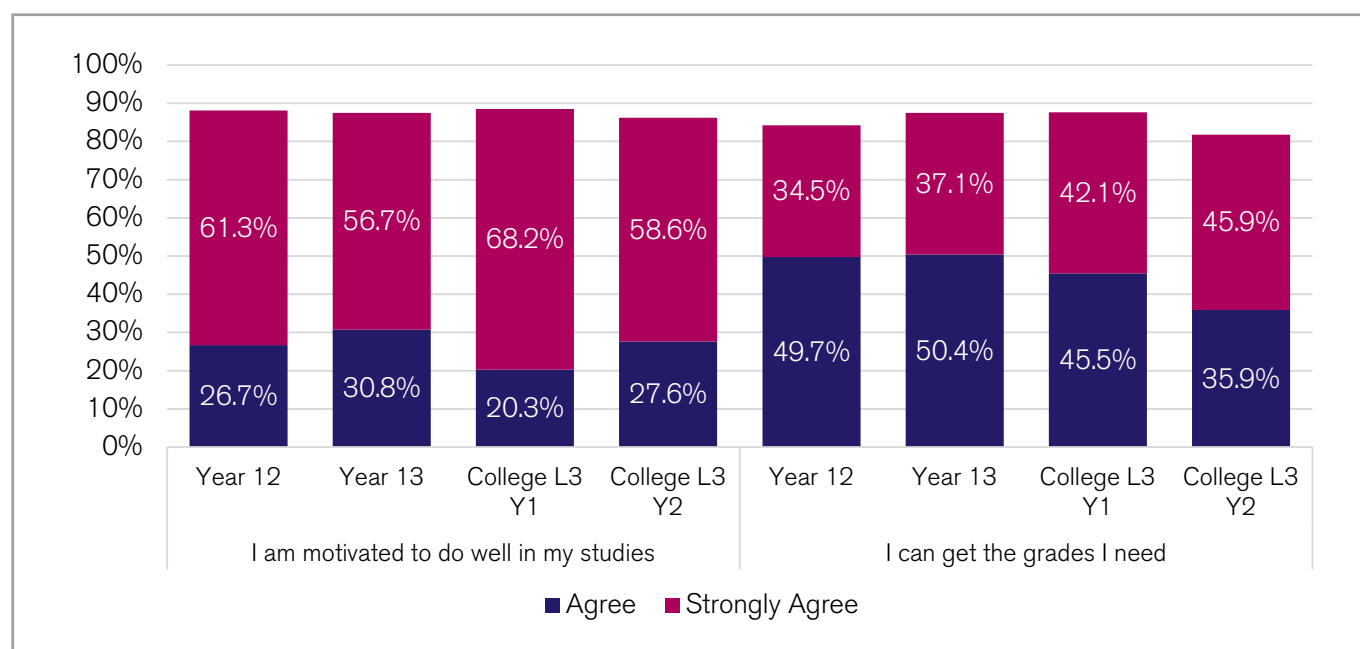
## The gaps between groups

Post-16 students in this survey are motivated to do well and are confident in their grades and the prospect of progressing to HE. However, many gaps suggest that some subgroups are less motivated and confident than their peers.

### Year groups

This survey reveals that Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1 students are more motivated to do well than their Year 13 or Level 3 Year 2 counterparts. College students are more motivated than sixth form students. However, Level 3 Year 1 students' confidence in getting the grades appears to have a polarising tendency with a significantly higher proportion of students strongly agreeing to "I can get the grades I need". In comparison, a higher proportion of students disagree or strongly disagree.

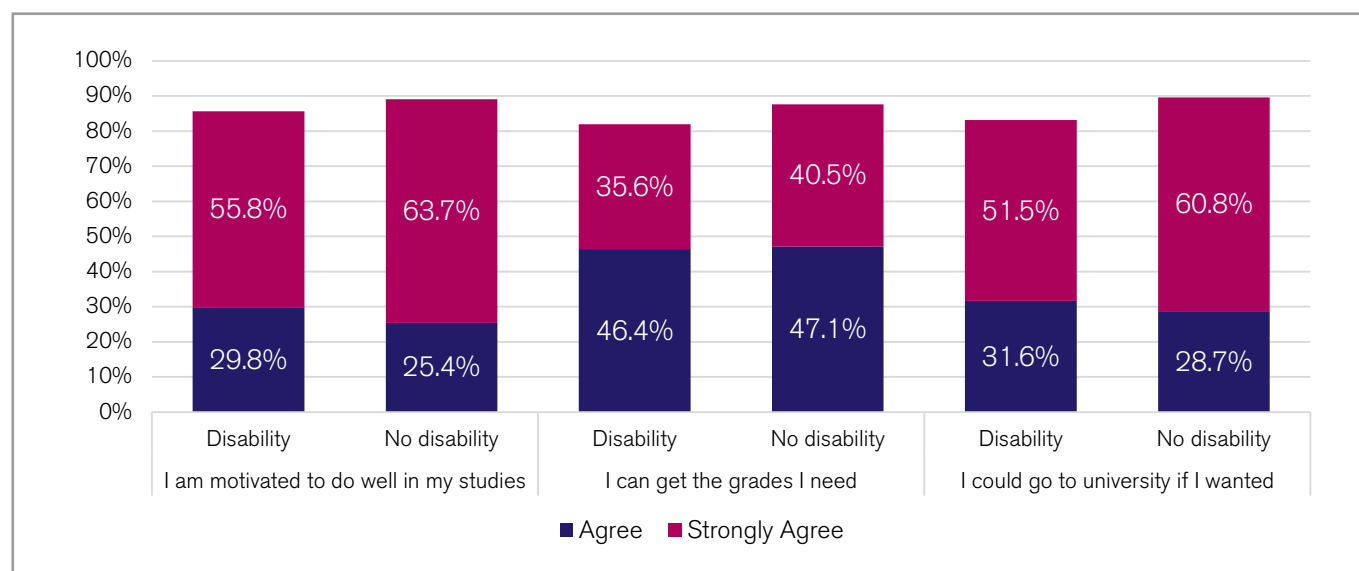
Figure 19 Post-16 students' academic self-efficacy by year groups (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



## Disability

The post-16 students with a disability are less motivated to do well and less confident in their grades and prospects to progress to HE than the students with no disability.

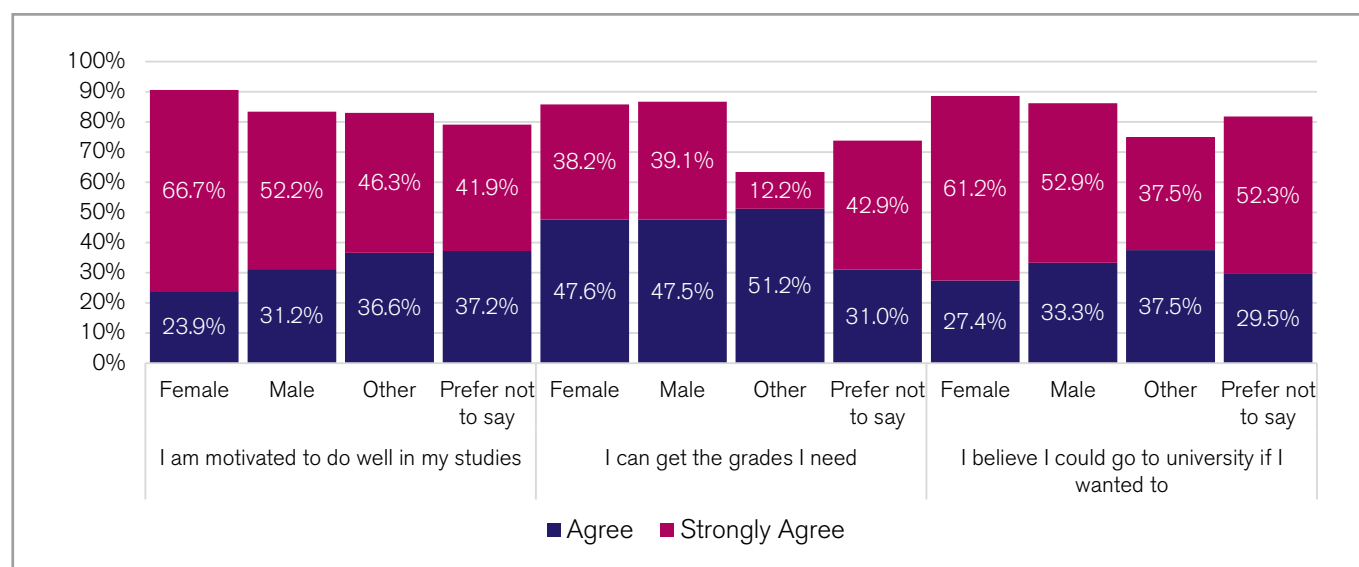
Figure 20 Post-16 students' academic self-efficacy by disability (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



## Gender

Post-16 female students are significantly more motivated than their counterparts, with two-thirds strongly agreeing that, "I am motivated to do well in my studies". The post-16 students identifying their gender as other are less confident in achieving the grades and the prospect of progressing to HE than their counterparts.

Figure 21 Post-16 students' academic self-efficacy by gender (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



## Gender and ethnicity

Post-16 BAME students who identified their gender as other or did not reveal gender identity fare the worst in all the three aspects of academic self-efficacy.

Table 7 Post-16 students' academic self-efficacy by gender and ethnicity (% "strongly agree")

	White Female	BAME Female	White Male	BAME Male	White Gender unknown	BAME Gender unknown
I am motivated to do well in my studies	<b>68.4%</b>	63.3%	52.7%	51.1%	45.9%	<b>39.1%</b>
I can get the grades I need	39.1%	36.6%	37.6%	<b>41.7%</b>	28.3%	<b>26.1%</b>
I could go to university if I wanted	59.6%	<b>64.3%</b>	54.5%	50.2%	45.9%	<b>43.5%</b>

## Gender, ethnicity, and disadvantage

No significant gaps appear between subgroups broken down by UCP/ Non-UCP or IMD quintiles regarding the three aspects of academic self-efficacy. However, the subgroups classified by gender, ethnicity, and IMD quintiles reveal substantial differences. In contrast to the BAME females from the non-disadvantaged background, BAME males from the non-disadvantaged background are the least motivated and least confident in HE prospects among all groups. On the contrary, BAME females from disadvantaged backgrounds are well motivated and have good confidence in HE prospects but less confidence in their grades than the other groups.

Table 8 Post-16 students' academic self-efficacy by gender, ethnicity, and IMD (% "strongly agree")

	White Disad- van- taged Female	White Disad- van- taged Male	White Non-dis- advan- taged Female	White Non-dis- advan- taged Male	BAME Disad- van- taged Female	BAME Disad- van- taged Male	BAME Non-dis- advan- taged Female	BAME Non-dis- advan- taged Male
I am motivated to do well in my studies	67.1%	48.4%	69.6%	54.7%	62.1%	54.1%	<b>68.7%</b>	<b>46.8%</b>
I can get the grades I need	36.4%	38.0%	38.5%	37.8%	<b>33.3%</b>	40.5%	<b>45.1%</b>	44.4%
I could go to university if I wanted	53.6%	52.5%	63.0%	57.5%	62.6%	51.9%	<b>70.7%</b>	<b>47.8%</b>



## Section summary

Lower-year students (Year 12 and Level 3 Year 1) are more motivated to do well than higher-year students (Year 13 and Level 3 Year 2) in sixth forms and colleges. College students are more motivated than sixth form students.

The post-16 students with a disability and those who identified their gender as other or did not reveal gender identity are less motivated to do well and less confident in their grades and prospects to progress to HE than their counterparts.

The post-16 students identifying their gender as other are less confident in getting the grades and in the prospect of progressing to HE than their counterparts.

In contrast to the BAME females from non-disadvantaged background, BAME males from non-disadvantaged background are the least motivated and least confident in HE prospects among all groups. On the contrary, BAME females from disadvantaged backgrounds are well motivated and confident about HE prospects but less confident in their grades than the other groups.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

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### A year of success

Generally, the post-16 students in sixth form schools or colleges in this survey are significantly more inspired to progress to higher education in the academic year 2022/23 than the year before. They also have a better understanding of HE knowledge and HE benefits compared to their counterparts last year. Their sense of belonging and perceived fit with HE improved significantly compared to last year. Post-16 students appear more motivated and confident in getting their grades and progressing to university.

Several factors might cause these positive changes. Firstly, normal school and college life has resumed since the last survey. Secondly, HeppSY invested in more careers advisory services for post-16 students. Thirdly, university campuses reopened for prospective students and outreach students. Schools and colleges' implementation of the government's catch-up funding to support attainment raising and other environmental factors all created a better social ecosystem to boost post-16 students' HE aspirations.

Although it is impossible to separate HeppSY interventions' impact from the above environmental factors, consistent findings across most learning outcomes in the Learner Survey suggest our interventions worked, especially for those who need support.

For two years in a row, we found that most HE knowledge gaps (including the understanding of HE benefits) between the UCP and Non-UCP students and those between the students with a disability and no disability have been closed.

Last year, there were small gaps between UCP and Non-UCP students in the sense of belonging (including perceived fit in HE) and academic self-efficacy. This year, those gaps are closed for the UCP and Non-UCP post-16 students because statistical tests show no significant difference between the two groups of students' learning outcomes in the sense of belonging and academic self-efficacy.

BAME students, especially Black students and BAME female students from non-disadvantaged backgrounds, outperformed their counterparts in many learning outcomes. This is further evidence of successful targeted outreach because both HeppSY and the outreach teams of two partnership universities have specific projects to support BAME students.

Finally, tracking students' progress from lower to higher year groups also proves HeppSY interventions' success. For example, the number of Level 3 Year 2 students who planned to progress to HE leapt in one year, with a 12% increase from Year 1 to Year 2.

## Gaps yet to close

Despite many years of effort, some gaps, although narrowed, still exist. For example, many gender gaps appear across all the learning outcomes. Male students do not fare as well as their female students in HE aspirations, HE knowledge related to how to get in, understanding of HE benefits, sense of belonging, perceived fit in HE regarding the academic study, learning motivation, and confidence in HE prospects. Many learning outcomes of White students are not as good as their BAME counterparts.

Although the disadvantaged students (defined as UCP students or the students from IMD quintile 1 area) have learning outcomes as good as their counterparts, when the disadvantaged indicator is combined with gender and ethnicity, specific groups associated with disadvantage have the worst learning outcomes in many aspects compared to their counterparts. White and BAME males from disadvantaged backgrounds need support in various areas to improve their future learning outcomes.

Due to certain physical, psychological, and social factors, the students with a disability and those who identify their gender as other or do not disclose have worse outcomes than their counterparts consistently over the past few years on HE knowledge and benefits associated with social factors and supports. They also have a lower sense of belonging than their counterparts.

The literature on cultural and social capital indicates that the gaps discussed above are difficult to close because one's belief associated with cultural and social capital is difficult to change unless there is a cultural or social change in their community. For example, the 'lad' culture in some South Yorkshire communities might hinder White males from disadvantaged backgrounds in their academic engagement and progress.

## Recommendation for practice

We need a targeted approach to support the post-16 students who are less likely to apply for HE and have lower HE prospects. Helping them remove the barriers of their HE prospects could increase their likelihood of applying for HE. Support new Sixth form and college students to understand "the financial support available" and "how to apply to study higher education".

Provide specific targeted interventions for the post-16 students with certain characteristics, such as disability, to improve their understanding of HE life and benefits, sense of belonging, and motivation and confidence to progress HE.

Provide comprehensive support for White males from disadvantaged backgrounds to improve their understanding of HE knowledge and benefits, sense of belonging and perceived fit in HE, and academic self-efficacy to narrow the HE aspiration gaps between them and their peers.

Do not treat BAME students as a holistic group when planning outreach interventions. This report reveals that BAME females from non-disadvantaged backgrounds might have benefited from previously targeted interventions. In contrast, BAME male students from disadvantaged backgrounds still need comprehensive support.

# Appendix A – Post-16 respondent characteristics in last two surveys

		2021/22		2022/23	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Year Group	Year 12	1563	39.1	767	41.4
	Year 13	978	24.5	513	27.7
	College - Level 2	169	4.2	59	3.2
	College - Level 3 - Year 1	761	19.1	331	17.9
	College - Level 3 - Year 2	522	13.1	183	9.9
Disability	With disability	512	12.8	372	20.1
	No disability	2840	71.1	1186	64.0
	Unknown	641	16.1	295	15.9
Gender	Female	2176	54.5	1076	58.1
	Male	1411	35.3	608	32.8
	Other or prefer not to say	84	2.1	85	4.6
	Unknown	322	8.1	84	4.5
Ethnicity	White	2857	71.6	1155	62.3
	Black	176	4.4	134	7.2
	Asian	395	9.9	357	19.3
	Mixed	113	2.8	84	4.5
	Other	115	2.9	11	0.6
	Unknown	337	8.4	112	6.0
Gender and Ethnicity	White Female	1738	43.5	706	38.1
	BAME Female	436	10.9	370	20.0
	White Male	1060	26.5	387	20.9
	BAME Male	350	8.8	221	11.9
	White Gender-unknown	53	1.3	62	3.3
	BAME Gender-unknown	30	0.8	23	1.2
	Unknown	326	8.2	84	4.5

# Appendix A – Post-16 respondent characteristics in last two surveys

		2021/22		2022/23	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
UCP or not	UCP	1552	38.9	665	35.9
	Non-UCP	2376	59.5	1123	60.6
	Unknown	65	1.6	65	3.5
IMD	IMD Q1			861	46.5
	IMD Q2			263	14.2
	IMD Q3			240	13.0
	IMD Q4			241	13.0
	IMD Q5			176	9.5
	Unknown			72	3.9
Gender, Ethnicity, and IMD (disadvantage = IMD Q1; Not-disadvantage = IMD Q2-5)	White Disadvantaged Female			222	12.0
	White Disadvantaged Male			124	6.7
	White Non-disadvantaged Female			457	24.7
	White Non-disadvantaged Male			245	13.2
	BAME Disadvantaged Female			266	14.4
	BAME Disadvantaged Male			161	8.7
	BAME Non-disadvantaged Female			83	4.5
	BAME Non-disadvantaged Male			47	2.5
	Other or Unknown			248	13.4
<b>Total</b>		<b>3993</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>1853</b>	<b>100.0</b>



To find out more please contact:

**Gemma Styles**  
Hepp Director  
[G.Styles@shu.ac.uk](mailto:G.Styles@shu.ac.uk)

**Vicki Spink**  
HeppSY Programme Manager  
[V.Spink@shu.ac.uk](mailto:V.Spink@shu.ac.uk)

**Helen Zhu**  
Evaluation and Data Manager  
[C.Zhu@shu.ac.uk](mailto:C.Zhu@shu.ac.uk)