



# 2021/2022 HeppSY Partnership Report

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Produced by the HeppSY Data & Evaluation Team

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# Foreword

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This year's partnership report provides an insightful analysis of the latest wave of the national survey carried out in HeppSY partner schools and colleges between October 2021 and January 2022.

With over 7,000 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, situated within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, this report provides the most extensive overview of young people's educational ambitions and perceived options since the beginning of the pandemic.

The outcomes and recommendations outlined here will inform HeppSY as we develop our core offer for 2022/23.

We would like to extend our gratitude to our partner schools and colleges across the region for the instrumental support in administering the survey, particularly during periods of rapid and unpredictable change linked to COVID-19.

**Mike Garnock-Jones**

Director, Higher Education Progression Partnership

# Executive Summary

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From October to January 2021, HeppSY partner institutions administered Wave 4 of the Uni Connect survey to students in Years 9 to 13, those studying at college Level 2 and Level 3, and for the first time, learners over the age of 19.

Key findings include a slight increase in students' understanding of higher education (HE) benefits, but a decrease in respondents indicating that they "definitely will apply" to HE when compared with Wave 2, as well as a decrease in knowledge of life at an HE institution. There is also evidence that a greater number of UCP students and White students intend to study away from home, whereas Non-White students felt more inclined to study locally. While the impact of COVID-19 on students' plans was generally weakened in 2021, nearly a quarter of respondents indicated that it had influenced their decision on what to do next.

Recommendations arising from the analysis of the Uni Connect survey include:

- Additional interventions for students entering Year 11 who have not participated in enough activities while in their previous year.
- Bespoke interventions for Level 3 Year 2 students who have not participated in activities aiming to improve their understanding of HE in their previous year of study.
- Bespoke interventions to increase HE knowledge, motivation, and self-efficacy among Black students.
- Bespoke interventions, such as SHE Can and HE Can, to reverse negative changes in HE knowledge, confidence, and likelihood to apply to HE since Wave 2 among Non-White male and female students.
- Consider the possible trend that more White students intended to study away from home in the post-pandemic era.

## Introduction

The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the Uni Connect Programme, funded by the Office for Students. The main focus of Uni Connect is to provide targeted HE outreach to young people in Years 9 to 13 living in particular geographic areas. From August 2021 this broadened out to include the targeting of adult learners (learners aged 19 and above). HeppSY is working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

This report reviews the outcomes from Wave 4 of the Uni Connect survey. The survey was completed by students in Years 9 to 13 and college Level 2 and Level 3<sup>1</sup>, online and in HeppSY schools and colleges during October to January of 2021/2022, and forms part of the national evaluation being conducted by CFE research. Overall, 7,071 complete student responses across 50 schools/colleges (with sample from 1 to 726) were included in the final dataset.

The responses were collected during the fourth coronavirus infection wave caused by Omicron. Some school closures and student absences affected the response rate. The responses did not reach the same level as the Wave 2 survey (about 50% less). However, comparing the Wave 2 and Wave 4 survey is better than between Wave 3 and Wave 4. First of all, the Wave 3 survey might not represent the whole student population well because of the low response rate. Second, the comparison between Wave 2, just before the global pandemic, and Wave 4, when the long-haul pandemic was no longer threatening lives, could capture the impact caused by the pandemic. The changes in learning outcomes could help practitioners differentiate the changes expected to see after interventions and the unexpected ones that might be affected by COVID-19.

The main aims and objectives of the report are as follows:

- To outline the attitudes of young people in South Yorkshire towards HE and its potential benefits.
- To make evidence-based recommendations that support HeppSY in appropriately targeting provision for the next academic year.
- To inform and influence outreach activity planning by partnership members including local universities and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.
- To provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HE expectations and home learning experiences of school and college students in South Yorkshire.

The outcomes reported here provide an indication of how young people in HeppSY partner schools and colleges across South Yorkshire conceptualise HE, and their potential place within it. Crucially, we can use the insights generated to highlight existing gaps and tailor subsequent provision, ensuring students are supported in the most appropriate and impactful way possible.

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

## Findings and recommendations

The key findings of the research are detailed below, split by substantive section.

### Likelihood of applying to HE at age 18/19

- Fewer students in Wave 4 responded that they “definitely will apply” than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Male, Year 11, and Year 10 students responded less likely to apply for HE at 18 or 19 than their counterparts.
- There was no statistically significant difference between the students with or without disability in likelihood to apply for HE.
- Four groups of students’ inspiration demonstrated a sign of shifting away from HE when comparing the survey outcomes from Wave 4 and Wave 2. They are Level 3 Year 1 students, the students with disabilities, Black students, and Asian students.
- UCP students and White students showed more interest in study away from home for HE in Wave 4, whereas Non-White female and Non-White male students were more inclined to pursue HE in local HE or further education institutions in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.

### HE knowledge

- Overall, the students in the Wave 4 survey did not significantly differ in the knowledge of HE application from those in Wave 2. However, fewer students in the Wave 4 survey reported that they knew about “student life”, “costs of study”, “financial support”, and “where to live” than those in the Wave 2 survey. This pattern was more distinct among UCP students. Fewer UCP students knew about knowledge of HE life in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Year 10, Year 12, and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Female, Black, and Asian students in the Wave 4 Learner Survey showed a decrease in terms of the number of students who said they knew about HE knowledge in many aspects when compared to their counterparts in Wave 2.

## Perceived benefits

- The students who responded to the Wave 4 survey showed a slightly better understanding of four out of six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey.
- Many student groups with protected characteristics fared better in understanding HE benefits in Wave 4 than their counterparts did in Wave 2, a sign of positive outcomes of interventions.
- Year 11 and college Level 3 Year 2 students fared better with perceived HE benefits in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2, while Year 13 and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse.
- Female students' understanding of HE benefits declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4, whereas male students and the students who selected "other gender" increased.
- White students' understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 was not as good as in Wave 2. Still, the students who identified themselves as "Mixed Ethnicity" or "Other ME" demonstrated a much better understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- The students with disabilities also showed a significantly better understanding of all the six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey.

## Perceived sense of belonging and fit within HE

- The proportion of the students who agree or strongly agree with "would fit in with others" decreased in Wave 4 (48.1% vs 49.7% in Wave 2).
- For college Level 3 Year 1 students, the sense of belonging indicator increased from 42% in Wave 2 to 47.1% in Wave 4, whereas perceived fit in HE and capacity to "cope with study" decreased significantly.

## Self-efficacy

- A decline in motivation to do well from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 survey appeared across many student groups.
- Some groups also showed a decline in the proportion of students who were confident in grades and accessing HE, for example, Black and White female students.

## COVID-19 impact

- COVID-19's impact on the students' study and plan to do next generally weakened in 2021.
- The sixth form students were the least impacted by COVID-19 in terms of likelihood of applying to HE than the students in other year groups. Comparing to 95.3% of Year 13 students who reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was the same or more than before, only 70% of Year 10 students said so.
- Nearly a quarter of students reported that COVID-19 influenced their decision about what to do next.
- The student groups with more students who reported that their decisions were affected by COVID-19 were also those with more students reporting substantial changes in the indicators of future plans, i.e. less likely to apply for HE at the age of 18 or 19, plan to study at FE colleges rather than sixth forms, or plan to get a job rather than to study at a HE institution.

## Recommendations for practice

Based on the learning outcomes reported above, the following recommendations are made for HeppSY and partners to consider how to best support the students.

- If Year 10 students had not participated in enough activities since the Wave 4 survey point in this academic year, they would need more interventions to boost HE knowledge when they progress to Year 11 in the next year. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Fewer pre-16 students planned to study in sixth form, and more intended to study at a FE college in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - A higher proportion of Year 10 students reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19, and fewer knew about many aspects of HE knowledge in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- If Level 3 Year 1 students had not participated in the activities needed to improve their understanding of HE, they would need bespoke interventions as early as possible in the next academic year when they progress to Level 3 Year 2. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Level 3 Year 1 students' responses to what to do next showed that fewer plan to study HE courses in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge, HE benefits and perceived fit in HE in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2.
- Black students need bespoke interventions to boost HE knowledge, motivation, and academic self-efficacy. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:

- Black and Asian students' likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19 negatively more than other ethnic groups.
- Black students' motivation and academic self-efficacy declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4.
- Fewer Black students said they knew about HE in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Non-White males and White females might need bespoke interventions to reverse the negative changes from Wave 2 to Wave 4. HE Can and SHE Can need to continue in the next academic year. The recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Non-White male students fared worse with their likelihood to apply for HE and HE knowledge in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.
  - Fewer White female students said they knew about HE knowledge and were confident in their grades and accessing HE.
- Supposing HeppSY partner universities want to attract local students to study locally, they need to consider the possible trend that more White students intended to study away from home in the post-pandemic era.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks go to Jessica Whitby and Joanna Grace for their contribution to writing the report.

We are also grateful to Daniel Fletcher (our Senior Insight Analyst) and Guy Birkin from the CFE for data quality assurance, and Mike Garnock-Jones (HeppSY Director) for his guidance and support to the five waves of Learner Survey.

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 would use the findings and recommendations to provide better support to students like you.

# Full Report

# Introduction

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The Higher Education Progression Partnership South Yorkshire (HeppSY) is part of the Uni Connect Programme, funded by the Office for Students. The main focus of Uni Connect is to provide targeted higher education (HE) outreach to young people in Years 9 to 13 living in particular geographic areas. From August 2021 this broadened out to include the targeting of adult learners (learners aged 19 and above). HeppSY is working in partnership with Sheffield Hallam University, The University of Sheffield and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

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## Aims and objectives

The main aims and objectives of the report are as follows:

- To outline the attitudes of young people in South Yorkshire towards HE and its potential benefits.
- To make evidence-based recommendations that support HeppSY in appropriately targeting provision for the next academic year.
- To inform and influence outreach activity planning by partnership members including local universities and South Yorkshire schools and colleges.

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- To provide an overview of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the HE expectations and home learning experiences of school and college students in South Yorkshire.

The outcomes reported here provide an indication of how young people in HeppSY partner schools and colleges across South Yorkshire conceptualise HE, and their potential place within it. Crucially, we can use the insights generated to highlight existing gaps and tailor subsequent provision, ensuring students are supported in the most appropriate and impactful way possible.

## Report structure

Each section of this report will address a substantive section of the survey, as follows:

1. **Future Plans**
2. **HE Knowledge**
3. **Perceived Benefits**
4. **Perceived Sense of Belonging and Fit Within HE**
5. **Academic Self-efficacy**
6. **COVID-19 Impact**

The four core strands of HeppSY programme activity (HE knowledge, careers knowledge, attainment, and confidence and resilience in 2020/21 and HE knowledge, careers knowledge, see your future self, and academic confidence in 2021/22)<sup>3</sup> are broadly covered across the second to fifth sections of this report. The report's outcomes will support the development of the HeppSY programme within each strand and the Progression Framework.

The final section of the report will cover the impact of COVID-19 on students' HE expectations and home learning experience. The outcomes of this section will provide a snapshot of how school and college students in the South Yorkshire region have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will be of interest to stakeholders across the region.

Three appendixes are attached to this report as the references to interpret the findings in this report:

- **Appendix A – Respondent Characteristics in W2 and W4**
- **Appendix B – Activities Delivered Between W2 and W4**
- **Appendix C – Students Attended Activities Delivered in 2021 by Strands**

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3 Appendix C demonstrates the number of students participating in the activities under the strands.

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# 1. Future Plans

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Three questions in the learner survey can be used as the indicators of the students' inspiration to progress to HE 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 HE)
- Have you applied to study HE? (For the students who chose any of the HE options in the question above)
- How likely are you to apply to HE 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 did not apply for HE yet)

All students answered the last question except those in sixth form schools or colleges who have applied for HE. Because this question applies to most students, it becomes the indicator suitable for comparing different demographic groups to evaluate their inspiration to access HE.

Figure 1 demonstrates the average likelihood score of each student group in Wave 4; the closer to 6, the more likely this group of students would apply for HE at 18 or 19. The comparison between Wave 4 and Wave 2 is for reference only. The difference for some small groups might not reflect the actual trend due to the low sample size in those groups.

In general, the percentage of students reporting that they were "fairly likely", "very likely", or that they "definitely will apply" in Wave 4, 70.1%, is slightly higher than that in Wave 2, 69.9%. The students' average likelihood scores in both waves are close to 5, "very likely". However, the average likelihood score in Wave 4, 4.75, is lower than in Wave 2, 4.81, because fewer students in Wave 4 responded that they "definitely will apply" than their counterparts in Wave 2.

## Wave 4 students' likelihood to apply for HE

Significant differences in the likelihood of applying for HE are found between different groups of students in all the demographic categories except one, "disability or not." The students with one or more disabilities, those without a disability, and those who preferred not to say had the same likelihood of applying for HE.

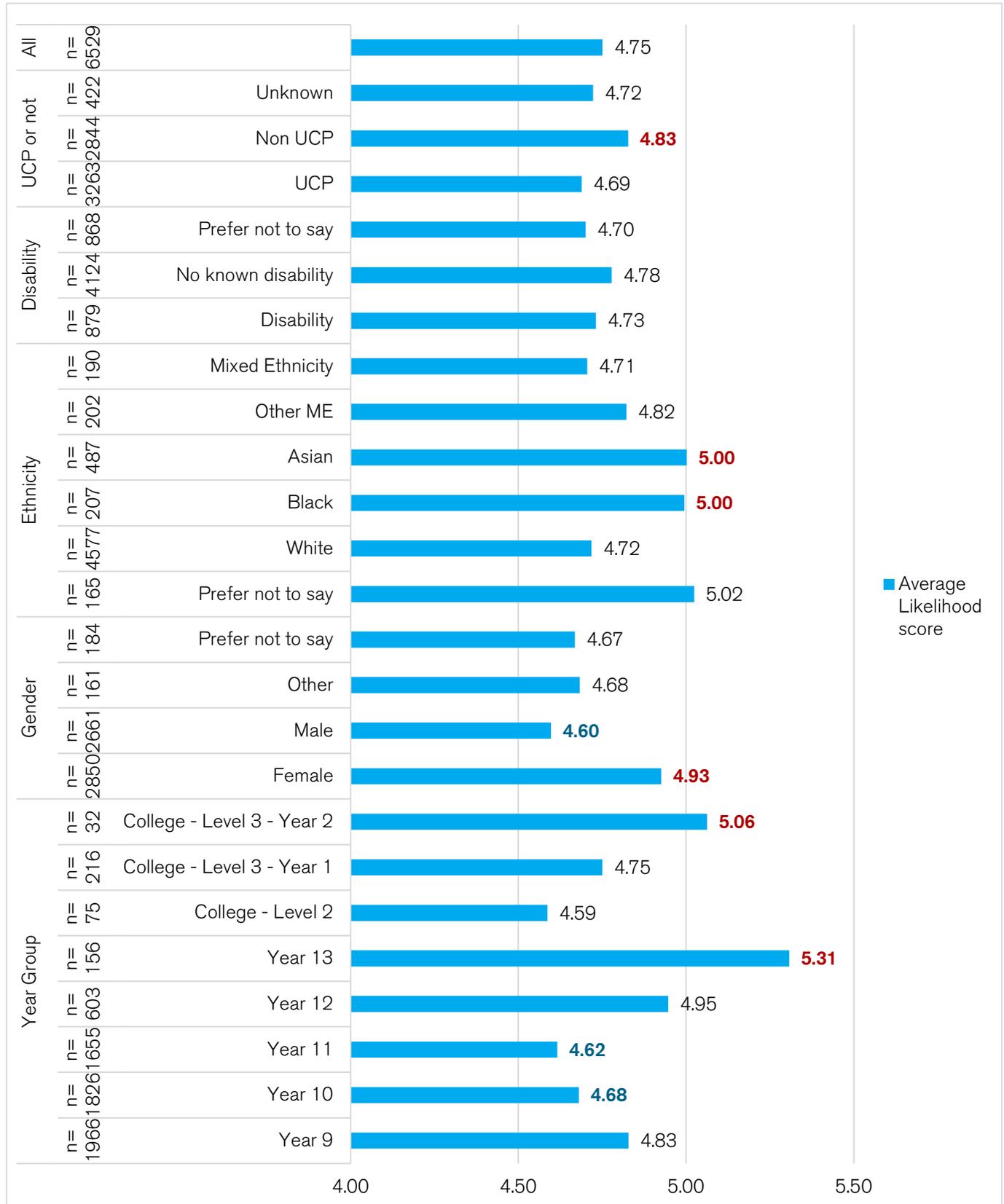
The students who live in the Uni Connect area (named "UCP") were less likely to apply for HE than those who do not live in the Uni Connect area (named "Non-UCP").

Asian and Black students were more likely to apply for HE than White students. Both Asian and Black students' likelihood scores reached 5, "very likely".

Male students were much less likely to apply for HE than the female students. Male students' average likelihood score is the second lowest of all groups, only slightly higher than those studying Level 2 at colleges.

The greatest difference between student groups in the likelihood of applying for HE was observed in different year groups. Year 9 students' average likelihood score is above the overall average, yet Year 10 and Year 11 students' scores are below average. In post-16 students, the older the students were, the higher likelihood they would apply for HE. This pattern is the same for sixth form students and college students.

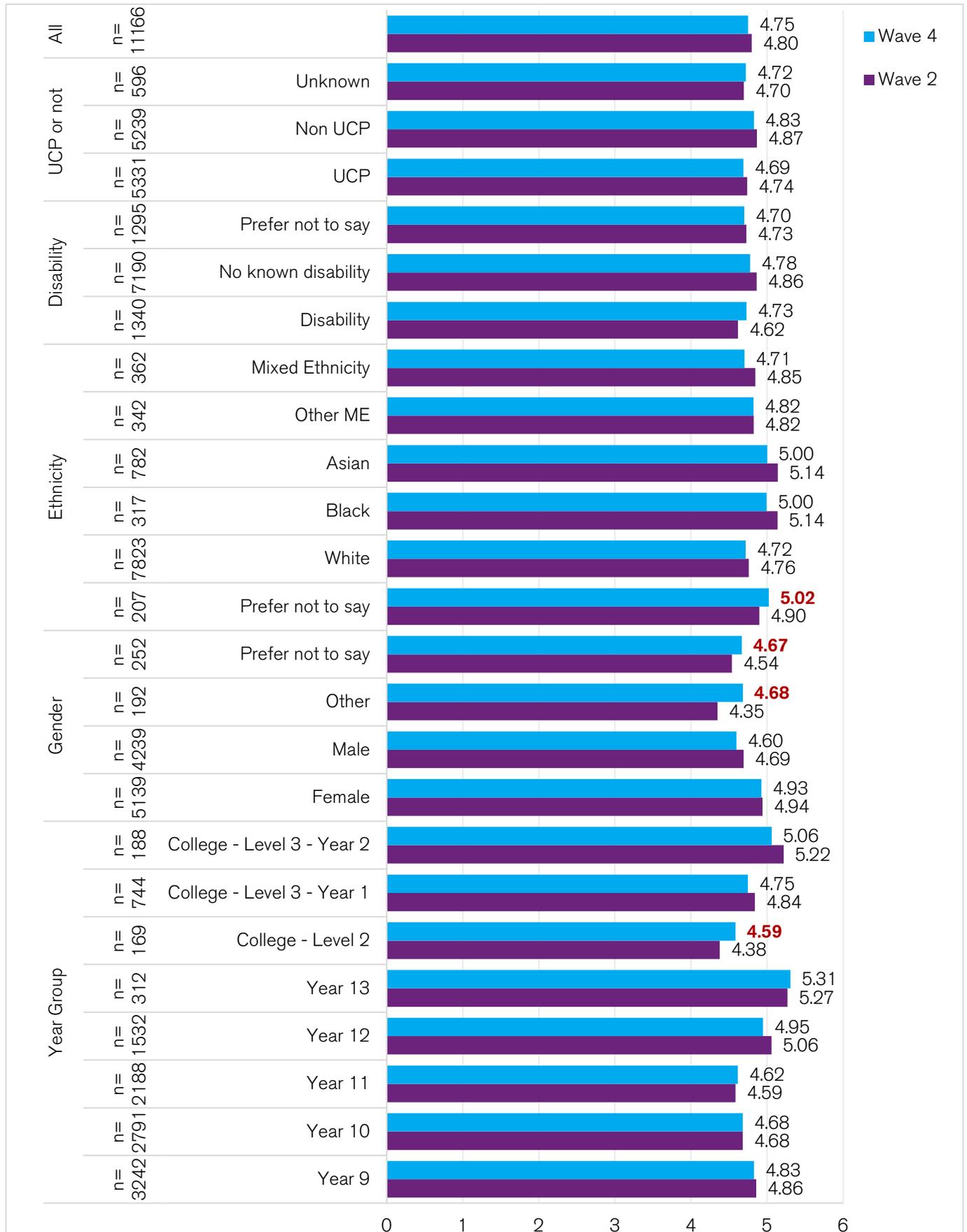
Figure 1: different groups of students' likelihood of applying to HE in Wave 4



## **Students' likelihood to apply for HE in Wave 4 and Wave 2**

Significant differences in the likelihood of applying for HE between different groups of students in any demographic categories in Wave 4 also exist in Wave 2 except for one, disability. In Wave 2, the students without disability had significantly higher likelihood to apply for HE than the students with at least one disability, whereas in Wave 4 such a difference between them disappeared. Considering the good sample size of this demographic category in both waves, the change from Wave 2 to Wave 4 might suggest an actual change, i.e. more students with at least one disability have been inspired to access HE than their counterparts two years ago.

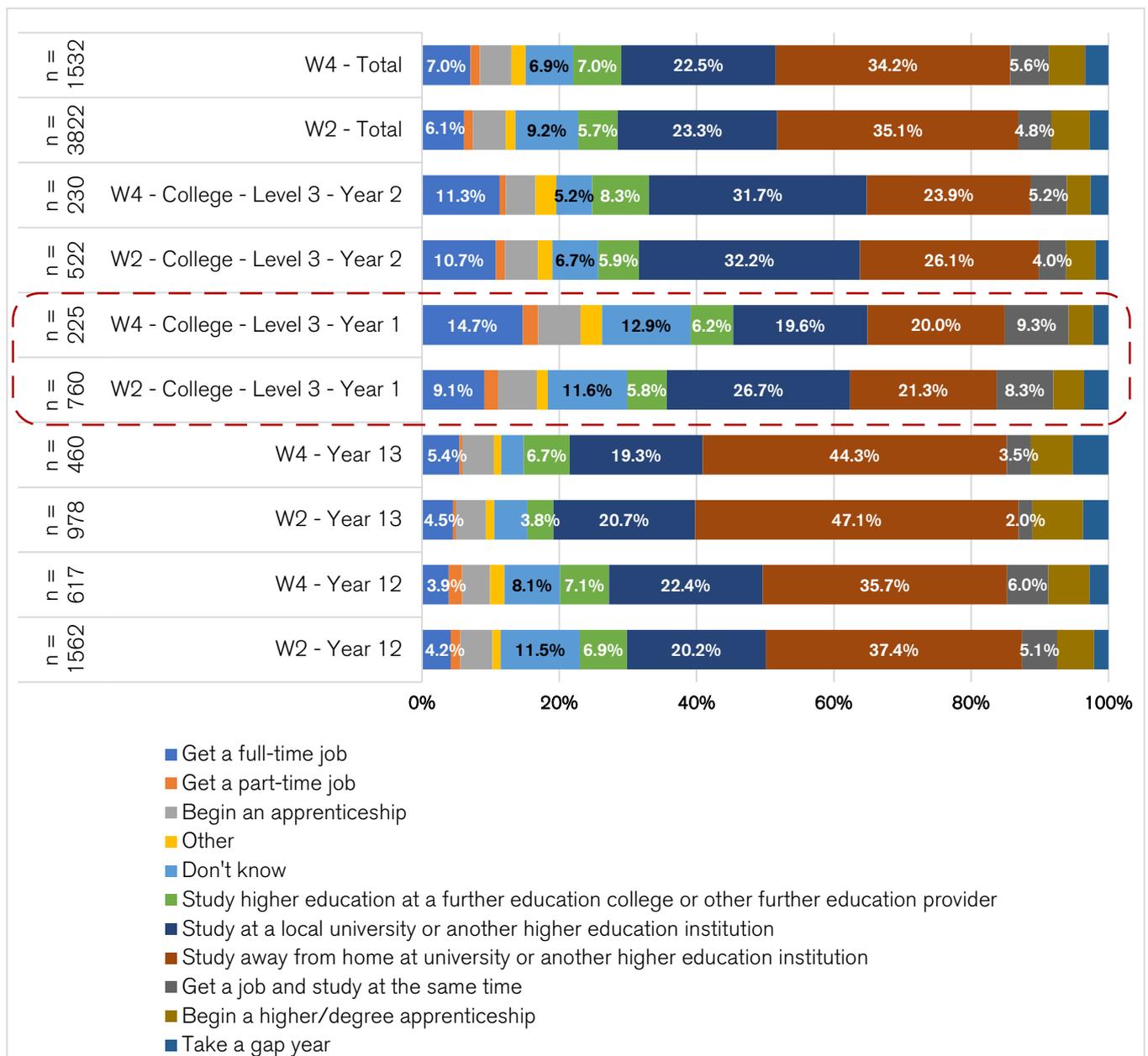
Figure 2: different groups of students' likelihood of applying to HE in Wave 4 vs Wave 2



## Students at KS5 or Level 3's next-step plan

The sixth form students and the college students at Level 3 showed different tendencies when they answered the question, "When you finish your current studies, what would you most like to do next?". Generally, "Study away from home at university or another HE institution" was the common inspiration for sixth form students (Year 12 and Year 13), whereas "Study at a local university or another HE institution" for college Level 3 students. However, Level 3 Year 1 students' inspiration demonstrated a sign of shifting away from HE when comparing the survey outcomes from Wave 4 and Wave 2.

Figure 3: Sixth form and college Level 3 students' next-step plan in Wave 4 vs Wave 2



## Students shifting away from universities

Apart from the students at Level 3 Year 1, three groups also had proportionally fewer students planning to study at universities in the Wave 4 than those in the Wave 2 survey: the students with one or more disabilities, Black students, and Asian students. However, more Asian students planned to study HE at a further education college or other FE provider in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.

Table 1: Student groups with declining inspiration to access universities

	Disability		Black		Asian	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Study HE at a further education college or other further education provider</b>	5.4%	5.8%	10.9%	9.8%	6.2%	13.5%
<b>Study at a local university or another HE institution</b>	21.6%	18.1%	29.3%	29.3%	45.5%	44.3%
<b>Study away from home at university or another HE institution</b>	33.2%	31.3%	38.5%	27.2%	18.9%	15.1%

## Where to study: studying locally or away from home?

Despite a slight decline in planning to study at a local university among UCP students and White students, they had an increasing proportion of students inspired to venture away from home for HE study. On the contrary, Non-White female and Non-White male students more inclined to pursue HE in local HE or further education institutions in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.

Table 2: Student groups with different location preferences to access universities

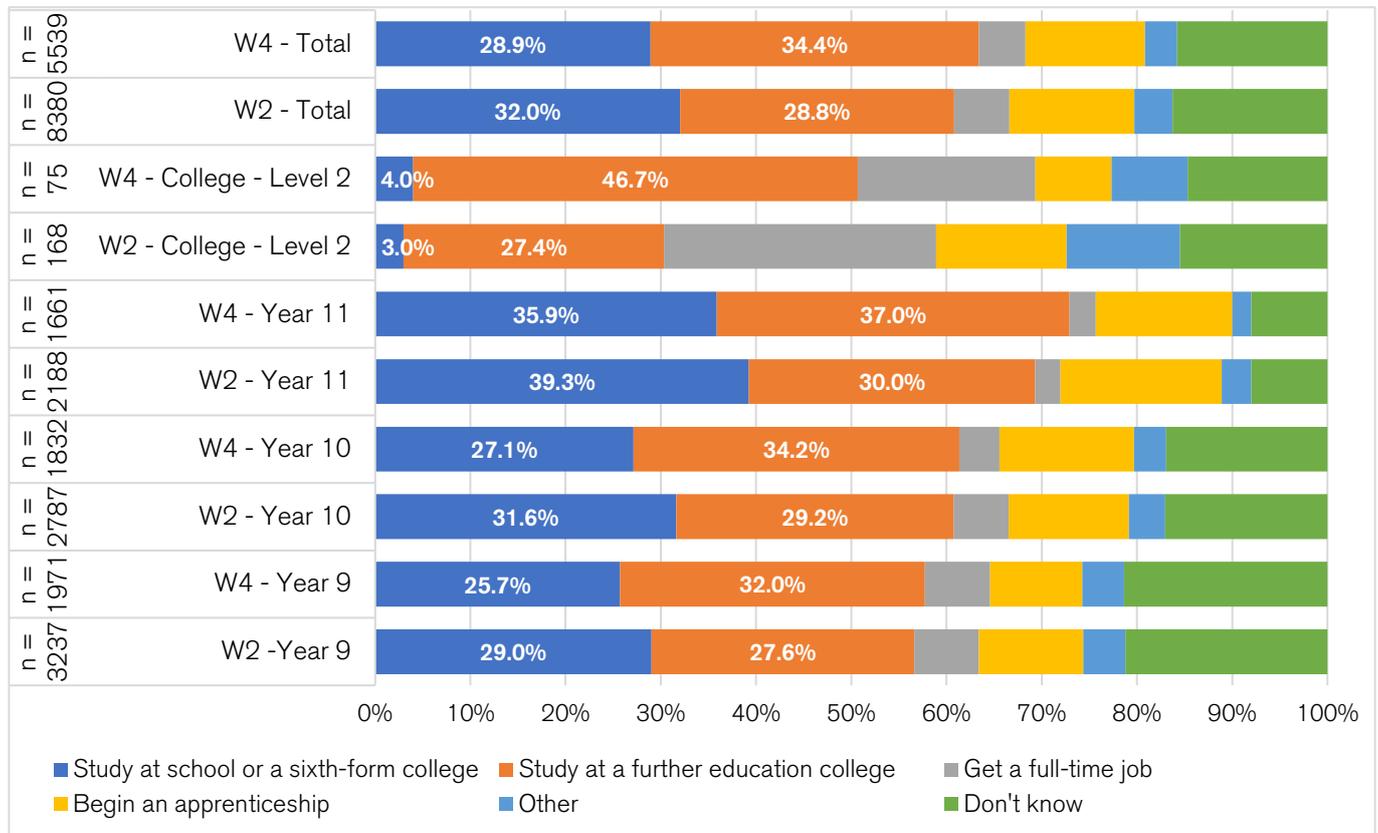
	UCP		White		Non-White Female		Non-White Male	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Study HE at a further education college or other further education provider</b>	5.7%	7.4%	5.1%	5.4%	8.2%	10.8%	6.1%	10.1%
<b>Study at a local university or another HE institution</b>	24.1%	23.1%	19.8%	15.8%	37.6%	41.9%	36.5%	36.7%
<b>Study away from home at university or another HE institution</b>	34.5%	36.0%	38.3%	40.0%	29.4%	23.9%	24.3%	15.4%

## Students at KS3-4 or Level 2’s next-step plan

The outcomes of all the previous waves of the Learner Survey indicate that more sixth form students were inspired to access HE than college students. Therefore, how the students at Key Stage 3 – 4 or equivalent in schools or colleges plan their next step will impact their pathway to HE.

Overall, FE college overtook sixth form, becoming the most popular choice for what to do next after current studies in the Wave 4 survey. Fewer students planned to study at sixth form, and more students planned to study at a further education college in Wave 4 compared to those in Wave 2 across all the year groups from Year 9 to Year 11. This trend was observed across most student groups with different demographic characteristics. The only exceptions are the students with one or more disabilities and the students in Mixed Ethnicity or Other Minority Ethnicity categories. These three groups of students are more inclined to study sixth form and further education in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.

Figure 4: Students at KS3-4 or Level 2's next-step plan in Wave 4 vs Wave 2



## Section summary

This section has reviewed responses relating to likelihood of applying to HE. The key findings are:

- Male, Year 11, and Year 10 students responded less likely to apply for HE at 18 or 19 than the students in other year groups.
- More students with at least one disability have been inspired to access HE than their counterparts two years ago, so that there was no statistically significant difference between the students with or without disability in likelihood to apply for HE.
- Four groups of students' inspiration demonstrated a sign of shifting away from HE when comparing the survey outcomes from Wave 4 and Wave 2. They are Level 3 Year 1 students, the students with one or more disabilities, Black students, and Asian students.
- UCP students and White students showed more interest in study away from home for HE in Wave 4, whereas Non-White female and Non-White male students more inclined to pursue HE in local HE or further education institutions in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Fewer students planned to study at sixth form and more students planned to study at a further education college in Wave 4 compared to those in Wave 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 the “nothing”, “a little” or “a lot” scale. As different students from different backgrounds might have a different interpretation of “a little” and “a lot”, this report calculated the percentages of the students whose responses were “a little” and “a lot” in relative populations as the outcomes of the students who had a certain level of HE knowledge.

The following figures illustrated the difference in the students' knowledge of HE application and HE life between the Wave 2 and the Wave 4 surveys. Overall, the students in the Wave 4 survey did not significantly differ in the knowledge of HE application from those in Wave 2. However, fewer students in the Wave 4 survey reported that they knew about “student life”, “costs of study”, “financial support”, and “where to live” than those in the Wave 2 survey.

The outcomes were not surprising. Many interventions were cancelled, and many remaining interventions were delivered virtually during the past two years. Lacking university campus visits and face-to-face interactions with university mentors and ambassadors, the students had fewer channels to get specific knowledge related to university life, such as “where to live” and “cost of study.”

It is encouraging that majority of the students have a certain level of HE knowledge in all aspects, particularly in subjects, qualifications and grades needed, and careers. Eight or nine out of ten students reported that they knew “a little” or “a lot” in these areas, and the percentages increased in Wave 4. This finding proves that virtual intervention effectively supports students in acquiring knowledge related to decisions on applying to HE.

Figure 5 Students' knowledge of HE application between W2 and W4 surveys

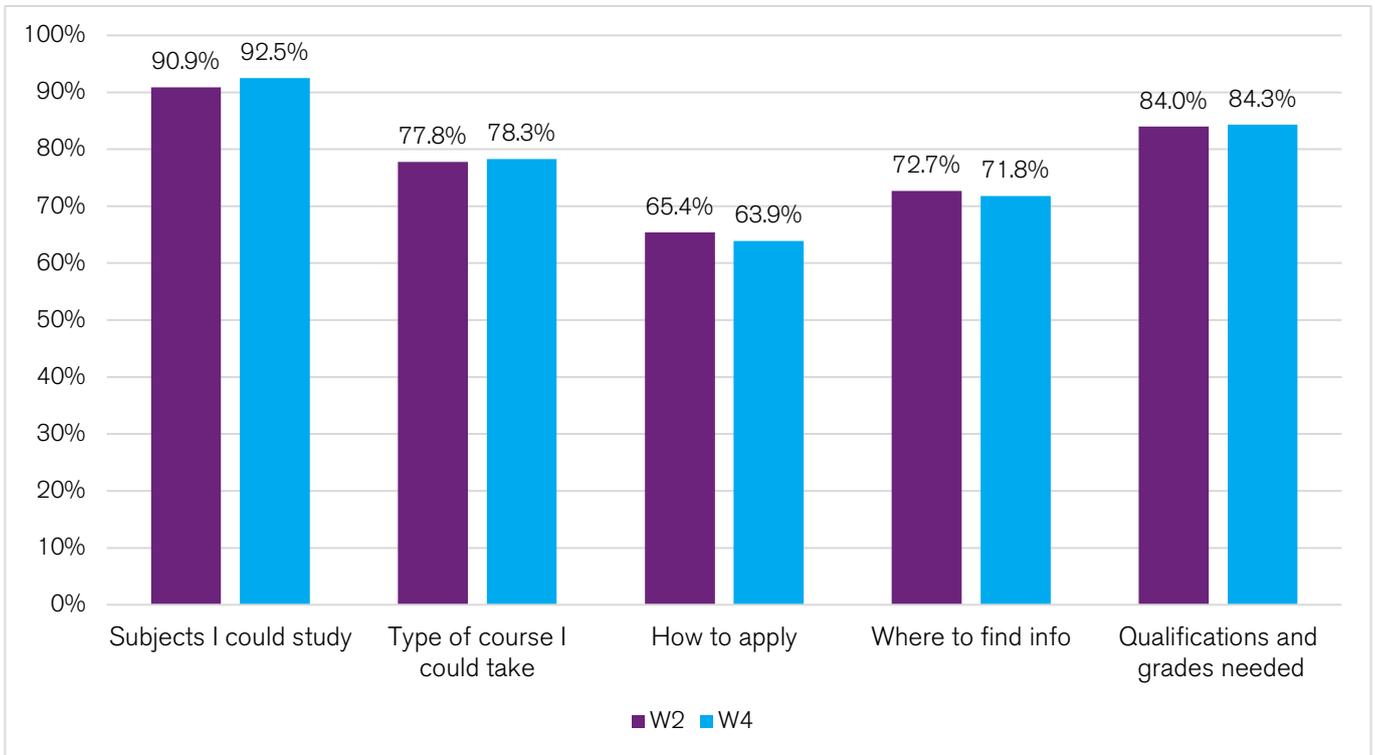
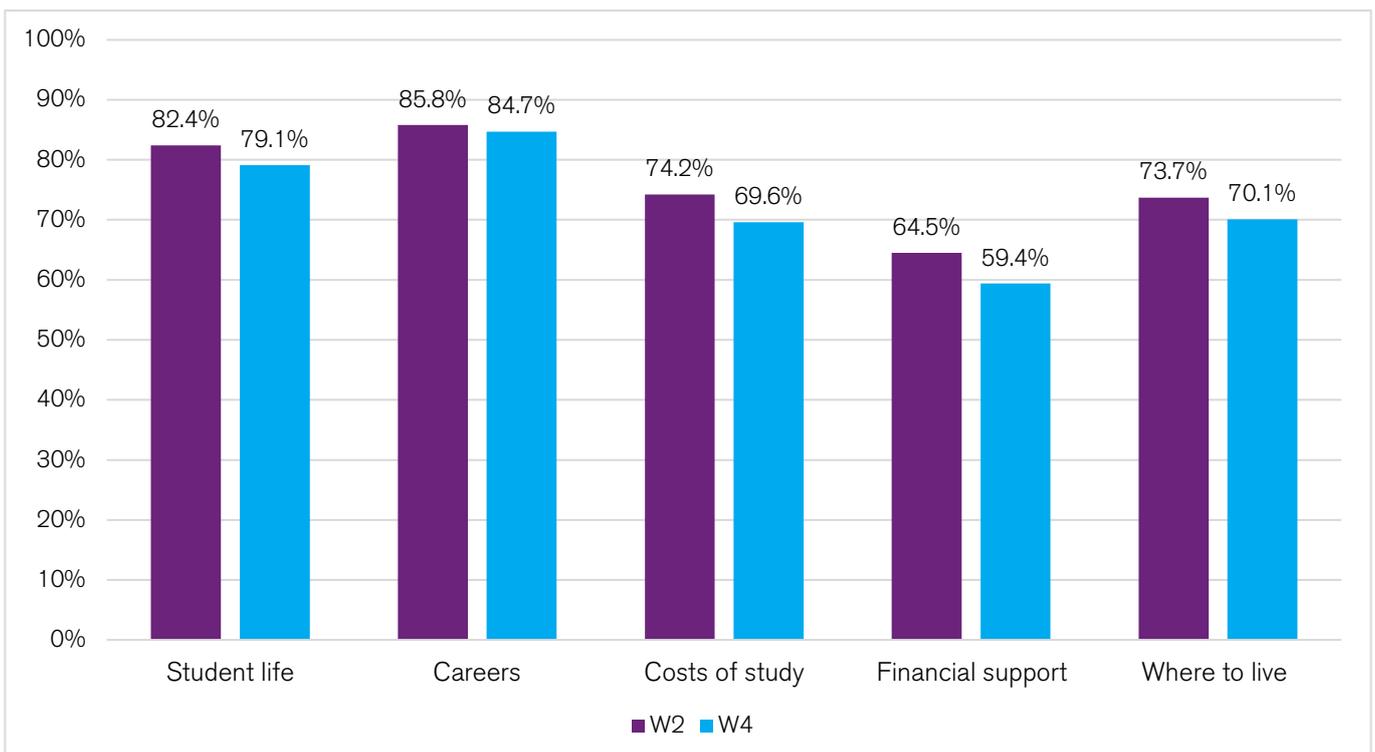


Figure 6 Students' knowledge of HE life between W2 and W4 surveys



## Students' HE knowledge by year groups

Year 13 and college Level 3 Year 2 students topped the rank of HE knowledge level in the Wave 4 survey as their counterparts did in the previous waves of surveys. The proportion of students who reported that they knew 'a lot' about the HE knowledge statements was correlated with the year group, with younger students being more likely to report that they knew 'a little' than older students. This pattern is consistent with the findings in the Wave 2 and the Wave 3 surveys. This trend reflects the bespoke interventions of HE knowledge provided for the students in different year groups, for example, the general HE pathway for Year 9 students and the UCAS application process for Year 12 students. It is also associated with the student's motivation and personal interests. The students closer to the decision moment of making HE applications are more interested in learning relevant knowledge.

Nevertheless, Year 13 and college Level 3 Year 2 students did not fare well across all the aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey as their counterparts in Wave 2. It's unclear what caused the differences in outcomes of different year groups from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 surveys. The impact could be from educational interventions and the disturbance caused by COVID-19.

Figure 7 shows that Year 9 and Year 11 students' knowledge of HE application increased overall in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2. On the contrary, Year 10 students' knowledge of HE application decreased in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2 on four out of five aspects except for "subjects I could study". College Level 2 students' knowledge level of "how to apply" and "where to find information" in the Wave 4 survey was not as good as their counterparts in Wave 2, but their knowledge level about "subject", "course", and "qualifications and grades" in Wave 4 were better than their counterparts in Wave 2.

Figure 8 shows that Year 9 students' knowledge of HE life remained the same in the Wave 4 survey as their counterparts in Wave 2. However, Year 10 students fared worse with all the five aspects of knowledge about HE life in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2. Besides career knowledge, Year 11 students' knowledge of HE life decreased in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2 on the other four aspects. College Level 2 students' knowledge of "student life" and "cost of study" increased significantly in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.

Figure 7 Students' knowledge of HE application between W2 and W4 surveys by KS3/KS4 year groups

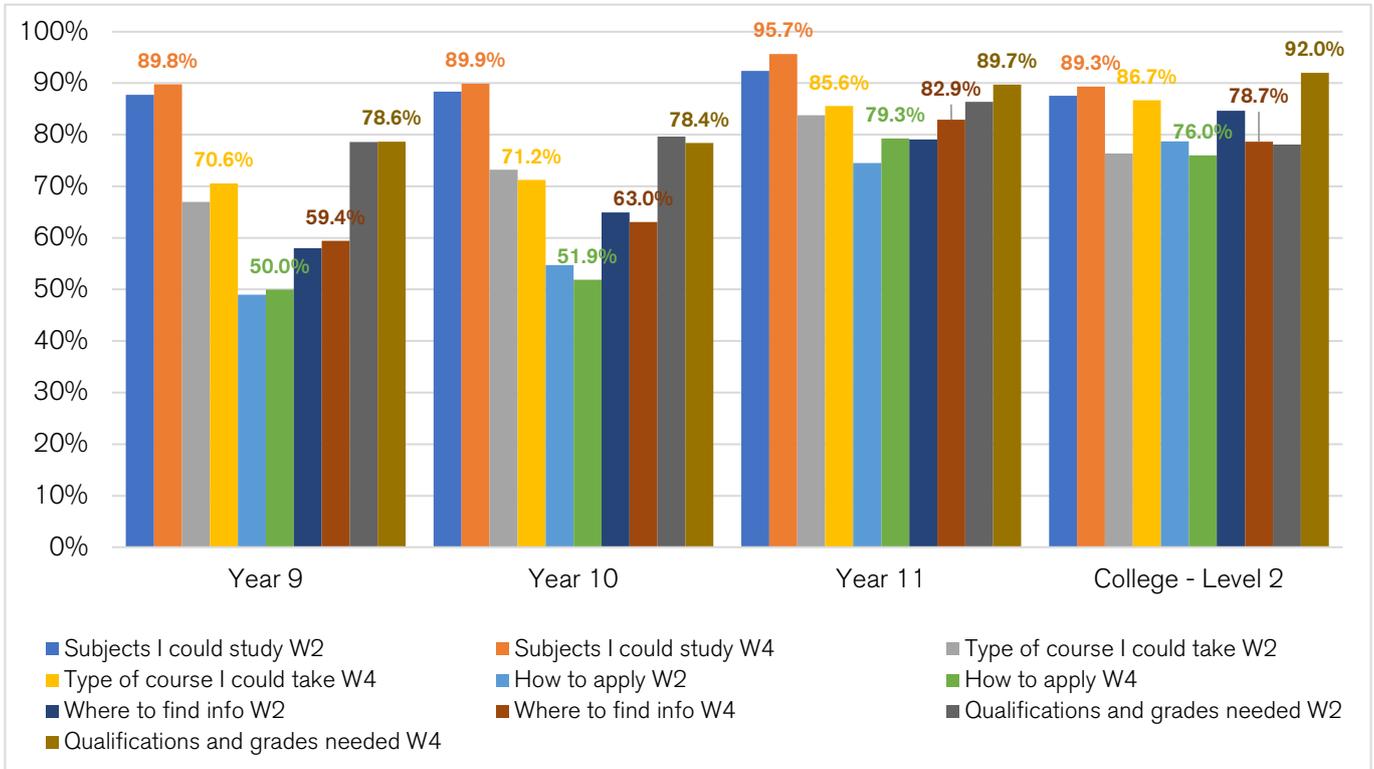
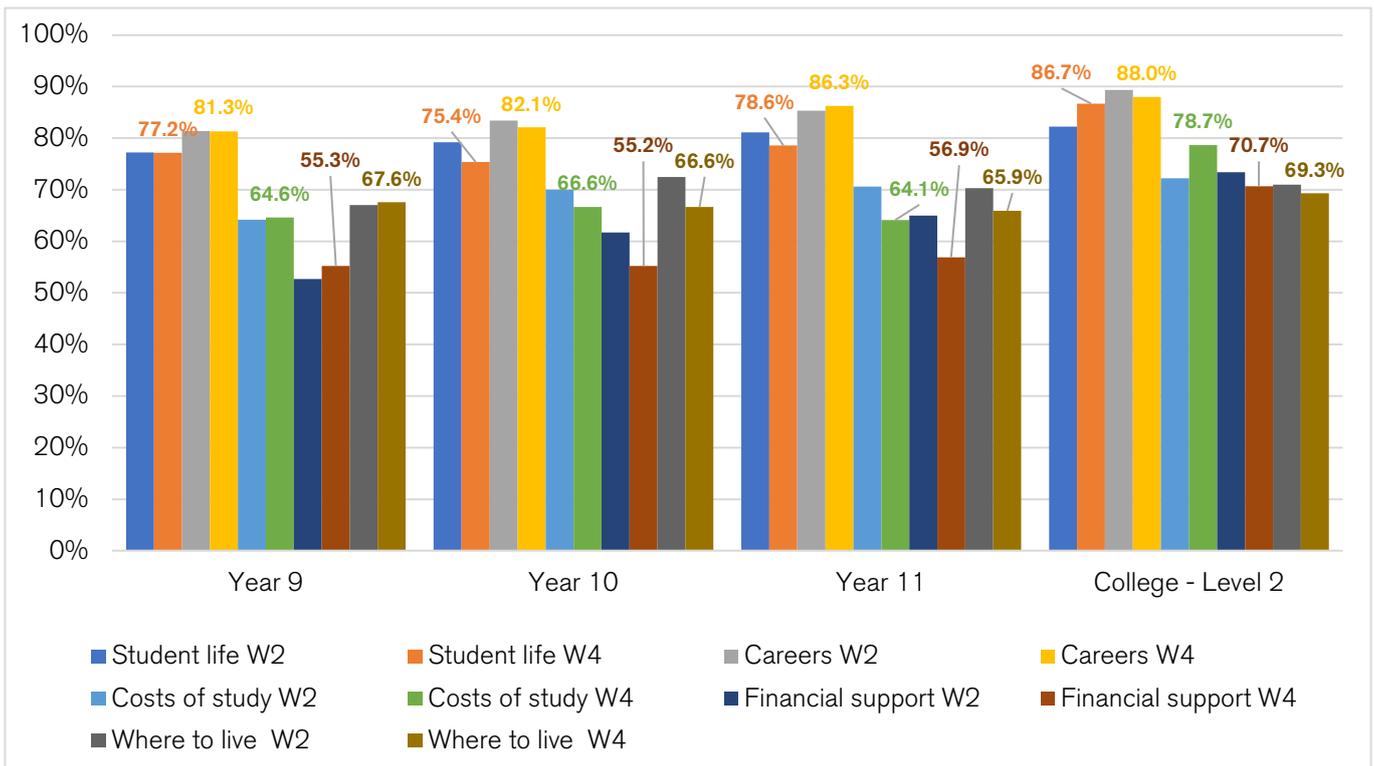
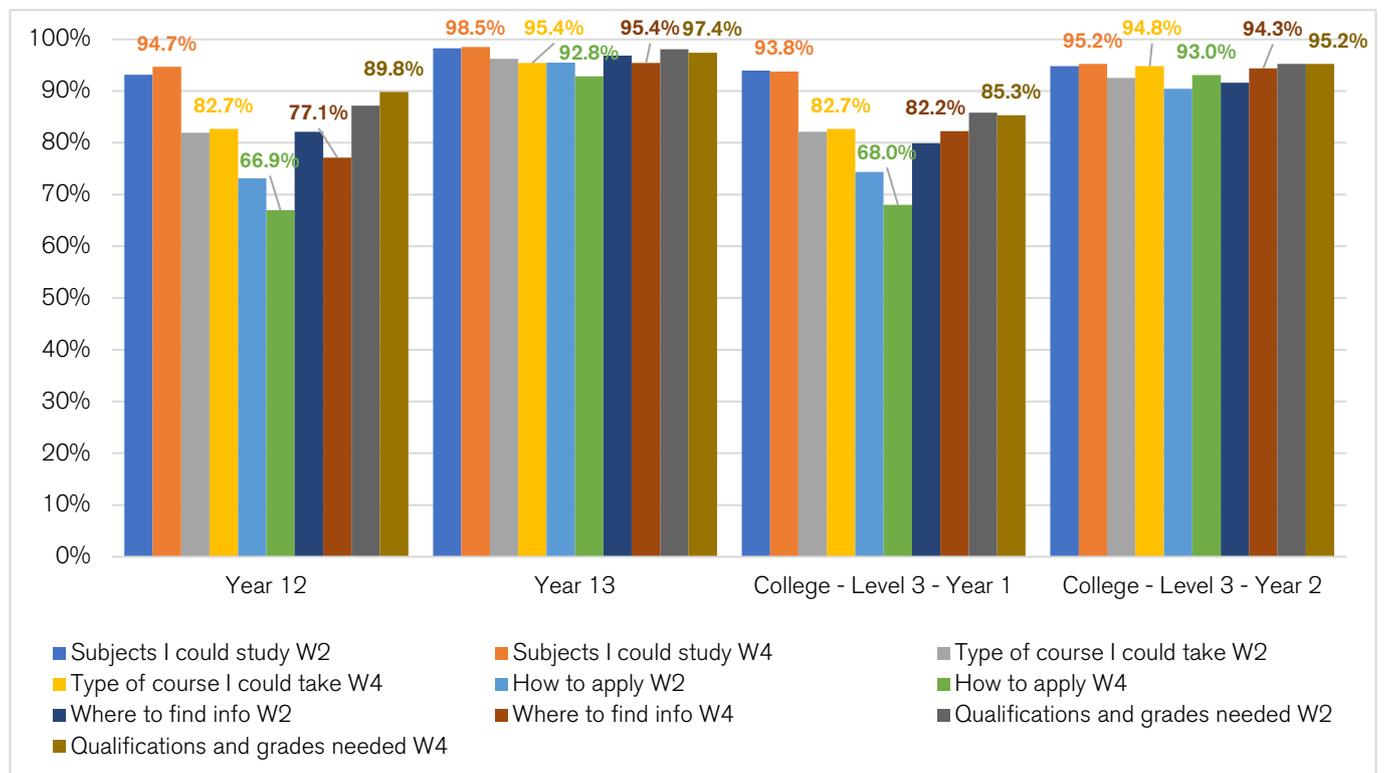


Figure 8 Students' knowledge of HE life between W2 and W4 surveys by KS3/KS4 year groups



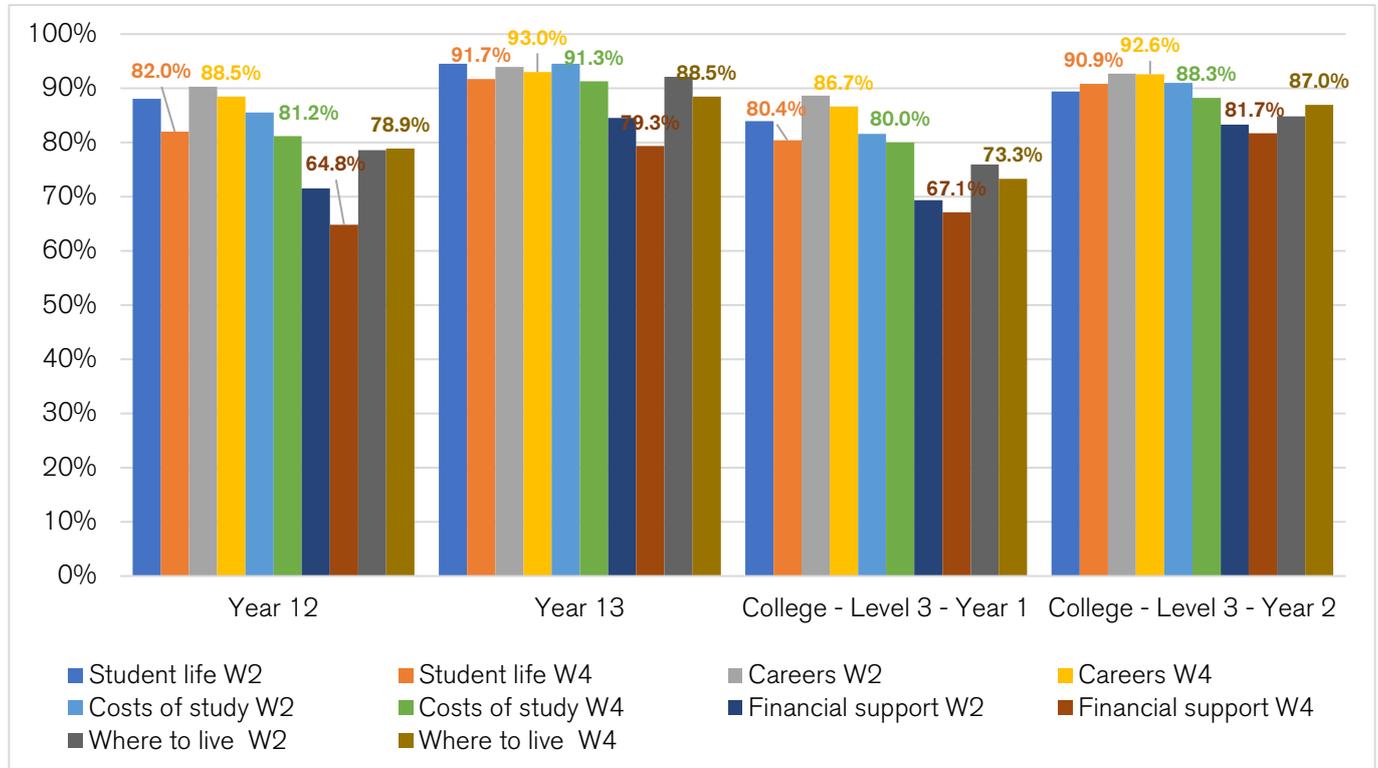
It is good news that college Level 3 Year 2 students' knowledge of HE application increased slightly across all the five aspects in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2. Although there shows a slight decrease when comparing Year 13 students in the two waves of surveys, Year 13 students in Wave 4 still prevalently said that they knew "a little" or "a lot" about HE application (ranging from 92.8% for "how to apply" to 98.5% for "subject that I could study" in Figure 9). However, fewer Year 12 students in the Wave 4 survey said they knew "how to apply" or "where to find information" than those in Wave 2. College Level 3 Year 1 students in the Wave 4 survey also fare worse in knowing "how to apply" than in Wave 2.

Figure 9 Students' knowledge of HE application between W2 and W4 surveys by KS5/Level 3 year groups



Compared to knowledge of HE application, KS5/ Level 3 students' knowledge of HE life in the Wave 4 survey was a concern. Except for college Level 3 Year 2, who showed an increase of knowledge in "student life" and "where to live" in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2, KS5/ Level 3 students generally fared worse with all aspects of HE life in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2 (figure 10).

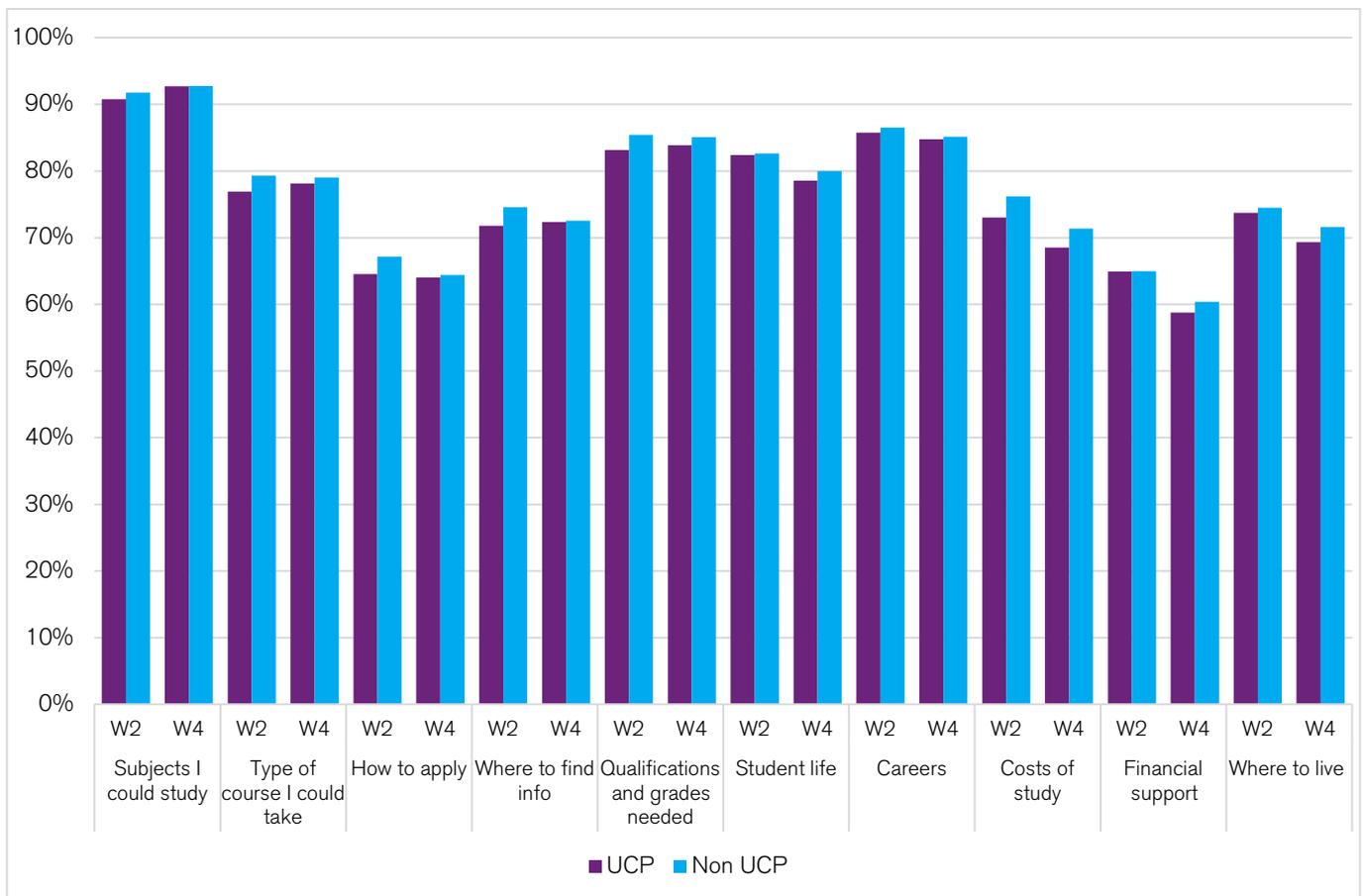
Figure 10 Students' knowledge of HE life between W2 and W4 surveys by KS5/ Level 3 year groups



## The narrowed gaps and the broadened gaps

Regarding HE application, the knowledge gaps between UCP and Non-UCP students in the Wave 2 survey narrowed or closed in Wave 4. However, that was not the case for the knowledge gap in HE life. Besides career knowledge, the knowledge gaps in other aspects of HE life between UCP and Non-UCP students in the Wave 2 survey broadened in Wave 4. Lacking face-to-face interactions with university student ambassadors, role models, and mentors during the pandemic is likely one of the causes.

Figure 11 UCP and Non-UCP students' HE knowledge gaps in Wave 2 and Wave 4 surveys



The HE knowledge gaps between the students with disabilities and with no-known disabilities in the Wave 2 survey narrowed in Wave 4 except for two gaps in knowing “how to apply” and “subjects I could study”. Both student groups had more students who knew about HE subjects in the Wave 4 survey than in Wave 2. However, the increase was higher for the students with no-known disabilities than those with disabilities.

The HE knowledge gaps between male and female students in the Wave 2 survey were small, and most were even smaller in Wave 4 because male and female students had the same trend of decreasing or increasing with changes towards closing the gaps. The only widened knowledge gap between male and female students from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 survey was knowledge of “type of course I could take”, which is still a small 3.2% gap with 77.3% for female students and 80.5% for male students. Other gender students showed more increases across many aspects of HE knowledge from Wave 2 to Wave 4. Eight out of ten HE knowledge gaps between other gender and male students narrowed from Wave 2 to Wave 4. The two widened gaps lie in “type of course I could take” and “financial support.”

Proportionally more Black and Asian students reported that they knew “a lot” or “a little” HE knowledge than their white or the other ME peers in the Wave 4 survey. This is prevalent in response to HE knowledge questions on subjects, course type, how to apply, where to find information, grades,

student life, cost of study, financial support and where to live, and is consistent with Waves 2 and 3. However, compared to Wave 2, significantly fewer Black students in Wave 4 reported that they knew about course type, how to apply, qualifications and grades, and where to live. In contrast, significantly more students in other ME or mixed ethnicity groups reported knowing about many aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey. Overall, most knowledge gaps between different ethnic groups were narrowed from Wave 2 to Wave 4.

It is worth noting that some narrowed gaps were the outcome of the HE knowledge indicators decreased from Wave 2 to Wave 4. These decreases might need interventions to mitigate.

*Table 3 White, Black, and Asian students' changes in HE knowledge from Wave 2 to Wave 4*

	White		Black		Asian	
	W4	Changes (W2 to W4)	W4	Changes (W2 to W4)	W4	Changes (W2 to W4)
<b>Subjects I could study</b>	92.5%	0.9%	94.2%	0.2%	94.7%	1.4%
<b>Type of course I could take</b>	78.3%	0.0%	81.9%	-1.5%	80.0%	-5.2%
<b>How to apply</b>	63.9%	-1.8%	68.1%	-3.9%	66.8%	-2.3%
<b>Where to find info</b>	71.9%	-1.3%	72.7%	-2.5%	75.3%	-1.6%
<b>Qualifications and Grades needed</b>	84.5%	0.1%	85.4%	-1.5%	89.5%	0.8%
<b>Student life</b>	78.4%	-4.3%	80.4%	-1.0%	84.7%	1.4%
<b>Careers</b>	84.8%	-1.9%	83.5%	-2.3%	87.5%	-0.9%
<b>Costs of study</b>	68.0%	-7.0%	76.2%	0.4%	79.3%	0.7%
<b>Financial Support</b>	57.3%	-7.1%	65.8%	-5.7%	70.9%	0.3%
<b>Where to live</b>	69.4%	-5.1%	70.8%	-6.9%	75.1%	1.0%

## Section summary

Overall, the students in the Wave 4 survey did not significantly differ in the knowledge of HE application from those in Wave 2. However, fewer students in the Wave 4 survey reported that they knew about “student life”, “costs of study”, “financial support”, and “where to live” than those in the Wave 2 survey. This pattern was more distinct among UCP students. Generally, more UCP students knew about HE application in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2, but fewer UCP students knew about knowledge of HE life in Wave 4 than in Wave 2. Non-UCP students were less so. The observed changes were likely caused by the disturbance to certain types of interventions due to the changed policies during the pandemic, for example lacking campus visits or other interactive interventions with HE students, staff, and mentors.

Year 10, Year 12, and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2. The outcomes suggested that more interventions would be needed to improve their understanding of HE in general and how to apply for HE studies in specific.

In line with the COVID-19 statistics, which revealed that the pandemic hit some demographic groups with protected characteristics in terms of health and finance, female, Black, and Asian students in the Wave 4 Learner Survey also showed a decrease in terms of the number of students who said they knew about HE knowledge in many aspects when compared to their counterparts in Wave 2. Targeted interventions might need to support some students with protected characteristics to close specific HE knowledge gaps.

## 3. Perceived Benefits

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The Learner Survey asked the students how much they agreed with six statements to evaluate their 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.

Students' understanding of HE benefits appeared to have a similar pattern across different waves of surveys, i.e. more students understood "it will enable me to get a better job", "it will enable me to earn more", "it will challenge me intellectually" and "it will give me valuable life skills" than "it will broaden my horizons" and "it will improve my social life" (Figure).

Despite the disruptions caused by COVID-19, the students who responded to the Wave 4 survey showed a slightly better understanding of four aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey:

- 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.

Figure 12 Students' understanding of HE benefits in Wave 2 and Wave 4 survey (% "strongly agree" + "agree")



## Student groups with a better understanding of HE benefits

Many student groups had significantly more students who strongly agreed or agreed with five or all the six statements about HE benefits in the Wave 4 survey than in Wave 2, particularly the following four groups of students: the students in Year 11 or college Level 3 Year 2 and the students who identified themselves as other gender or mixed ethnicity (Table 4).

Table 4 Student groups with a better understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 than in Wave 2

	Year 11		College - Level 3 - Year 2		Other gender		Mixed Ethnicity	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Broaden my horizons</b>	58.6%	62.6%	73.2%	77.4%	37.0%	53.5%	56.9%	66.0%
<b>Challenge me intellectually</b>	69.9%	73.6%	84.1%	80.9%	44.7%	71.4%	71.4%	75.4%

	Year 11		College - Level 3 - Year 2		Other gender		Mixed Ethnicity	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Give me valuable life skills</b>	69.9%	74.4%	78.0%	83.9%	44.7%	65.7%	68.9%	76.8%
<b>Improve social life</b>	58.6%	64.1%	66.9%	76.1%	36.1%	41.7%	61.5%	68.5%
<b>Enable me to earn more</b>	69.8%	74.5%	71.1%	78.3%	48.1%	64.6%	71.4%	76.8%
<b>Enable me to get a better job</b>	72.1%	78.6%	74.3%	85.2%	54.3%	68.0%	73.2%	80.8%

## Student groups whose understanding of HE benefits need to improve

Two student groups had significantly fewer students who strongly agreed or agreed with three or more statements about HE benefits in the Wave 4 survey than Wave 2: the students in Year 13 or in college Level 3 Year 1.

Table 5 Student groups whose understanding of HE benefits declined in Wave 4 than in Wave 2

	Year 13		College - Level 3 - Year 1		White Female	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Broaden my horizons</b>	80.8%	80.7%	71.1%	71.6%	69.3%	62.8%
<b>Challenge me intellectually</b>	88.7%	92.0%	83.3%	78.2%	80.5%	76.5%
<b>Give me valuable life skills</b>	85.1%	81.3%	80.2%	74.7%	81.7%	80.8%
<b>Improve social life</b>	75.2%	72.2%	68.9%	66.7%	72.0%	70.3%
<b>Enable me to earn more</b>	78.9%	76.1%	75.2%	73.3%	79.2%	79.0%
<b>Enable me to get a better job</b>	80.4%	78.7%	80.6%	76.4%	83.3%	84.2%

## The narrowed gaps

Some gaps in understanding of HE benefits between some student groups with protected characteristics narrowed in Wave 4 compared to those in Wave 2, for example, gaps between UCP and Non-UCP students, the students with disabilities or Non-known disabilities, female students or those who selected “Other gender” and male student, and the students who selected “Other ME” or “Mixed Ethnicity” and White students. Some of the narrowed gaps are worth celebrating, and some are not. If the student group with protected characteristics showed a significant increase in understanding of HE benefits in the Wave 4 survey than in Wave 2 and their counterparts also showed an increase or maintained more or less the same level of understanding, the narrowed gaps in this regard are worthy to celebrate. Therefore, we celebrate the narrowed gaps between the students who selected “Other gender” and male students.

Table 6 narrowed gaps in understanding of HE benefits between student groups from Wave 2 to Wave 4

	Male		Other Gender		Gaps between Male and Other Gender	
	W2	W4	W2	W4	W2	W4
<b>Broaden my horizons</b>	61.5%	63.6%	37.0%	53.5%	24.5%	10.2%
<b>Challenge me intellectually</b>	74.0%	74.3%	44.7%	71.4%	29.3%	2.9%
<b>Give me valuable life skills</b>	74.3%	75.2%	44.7%	65.7%	29.6%	9.5%
<b>Improve social life</b>	61.0%	62.5%	36.1%	41.7%	24.9%	20.8%
<b>Enable me to earn more</b>	74.7%	75.9%	48.1%	64.6%	26.7%	11.3%
<b>Enable me to get a better job</b>	77.5%	79.0%	54.3%	68.0%	23.2%	11.0%

## Section summary

Despite the disruptions of educational interventions caused by COVID-19, the students who responded to the Wave 4 survey showed a slightly better understanding of four out of six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey. Although not all the student groups show the same positive trend, it is good news that many student groups with protected characteristics fared better in understanding HE benefits in Wave 4 than their counterparts did in Wave 2, a sign of positive outcomes of interventions.

Year 11 and post-16 students' understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 changed significantly from their counterparts in Wave 2. Year 11 and college Level 3 Year 2 students fared better in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2, while Year 13 and college Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse.

Female students' understanding of HE benefits declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4, whereas male students and the students who selected "Other gender" increased.

White students' understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 was not as good as in Wave 2. Still, the students who identified themselves as "Mixed Ethnicity" or "Other ME" demonstrated a much better understanding of HE benefits in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.

The students with disabilities also showed a significantly better understanding of all the six aspects of HE benefits than their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey.

The mixed outcomes suggest that college Level 3 Year 1 students (will be Year 2 in the academic year 2022/23, and female students (especially White female students) might need interventions to enhance their understanding of HE benefits.

# 4. Perceived Sense of Belonging and Fit Within HE

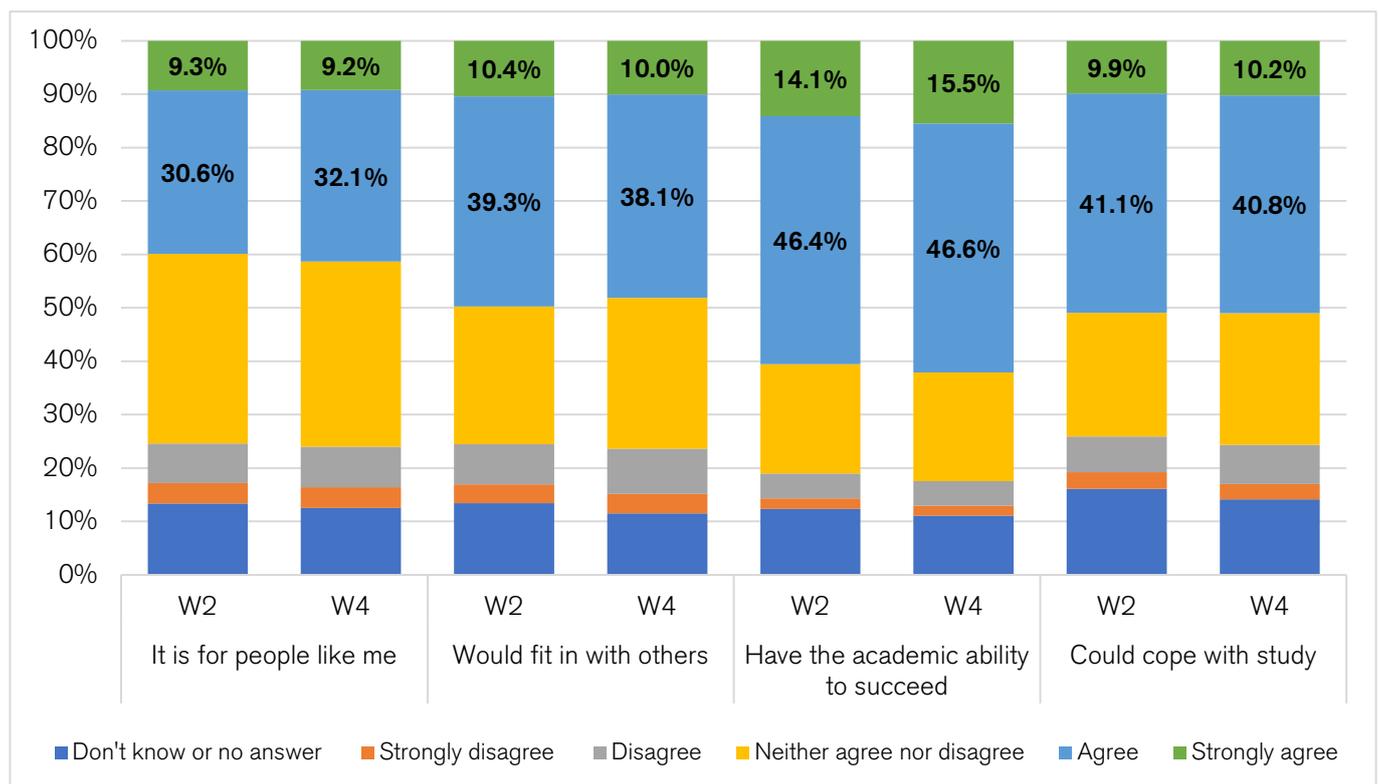
The students' rating their agreement with four statements in the learner survey reflects their perceived sense of belonging and fit with HE. The four statements include:

- 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.

Despite the disturbance caused by COVID-19 in the past two years, most of the students in the Wave 4 survey reported a positive sense of belonging and fit with HE.

Compared to the Wave 2 survey, a higher proportion of the students in the Wave 4 survey agree or strongly agree that HE “is for people like me”, they “have the academic ability to succeed”, and they “could cope with study”. However, the proportion of the students who agree or strongly agree with “would fit in with others” decreased in Wave 4 (48.1% vs 49.7% in Wave 2).

Figure 13 Students' sense of belonging and fit with HE in Wave 4 vs Wave 2



## **Students with booming perceived fit and confidence in HE life**

Not all the student groups demonstrate similar trends of the changes in the sense of belonging, perceived fit, and academic confidence from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 surveys. The groups with positive changes across all the four indicators include:

- College Level 3 Year 2 students
- Students with disabilities
- Students who did not disclose their ethnicity
- Non-White students who identified as “Other” or did not disclose their gender

However, apart from college Level 3 Year 2 students, the students in the other three groups were still significantly less confident in their “academic ability to succeed” and capacity to “cope with study” than all the respondents in Wave 4 surveys.

Proportionally fewer students with disabilities or Non-White students who identified as “Other” or did not disclose their gender strongly agreed or agreed that they “would fit in with others.”

Despite an increase from 25.4% to 35.2% for Non-White students who did not disclose their gender regarding HE “is for people like me” in the Wave 2 and the Wave 4 surveys, it is still lower than the respondents in the Wave 4 survey with the same level of sense of belonging at HE (41.4%).

For the Year 9, Year 10, and Year 11 students, the sense of belonging and academic confidence in the Wave 4 survey increased compared to in the Wave 2 survey, whereas there was no significant change in perceived fit in the two surveys.

More male students and White male students had a sense of belonging and a higher level of academic confidence in the Wave 4 survey than in the Wave 2 survey. The percentages of perceived fit decreased slightly from Wave 2 to Wave 4 but were still higher than that in all respondents in the Wave 4 survey (48.1%).

## **Students with dimming perceived fit and confidence in HE life**

Although a higher proportion of the following groups showed a sense of belonging, perceived fit in HE, and a good level of academic confidence than the respondents in both waves of surveys, the decrease from Wave 2 to Wave 4 in some indicators could be concerning.

These groups include:

- Year 12 students
- Black students
- Asian students
- Female students

The most concerning group of students are probably Asian students. All the four indicators of Asian students in Wave 4 are lower than in Wave 2. For Black students, three out of four indicators decreased. The only increase is the capacity to “cope with study”.

Year 12 students' sense of belonging, perceived fit in HE, and capacity to “cope with study” decreased from Wave 2 to Wave 4.

Despite a slight increase in “the academic ability to succeed”, female students' perceived fit in HE and capacity to “cope with study” in Wave 4 were not as good as in Wave 2. For White female students, the decrease in capacity to “cope with study” was more significant than for general female students. On the contrary, Non-White female students' academic confidence increased between the two waves but their sense of belonging and perceived fit in HE decreased more significantly than general female students.

## **Section summary**

Compared to the Wave 2 survey, more students in Wave 4 showed a sense of belonging to HE and academic confidence but fewer perceived fit with others.

College Level 3 Year 2 students in the Wave 4 survey showed a stronger sense of belonging, perceived fit, and academic confidence than those in Wave 2. For pre-16 students, the sense of belonging and academic confidence in the Wave 4 survey increased compared to in the Wave 2 survey, whereas there was no significant change in perceived fit in the two surveys. Year 12 students' sense of belonging, perceived fit in HE, and capacity to “cope with study” decreased from Wave 2 to Wave 4. It is worth noting that college Level 3 Year 1 students showed a different pattern of changes in the sense of belonging, perceived fit in HE, and capacity to “cope with study”. The sense of belonging indicator increased from 42% in Wave 2 to 47.1% in Wave 4, whereas perceived fit in HE and capacity to “cope with study” decreased significantly.

More male students had a sense of belonging and a higher level of academic confidence in the Wave 4 survey than in the Wave 2 survey. In contrast, female students' perceived fit in HE and capacity to “cope with the study” in Wave 4 were not as good as in Wave 2.

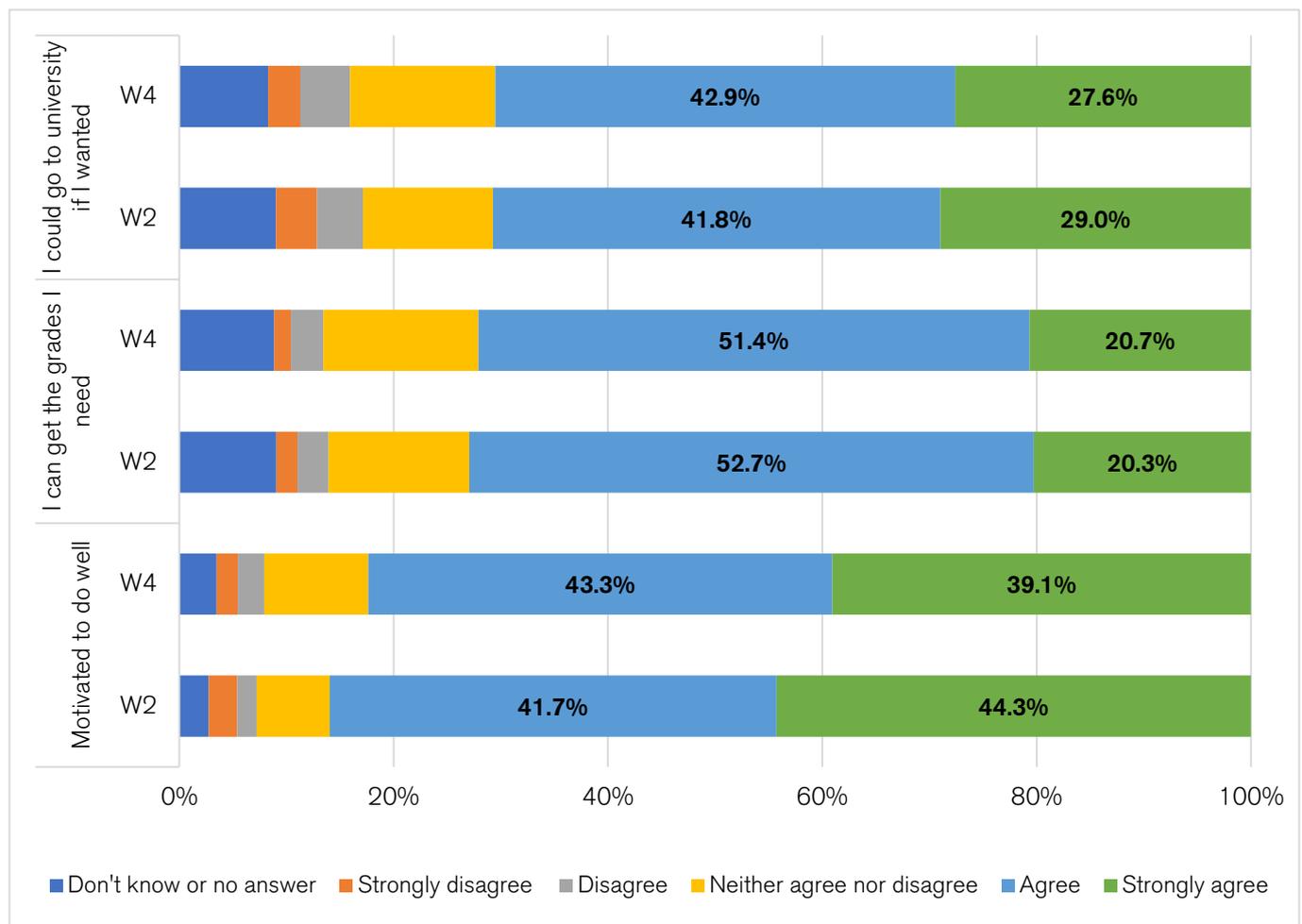
# 5. Academic Self-efficacy

Three statements in the learner survey measure the students' self-efficacy related to academic achievements. The students rated their agreement with each of the following statements:

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

Overall, the students who responded to the Wave 4 learner survey remained almost the same level of confidence in “I can get the grades I need” and “I could go to university if I wanted” as their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey. Although the proportion of the students who were “motivated to do well” decreased by 3.6% from Wave 2 to Wave 4, those who strongly agreed or agreed that they were motivated to do well were still the vast majority in Wave 4 (82.4%).

Figure 14 Students' academic self-efficacy in Wave 4 vs Wave 2



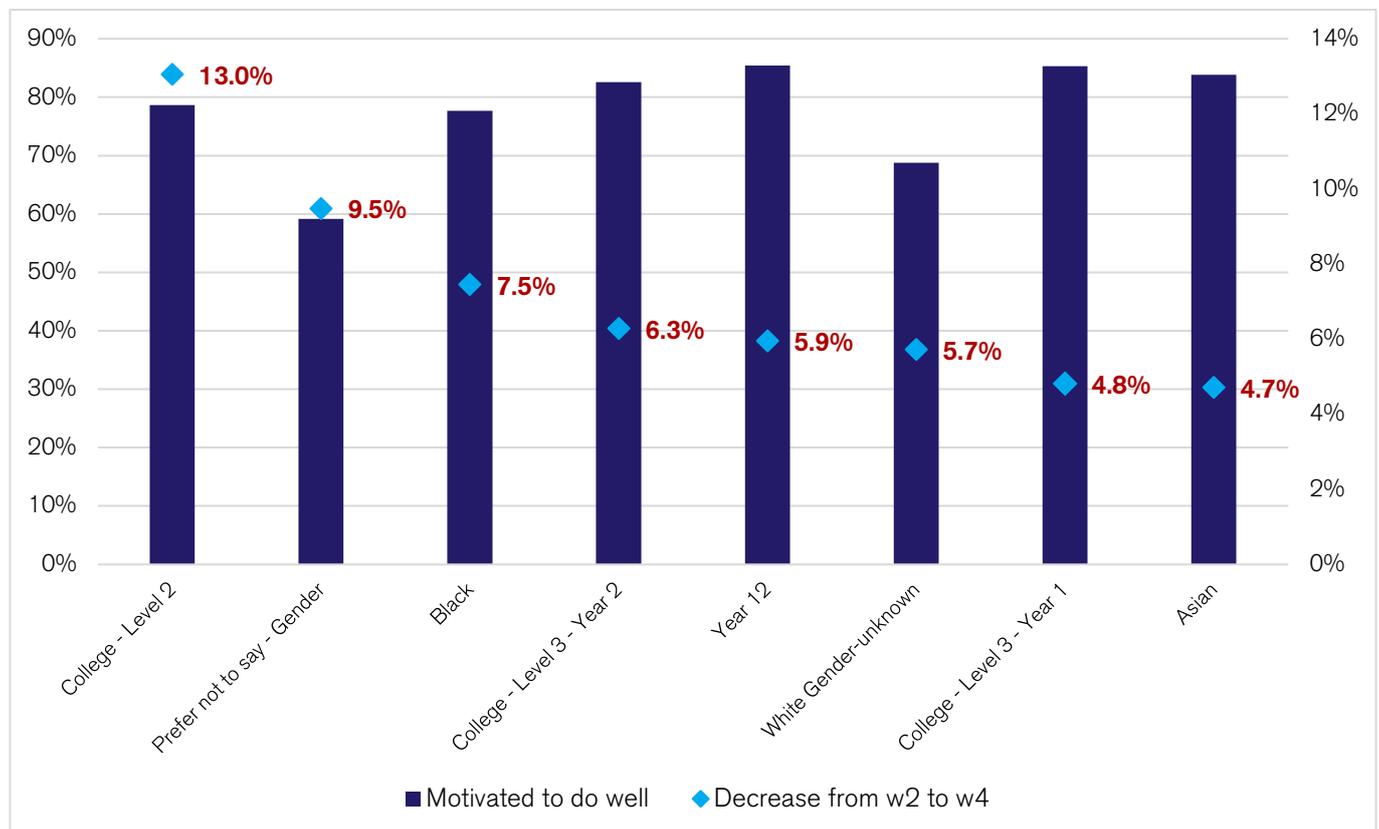
## The students who need to boost motivation

Overall, there was a 3.6% decrease in the students who reported being motivated to do well from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 surveys. The decrease is observed across most of the student groups. Even though two groups of students appeared to have an increase in motivation from Wave 2 to Wave 4, the proportion of the motivated students in the two groups was lower than that overall. Therefore, all students need interventions to boost their motivation to reach the level in Wave 2. Some student groups especially need more motivational interventions because the decrease in these groups is more substantial than the overall decrease rate.

Among the eight groups with a larger decrease from Wave 2 to Wave 4 demonstrated in the figure below, four showed an urgent need, according to the data, with a lower proportion of motivated students and a significant decrease. These groups include:

- College Level 2 students
- Black students
- The students who did not reveal their gender
- White students who identified as “Other” or did not disclosure their gender.

Figure 15 Student groups with decreased academic motivation from Wave 4 to Wave 2



## The students who need self-efficacy interventions

Despite a dip in motivation to do well, most student groups showed an increase in confidence in getting the needed grades and accessing HE. Four groups with significant decrease across two or three aspects of academic self-efficacy need interventions in academic motivation and confidence:

- Black students
- White female students
- College Level 2 students
- Year 12 students.

The figures highlighted in red in Table 7 mean that the percentages were lower than all students in the Wave 4 survey or substantially decreased from Wave 2. These figures indicate that each group of students needs different interventions to improve their academic self-efficacy. Take Black students as an example. Their motivation and confidence in grades and accessing HE appeared to decrease from Wave 2 to Wave 4. The decline in motivation to do well among Black students is especially a concern because the proportion of motivated students in Black students was below that of all students.

Table 7 Student groups with decreased self-efficacy from Wave 4 to Wave 2

	Motivated to do well		I can get the grades I need		I could go to university if I wanted	
	W4 (percent)	Decrease from W2	W4 (percent)	Decrease from W2	W4 (percent)	Decrease from W2
<b>Black</b>	77.7%	7.5%	75.8%	3.7%	75.0%	4.7%
<b>White Female</b>	86.0%	3.9%	71.5%	1.7%	73.4%	2.7%
<b>Year 12</b>	85.4%	5.9%	77.6%	0.7%	83.1%	2.0%
<b>College - Level 2</b>	78.7%	13.0%	73.3%	4.8%	68.0%	-13.6%
<b>All students</b>	82.4%	3.6%	72.1%	0.9%	70.5%	0.2%

## The narrowed gaps

The gaps between the students who claimed disability and those no-known disability was narrowed across all the three aspects of academic self-efficacy from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 survey. This trend also appeared between Non-UCP and UCP students.

Table 8 narrowed gaps in self-efficacy between student groups from Wave 2 to Wave 4

	Motivated to do well		I can get the grades I need		I could go to university if I wanted	
	Gap in W2	Gap in W4	Gap in W2	Gap in W4	Gap in W2	Gap in W4
UCP and Non UCP	1.1%	1.2%	3.7%	3.0%	5.1%	3.8%
With disabilities and No-known disabilities	9.9%	7.8%	13.0%	10.0%	15.0%	10.4%

## Section summary

A decline in motivation to do well from the Wave 2 to the Wave 4 survey appeared across many student groups. Some groups also showed a decline in the proportion of students who were confident in grades and accessing HE, for example, Black and White female students. The findings indicated that bespoke interventions would help some student groups to improve their academic self-efficacy.

There were also signs suggesting positive outcomes of the interventions in the past two years, largely overlapping with the COVID-19 pandemic. The self-efficacy gap between Non-UCP and UCP students and between students with disability and those with no-known disabilities narrowed according to the outcomes from Wave 2 and Wave 4 surveys.

# 6. COVID-19 Impact

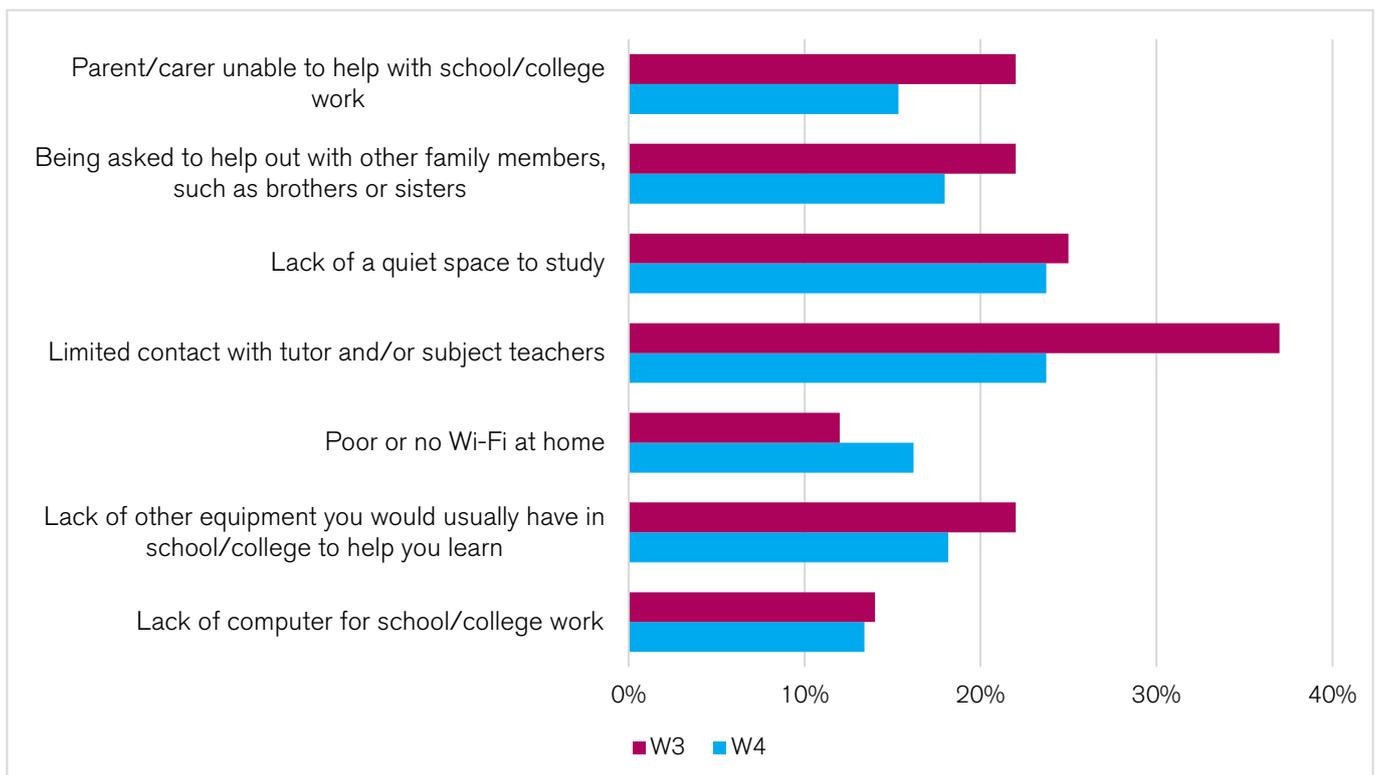
The Wave 4 survey includes the same questions exploring COVID-19's impact on the students' study and prospects in the future used in the Wave 3 survey:

- Whether COVID-19 influenced plans.
- Impact of COVID-19 on the likelihood of applying to HE.
- Where studied during lockdown.
- Difficulties studying from home.

According to the survey outcomes, COVID-19's impact on the students' study and prospects has been mitigated between the two surveys. Overall, 23.9% of students said that their decision about what to do next had been impacted by COVID-19 either "a great deal" or "to some extent", a 3% decrease compared to the Wave 3 survey.

The Wave 4 outcomes also indicated that COVID-19's impact on the students' decision about HE weakened in 2021. Two third of students (66.6%) did not think their decision had not been influenced by COVID-19, a near 6% increase from the Wave 3 survey. Additionally, fewer students reported difficulties for them to continue learning at home in Wave 4 than those in Wave 3 (figure).

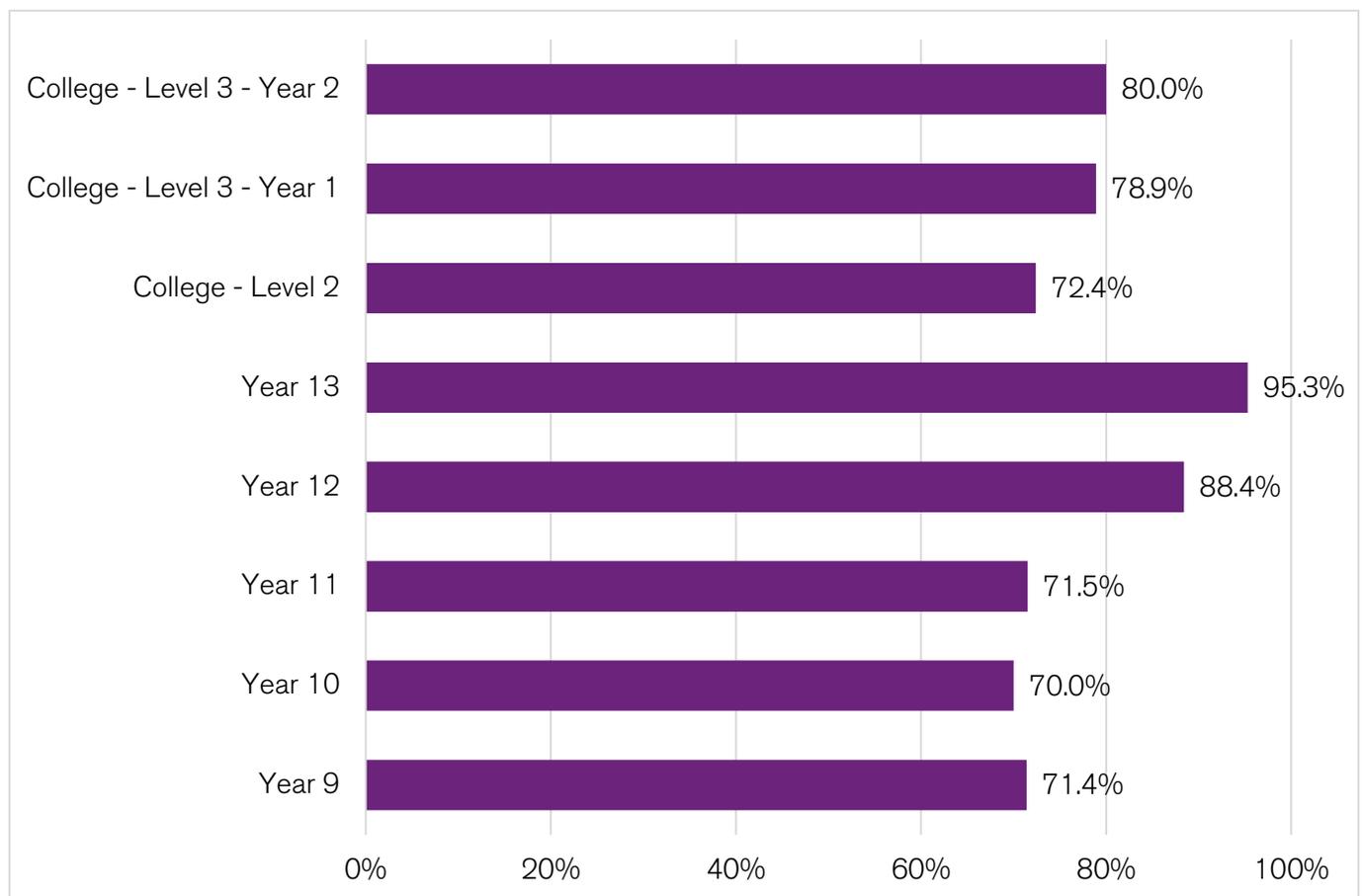
Figure 16 Difficulties in studying from home reported by students in the Wave 3 and the Wave 4 survey



## Impact on different students' likelihood of applying to HE

Nearly three quarters of the students (73.4%) reported their likelihood of applying to HE did not change or increase in the Wave 4 survey. The sixth form students were the least impacted by COVID-19 in terms of likelihood of applying to HE than the students in other year groups. College Level 3 students were less impacted than Level 2 and the pre-16 students.

Figure 17 Impact of COVID-19 on students' likelihood of applying to HE by year groups



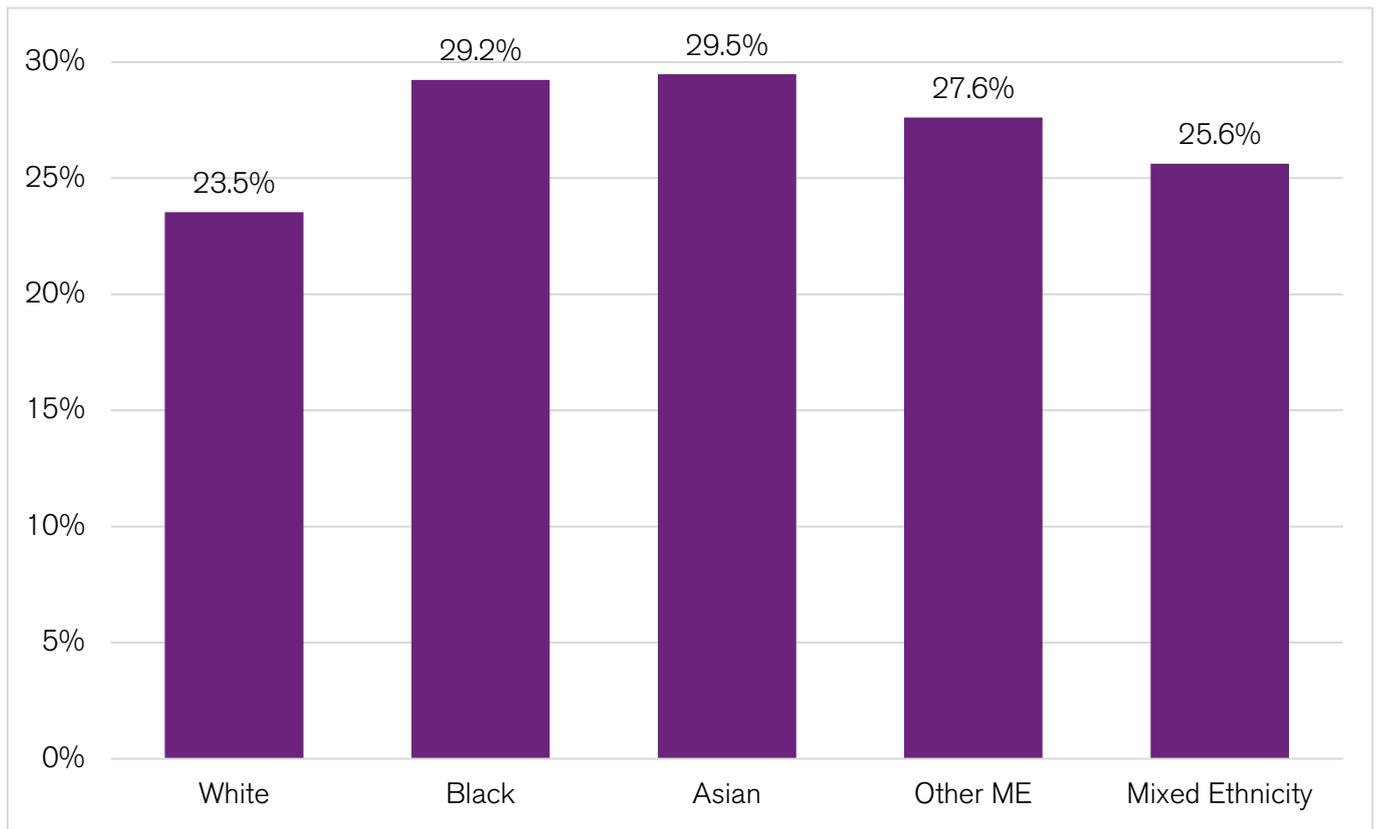
The ethnic minority student groups' HE prospects appeared to be affected more by COVID-19. More students in "Other ME", "Mixed Ethnicity", or who did not reveal their ethnicity reported they were "less likely" or "not sure" of applying to HE. So did those who selected the "Other" gender or did not reveal their gender. These students' likelihood of applying to HE ranged from 60.7% to 70.7%, significantly lower than all. The students who fell in the overlap of the above ethnicity and gender group, i.e. whose ethnicity was not White and whose gender was "Other" or "Prefer not to say", showed the least likelihood of applying to HE. Only 54.5% said they were "more likely" or "as likely as before" to apply to HE at age 18 or 19.

## Impact on different students' plan to do next

Nearly a quarter of students (23.9%) reported that COVID-19 influenced their decision about what to do next “a great deal” or “to some extent”. However, the difference observed in many student groups, among UCP and Non-UCP students, with or without disabilities, and different gender, ethnicity, and year groups were statistically significant. The implication means that the students’ decisions on continuous education could change.

A higher proportion of Non-UCP students’ decisions about what to do next was affected than UCP students (25.4% vs 22.6%). More students with disabilities were affected than those without known disabilities (26.6% vs 22.9%). Male students (20.5%) were less affected than female students (27.3%) or the students who selected the “Other” gender 33.1%). White students were less affected than Asian, Black, Mixed, and other minor ethnicities (figure).

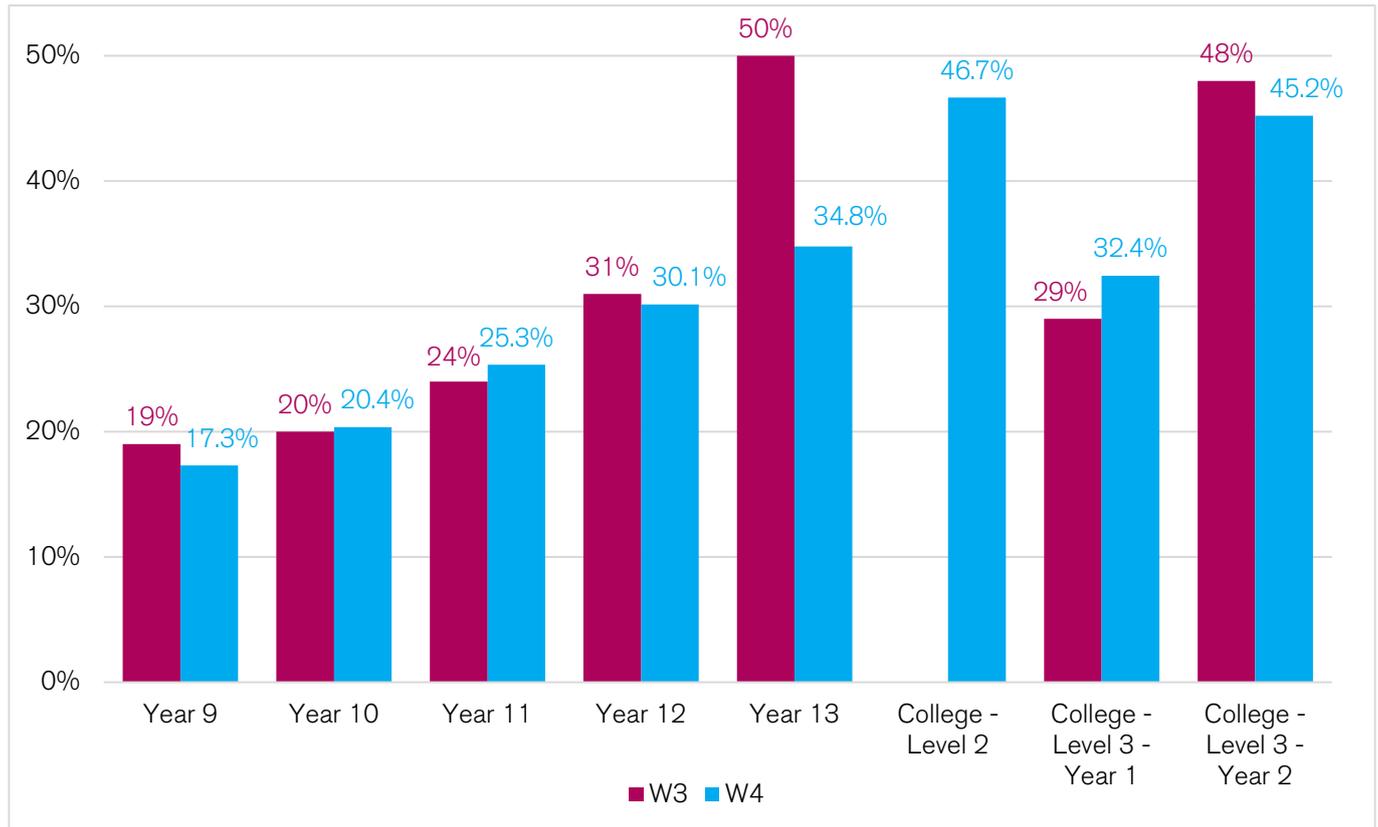
Figure 18 Impact of COVID-19 on students' decisions about what to do next by ethnicity



Although COVID-19’s impact on the final year sixth form or college students’ decision about what to do next was mitigated from the Wave 3 to the Wave 4 survey, it is less so for the students in other year groups. It is a concern that a higher proportion of Level 3 Year 1 college students reported that

COVID-19 affected their decisions about what to do next in Wave 4 than in the Wave 3 survey. As we have observed from Figure 2 in Chapter 1, Level 3 Year 1 college students in the Wave 4 survey were less likely to apply for HE at age 18 or 19 than their counterparts in Wave 2.

Figure 19 Impact of COVID-19 on students' decisions about what to do next by year groups



## Difficulties in studying from home

COVID-19's impact on the students' decision of what to do next strongly correlated to the difficulties they experienced in studying from home in the Wave 4 survey. The student groups with a high proportion of students reporting that COVID-19 affected their decisions of what to do next often proportionally reported more difficulties in studying from home, mostly in "limited contact with tutor and/or subject teachers", "lack of a quiet space to study", "being asked to help out with other family members, such as brothers or sisters", or "lack of other equipment you would usually have in school/college to help you learn". Post-16 students, female students, and the students who selected "Other" when asked their gender were the specific groups with the four types of difficulties.

Figure 20 Difficulties in studying from home reported more by post-16 students

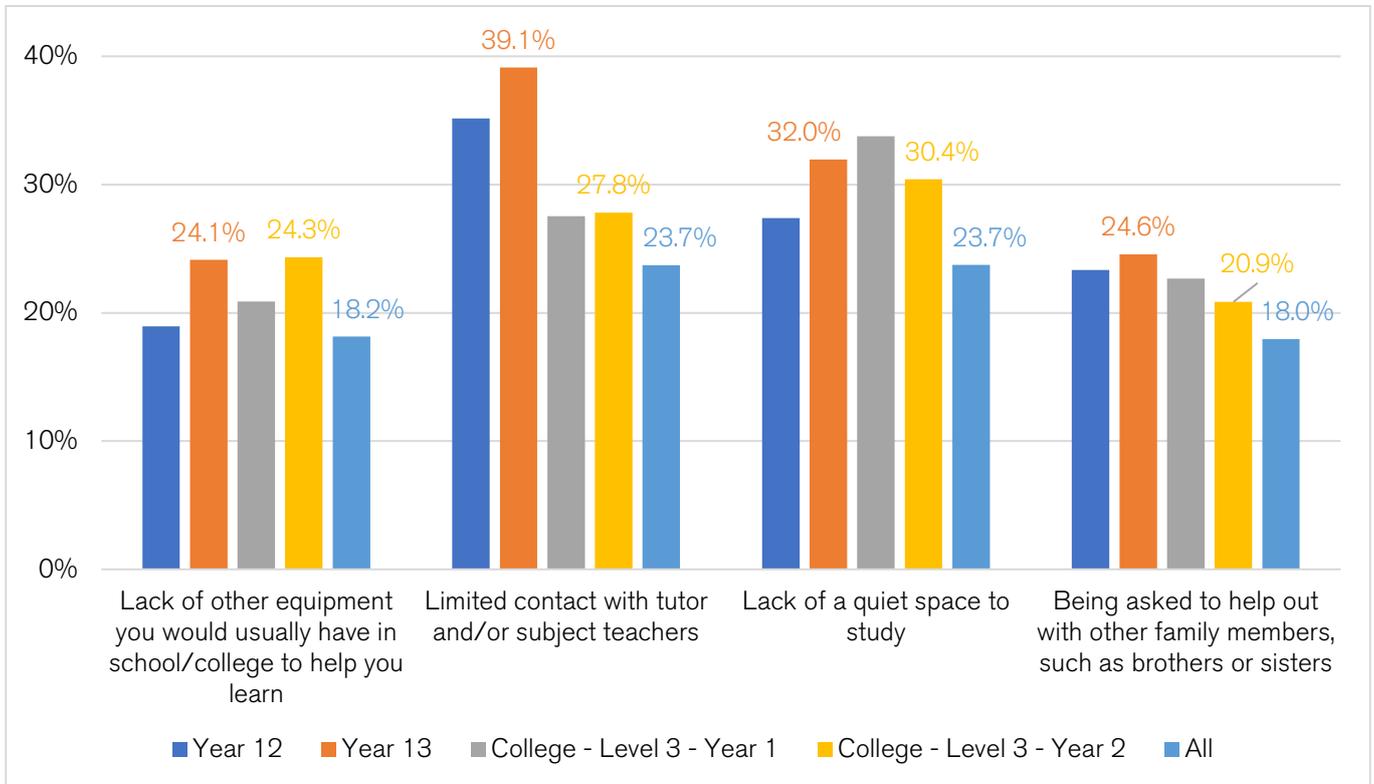
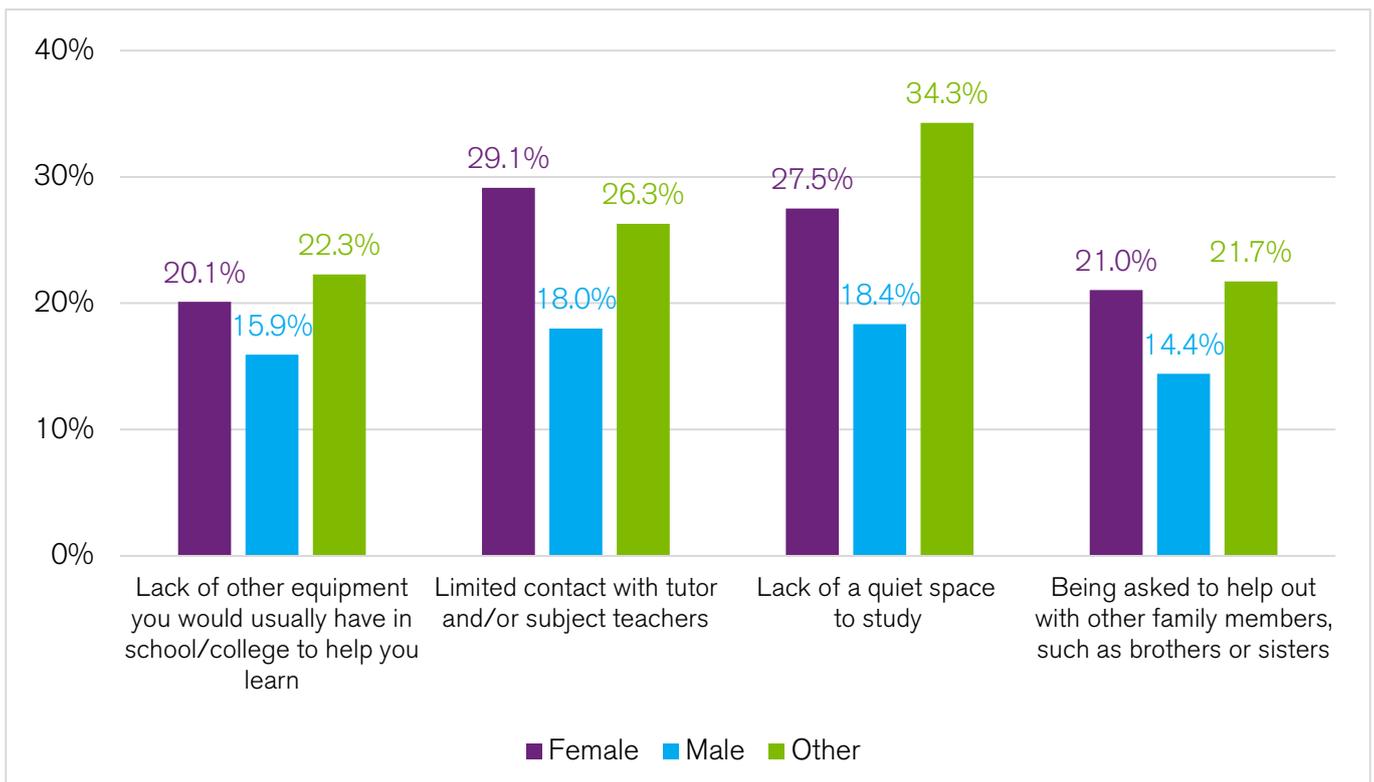
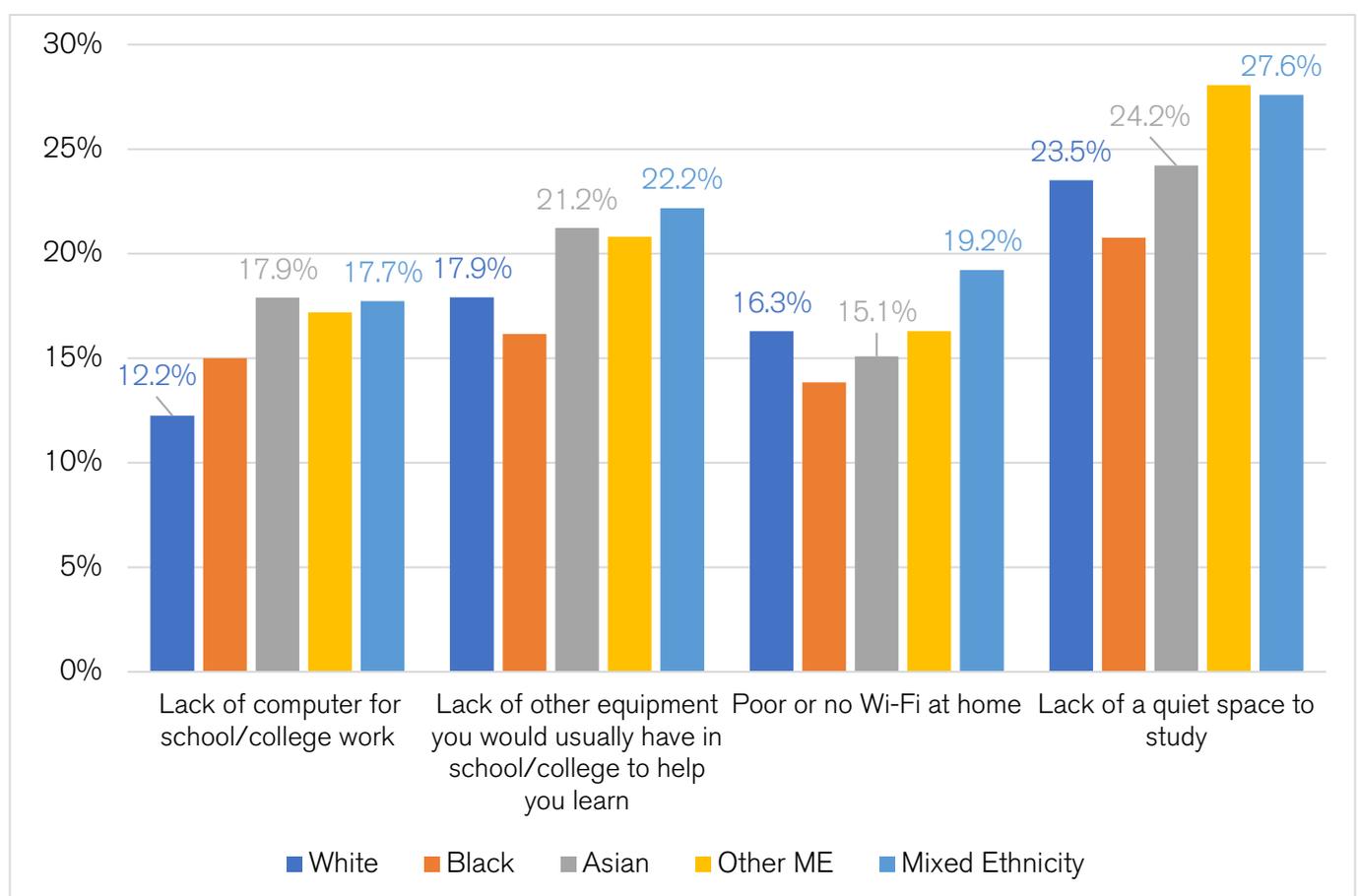


Figure 21 Difficulties in studying from home reported more by female and "Other" students



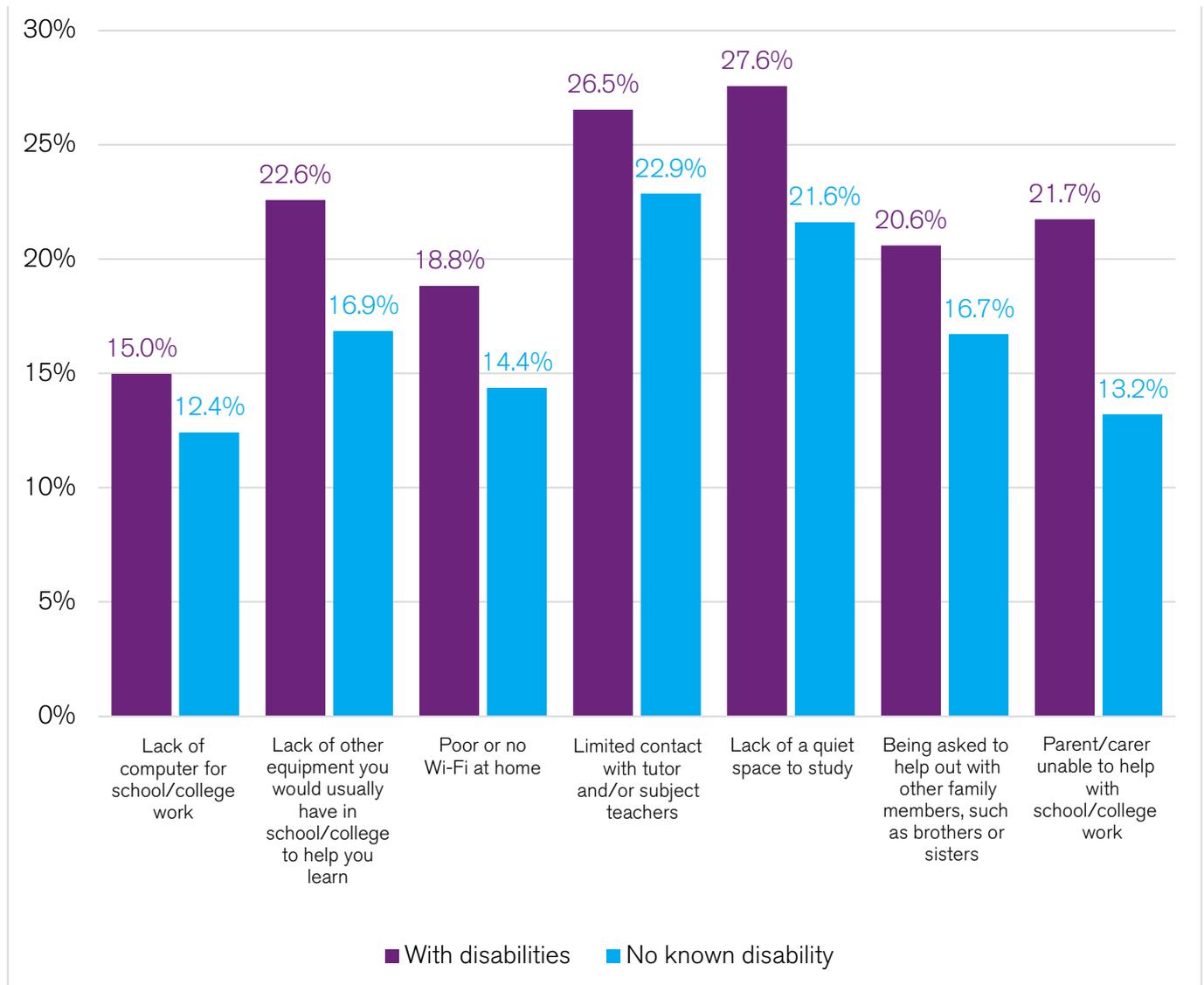
For Asian, Mixed, and Other ME students, the proportion who reported “lack of computer for school/college work” and “lack of other equipment you would usually have in school/college to help you learn” as difficulties in studying from home were statistically significantly higher than White students. Black students did not show a similar pattern to the other Non-white ethnic groups. The association between difficulties in studying from home and COVID-19’s impact on decisions about what to do next was not established for Black students.

Figure 22 Difficulties in studying from home reported more by Asian, Mixed, and Other ME students



A significantly higher proportion of students with disabilities experienced all the difficulties than the students with no known disabilities.

Figure 23 Difficulties in studying from home reported more by the students with disabilities



## Section summary

The comparison of the Wave 3 and the Wave 4 survey shows that COVID-19's impact on the students' study and plan to do next generally weakened in 2021. However, some student groups were affected less, whereas others were significantly more.

The sixth form students were the least impacted by COVID-19 in terms of likelihood of applying to HE than the students in other year groups. Compared to 95.3% of Year 13 students who reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was the same or more than before, only 70% of Year 10 students said so. The finding suggests that pre-16 students need more educational interventions to mitigate COVID-19's negative impact on their HE prospects.

Nearly a quarter of students reported that COVID-19 influenced their decision about what to do next. Significant differences were observed between student groups broken down by UCP/ Non-UCP, disability, gender, ethnicity, and year groups. Some have a positive association with their responses to what to do next, whereas others have a negative association. For post-16 Black and Asian students, COVID-19's impact might cause a significant proportion of them to choose other options instead of HE study. For pre-16 Asian, female, and Year 11 students, COVID-19's impact might cause a significant proportion of them to choose FE college over sixth form. On the other hand, COVID-19's impact could be a positive driver for some students' decision to continue education. As found in Chapter 1, a higher proportion of the students with one or more disabilities and the students in Mixed Ethnicity or Other Minority Ethnicity categories chose to study sixth form or FE college in Wave 4 than their counterparts did in the Wave 2 survey.

# 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

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This report systematically illustrated the five groups of learning outcomes used in the Wave 4 OfS Uni Connect Learner Survey and the comparisons between the students with the same characteristics in the Wave 2 and Wave 4 survey. The self-reported learning outcomes on HE knowledge, perceived HE benefits, sense of belonging and perceived fit with HE, and academic self-efficacy, albeit with limitations, are useful to identify which groups of students might need what kind of interventions.

As in previous surveys, Year 11 and Year 10 students responded less likely to apply for HE at 18 or 19 than those in other year groups. However, Year 11 students in the Wave 4 survey were more likely to apply to HE than those in Wave 2. They fared well on academic self-efficacy when compared to Year 10 students in the Wave 4 survey and their counterparts in the Wave 2 survey. The learning outcomes appeared to associate with the interventions in the academic year 20/21 and 21/22. The HEAT activity record showed that Year 11 students had substantially more interventions in attainment, confidence and resilience, and academic confidence than Year 10 students in 2021.

Another association between learning outcomes and the number of interventions lies in different year group students' HE knowledge. Year 10, Year 12, and college Level 3 Year 1 student fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2. In the HEAT activity record, Year 10 students participated fewer activities related to HE knowledge than the other pre-16 students, whereas Year 12 students were less than Year 13 students in 2021.

Some learning outcomes in the Wave 4 survey reflected the disturbance to face-to-face interventions caused by COVID-19. Fewer students in the Wave 4 survey reported that they knew "student life", "costs of study", "financial support", and "where to live" than those in the Wave 2 survey. Lacking campus visits or other interactive interventions with HE students, staff, and mentors affected all students, particularly UCP students who lacked social capital, to acquire these types of knowledge.

Some findings in the report align with ONS' COVID-19 statistics that some demographic groups with protected characteristics were hit worse during the pandemic with higher infection rates and unemployment rates. Female, Black, and Asian students in the Wave 4 Learner Survey also showed a decrease in the number of students who said they knew about HE knowledge in many aspects compared to their counterparts in Wave 2. White female and Black students also showed a decline in the proportion of students who were confident in grades and accessing HE.

The comparison of the Wave 3 and the Wave 4 survey shows that COVID-19's impact on the students' study and plan to do next generally weakened in 2021. However, some student groups were affected more than others. Compared to 95.3% of Year 13 students who reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was the same or more than before, only 70% of Year 10 students said so. For post-16,

Black and Asian students, COVID-19's impact might cause a significant proportion of them to choose other options instead of HE studies. For pre-16 Asian, female, and Year 11 students, COVID-19's impact might cause a significant proportion of them to choose FE college over sixth form.

Although it is impossible to separate HeppSY interventions' impact from COVID-19's, consistent findings across most learning outcomes in the Learner Survey suggest our interventions worked, especially for those who need support. Many gaps between the students with disabilities and those with no-known disabilities were narrowed or closed. Both male students and the students who identified as "Other" gender fared well on many learning outcomes in Wave 4 than in Wave 2, and the gaps between them narrowed in Wave 4 compared to Wave 2. Some gaps between "Other ME" or "Mixed Ethnicity" and White were also narrowed in Wave 4.

In another difficult year interrupted by COVID-19, HeppSY and partners collaborated closely to support the students. The learning outcomes in this report proved that HeppSY and partners' offers during the pandemic were impactful and deserved a celebration.

## Recommendations for practice

Based on the learning outcomes reported above, the following recommendations are made for HeppSY and partners to consider how to best support the students.

- If Year 10 students had not participated in enough activities since the Wave 4 survey point in this academic year, they would need more interventions to boost HE knowledge when they progress to Year 11 in the next year. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Fewer pre-16 students planned to study in sixth form, and more intended to study at a FE college in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - A higher proportion of Year 10 students reported that their likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19, and fewer knew about many aspects of HE knowledge in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- If Level 3 Year 1 students had not participated in the activities needed to improve their understanding of HE, they would need bespoke interventions as early as possible in the next academic year when they progress to Level 3 Year 2. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Level 3 Year 1 students' responses to what to do next showed that fewer plan to study HE courses in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
  - Level 3 Year 1 students fared worse across many aspects of HE knowledge, HE benefits and perceived fit in HE in the Wave 4 survey than their counterparts in Wave 2.

- Black students need bespoke interventions to boost HE knowledge, motivation, and academic self-efficacy. This recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Black and Asian students' likelihood of applying for HE was affected by COVID-19 negatively more than other ethnic groups.
  - Black students' motivation and academic self-efficacy declined from Wave 2 to Wave 4.
  - Fewer Black students said they knew about HE in Wave 4 than in Wave 2.
- Non-White males and White females might need bespoke interventions to reverse the negative changes from Wave 2 to Wave 4. HE Can, and SHE Can need to continue in the next academic year. The recommendation is based on the following evidence from the surveys:
  - Non-White male students fared worse with their likelihood to apply for HE and HE knowledge in Wave 4 than their counterparts in Wave 2.
  - Fewer White female students said they knew about HE and were confident in their grades and accessing HE.
- Supposing HeppSY partner universities want to attract local students to study locally, they need to consider the possible trend that more White students intended to study away from home in the post-pandemic era.

## Recommendations for evaluation

- "Nothing," "a little," and "a lot" options for the students to assess their HE knowledge level are not adequate to measure their real level of knowledge. The students from different cultural backgrounds could have a different understanding of "a little" and "a lot." A five-point Likert scale is recommended to improve the measurement.
- The current learner survey lacks tools to measure the students' skills relevant to the decision. Skill scales should be used to measure more intermediate learning outcomes.
- The motivation and self-efficacy scale in the current learner survey is one of the causal factors that contribute to the students' likelihood to apply for HE at the age of 18 or 19, according to a separate modelling exercise. However, the aspects of motivation and self-efficacy are not enough to cover these intermediate learning outcomes. The scale needs to be extended to reflect the interventions that HeppSY and partners delivered.

# Appendix A – Respondent Characteristics in W2 and W4

	Wave 2		Wave 4	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>UCP</b>	5774	47.2%	3481	49.2%
<b>Non UCP</b>	5860	47.9%	3141	44.4%
<b>Unknown</b>	612	5.0%	449	6.3%
<b>Year 9</b>	3260	26.6%	1971	27.9%
<b>Year 10</b>	2801	22.9%	1832	25.9%
<b>Year 11</b>	2192	17.9%	1661	23.5%
<b>Year 12</b>	1563	12.8%	617	8.7%
<b>Year 13</b>	978	8.0%	460	6.5%
<b>College - Level 2</b>	169	1.4%	75	1.1%
<b>College - Level 3 - Year 1</b>	761	6.2%	225	3.2%
<b>College - Level 3 - Year 2</b>	522	4.3%	230	3.3%
<b>With disabilities</b>	1493	12.2%	961	13.6%
<b>No-known disabilities</b>	7926	64.7%	4460	63.1%
<b>Prefer not to say</b>	1373	11.2%	926	13.1%
<b>Disability - Unknown</b>	1454	11.9%	724	10.2%
<b>Female</b>	5713	46.7%	3123	44.2%
<b>Male</b>	4601	37.6%	2839	40.1%
<b>Gender - Other</b>	208	1.7%	175	2.5%
<b>Gender - Prefer not to say</b>	268	2.2%	196	2.8%
<b>Gender - Unknown</b>	1456	11.9%	738	10.4%
<b>Ethnicity - Prefer not to say</b>	214	1.7%	172	2.4%

	Wave 2		Wave 4	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
<b>White</b>	8609	70.3%	4875	68.9%
<b>Black</b>	350	2.9%	260	3.7%
<b>Asian</b>	866	7.1%	570	8.1%
<b>Other ME</b>	370	3.0%	221	3.1%
<b>Mixed Ethnicity</b>	392	3.2%	203	2.9%
<b>Ethnicity - Unknown</b>	1445	11.8%	770	10.9%
<b>White Female</b>	4644	37.9%	2404	34.0%
<b>Non-White Female</b>	1043	8.5%	698	9.9%
<b>White Male</b>	3631	29.7%	2194	31.0%
<b>Non-White Male</b>	936	7.6%	613	8.7%
<b>White Gender-unknown</b>	286	2.3%	256	3.6%
<b>Non-White Gender-unknown</b>	181	1.5%	105	1.5%
<b>Unknown</b>	1525	12.5%	801	11.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>12246</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>7071</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## Appendix B – Activities Delivered Between W2 and W4

	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Post-Secondary	Unknown	Total
<b>Exhibition</b>					1		1	<b>2</b>
<b>General HE Information</b>	216	168	204	185	292	38	28	<b>1131</b>
<b>HE Campus Visit</b>		1	3				1	<b>5</b>
<b>HE Subject Insight</b>	72	62	2	27	9		22	<b>194</b>
<b>Mentoring</b>		18	29	17	153	25	6	<b>248</b>
<b>Non-Student</b>							28	<b>28</b>
<b>Other</b>	5	5	4	2	3	4	1	<b>24</b>
<b>Skills and Attainment</b>	26	28	9	12	16	1	16	<b>108</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>474</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>1740</b>

# Appendix C – Students Attended Activities Delivered in 2021 by Strands

	Times of activities	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Post-Secondary	Total
<b>HE knowledge</b>	0	5509	4036	5011	1706	1652	207	<b>18121</b>
	1	1794	1350	1817	810	1161	117	<b>7049</b>
	2 or more	38	680	71	183	446	16	<b>1434</b>
<b>Career Knowledge</b>	0	2612	3002	3156	1443	2471	293	<b>12977</b>
	1	3334	1983	2542	748	624	32	<b>9263</b>
	2 or more	1395	1081	1201	508	164	15	<b>4364</b>
<b>Attainment</b>	0	7080	5485	6016	2411	3103	331	<b>24426</b>
	1	211	448	719	261	116	9	<b>1764</b>
	2 or more	50	133	164	27	40	0	<b>414</b>
<b>Confidence and resilience</b>	0	6750	5690	5915	2443	3038	322	<b>24158</b>
	1	568	329	840	211	221	17	<b>2186</b>
	2 or more	23	47	144	45	0	1	<b>260</b>
<b>Academic confidence</b>	0	6906	5458	5854	2287	3114	329	<b>23948</b>
	1	434	436	913	391	77	6	<b>2257</b>
	2 or more	1	172	132	21	68	5	<b>399</b>



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