CITY STUDENTS' UNION

Term 2 Check-ins 2022

'A report on the experience of students during term 2 of the academic year 2021/2022.'

Term 2 Check-ins Report 2022

Executive Summary

The Student Check-ins project is a wellbeing and insight project delivered by City Students' Union (the Union). The project took place across February and March in term two of the 2021-22 academic year. The Union made 7022 calls to students and conducted 1549 check-ins with students, representing 7.8% of the City student population.

Students provided feedback on the 20/21 teaching and learning model to inform planning for 22/23. Exams and assessment were a key concern for students with many undertaking exams and others waiting for results during the period the calls were delivered. Industrial action, lack of opportunities to meet other students and concerns with online learning were key issues for students.

This report highlights the key headlines from the term 2 check-ins and recommendations to consider.

Headlines

1. Students want some aspects of online learning to remain as part of their programme going forward. Blended learning has provided students greater flexibility during their programme which has been particularly beneficial in terms of reducing travel costs, working alongside studying, socialising and supporting students with caring responsibilities.

2. A significant number (16.4%) of students stated they had not received any in person teaching by Term 2.

3. Online learning has resulted in some students not feeling a sense of community. Students highlighted that online learning meant they did not often come to campus and this had an impact on their sense of community and belonging.

4. Multiple aspects of online teaching could be altered to improve the academic experience. Students were frustrated by delays in having access to lecture recordings. Online teaching was often considered unengaging with students who had interactive sessions, activities e.g. quizzes or polls most engaged.

5. Exams and assessments were the most recurring student concern across the check-ins. Previously raised feedback such as clustered deadlines, insufficient feedback, and lack of support priori to assessments was raised frequently again by students.

6. City students' sense of community is growing. Students felt a greater sense of community at City in comparison to February 2021, however there is still a significant proportion of students who did not.

7. Students mostly felt supported at City however there is a large disparity between how supported students felt based on their school. Proactive and timely communication from both academic staff and City services more broadly were considered essential by students to ensuring they felt supported.

8. Final year students at City are growing in confidence in terms of securing a job or further study post-graduation. Student's confidence increased year on year from 2021 to 2022.

9. Industrial action and campus closures were a growing concern for students particularly regarding lost learning and a lack of access to facilities. Some students felt industrial action and campus closures impacted their sense of value for money as a City student.

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been set out by the Union as a result of findings from the Term 2 Check-ins 2022.

1. The University to adopt the proposed teaching and learning model for the academic year 2022-23. Actions should be put in place to address students concerns (engagement, community, and technology) raised in this report, and other Union reports, regarding online learning to improve the offer for the next academic year.

2. City to further investigate the proportion of students who are studying totally online.

3. City to communicate to students the teaching and learning model for next year and include the positive benefits of coming on to campus and in person teaching, particularly in terms of community.

4. Schools should aim to collaboratively coordinate with the Timetabling team to avoid inconsistencies in the length of teaching days across the span of multiple days.

5. Deliver more events and activities particularly targeted at fostering a sense of postgraduate community and belonging at City.

6. Schools should facilitate building communities within the student body by providing regular social events at course-level and across the wider School.

7. City, Schools and the Union to collaborate to deliver End of Term 3 social activity for students, particularly final year's post completion of dissertations and final assessments.

8. As recommended in the Union's Student Voice Report Term 1 and Term 2 2021/22 and Student Voice Report Term 1 2022, City should commit to removing clustered deadlines across modules for all courses and ensure better coordination between module leaders to set staggered deadlines.

9. City and the Union to collaborate to deliver pre-welcome check-in for students prior to the academic year 2022-23.

Overview

The Term 2 Check-ins took place over 10 days from 14th February - 9th March 2022. The Term 2 Check-ins build on the success of previous check-ins delivered during Welcome 2021 and February 2021. The project was delivered in person by a team of 18 trained student check-in callers. The aim of the project was to provide a wellbeing check-in for 1000+ students in term 2, gather insights into the student experience in term 2 and gather feedback on the proposed teaching and learning model.

7022 calls were made to students with 1549 check-ins completed with students. 33% of students picked up the phone when called, with 67% of students who following through to have a check-in.

When called by our check-in callers' students were guided through a range of topics based on feedback from the Welcome Check-ins and input from Union and City colleagues. The full question set can be found in Appendix 1. The topics covered in the term 2 check-ins were:
- Teaching and learning model
- Exams and assessments
- Student support
- Employability
- Community
- Student worries

The questions on the teaching and learning model were developed in collaboration with City colleagues. These questions were designed to gather feedback from students on the current teaching and learning model and inform planning for the next academic teaching year.

The survey was filled out to different levels of detail and styles by over 25 call handlers, which included student staff and Union staff. Therefore, there was a large fluctuation in the way the free text responses were filled out. As result of this, in places evidence from the call handlers has been used to provide further insights.

Students were emailed in advance telling them to expect a check-in call and giving them the option to opt out. Students were given the option to opt for an online version of the check-in rather than over the phone of which 40 were completed. These responses have been merged with the responses from the phone check-ins.

Demographics Breakdown

The majority of students who received a check-in were from SASS (24.9%) followed by SHS (22.1%), Bayes (20.8%), SMCSE (16.1%) and CLS (14.3%).

68.4% of students who received a check-in were home students, 24.1% were overseas students and 7.6% were European students. The proportion of overseas and European students contacted increased starkly from February 2021 where only 6% were European or overseas. This large increase is likely due to changes in providing international students multiple opportunities to receive a check-in through pre-booking, filling out the check-in online and receiving a call from a check-in caller.

% of check-ins by school

- SASS
- SHS
- CLS
- SMCSE
- Bayes
- LEAD

0.5%
20.8%
24.9%
16.1%
22.1%
14.3%
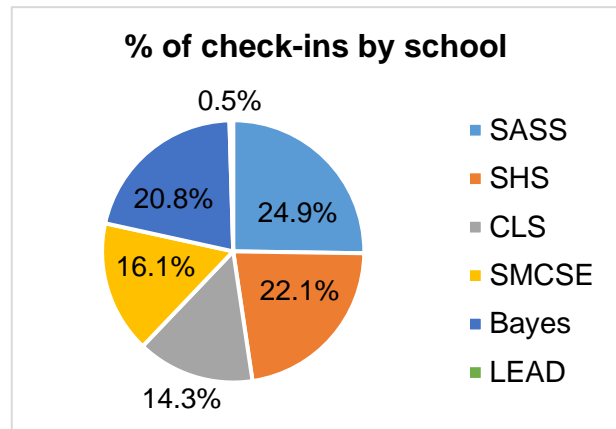
Of the 1549 students who received a check-in 63.7% were undergraduate (UG) students, 32.1% were postgraduate taught (PGT) students and 3.5% were postgraduate research.

29.4% of students who received a check-in were white, 29% were Asian, 15% were Black, 10.3% were Arab, 6.5% were mixed, 5% Chinese and 4.8% other.

7.7% of the students who received a check-in had disclosed a disability to City. Of those students that disclosed a disability 43% disclosed a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia and 33.9% disclosed a mental health condition.

Just under half (48.4%) of the students that received a check-in were in their first year of study at City, whilst 27.8% were in their second year of study and a further 18.4% in their third year of study.

Visualisations of demographic breakdowns can be found in Appendix 2.

Analysis

Teaching and learning model

84.6% of students stated they had in person teaching at some point this year.
A considerable proportion of students (15.4%) still had not received in person teaching this academic year.

While students highlighted positive aspects of online learning, a blended approach was the most favoured regardless of a students' current mode of learning. Feedback from students re-enforces the proposed teaching and learning model with notable caveats, most notably, improving the online learning provision.

Students who have not received in person teaching by school	Count	%
The Bayes Business School	63	27.6%
School of Mathematics, Computer Science and Engineering	46	20.2%
School of Health Sciences	41	18.0%
School of Art and Social Sciences	37	16.2%
The City Law School	33	14.5%
Other	8	3.5%

In-person learning produces a more highly engaged class and better interpersonal relationships. In person provided students with more opportunities to ask questions and engage further in the taught content. Students felt they had more productive relationships with their lecturers when in person. in person teaching also provided students with valuable opportunities to meet other students on their course.

Some students were incredibly positive about how online/blended learning enabled them to create a better university/life balance with more time to do coursework or other responsibilities (jobs, caring responsibilities.) Students were positive in regard to the flexibility that a blended approach offers. Students described incurring less travel expenses because of online teaching supporting them financially. Some students noted that the blended model enabled them to be involved in other aspects of the City community such as part time jobs or societies.

Of the 15.4% of students who stated they experienced no in person teaching 44% were positive about their experience because of the convenience and the ability to access resources if a class was missed. However, 27% of these students had a negative experience stating that poor internet access meant they were unable to attend class, classes were not always recorded and often not perceived as engaging.

While in-person learning is preferred, some students raised concerns about COVID in the classroom. COVID procedures were not always followed, and small classrooms can be difficult to socially distance in depending on the class size. There was confusion amongst some students about why some content is delivered in person or online. There was the perception that at time it is not the most suitable mode of delivery for the content. *"Still wary about COVID and coming in, in person. Lectures are compact and not always COVID safe." "Learning structures feel last minute and not appropriate.*

While students appreciate online material to refer to, the lectures are not always recorded and uploaded in a timely manner. Students also face technical difficulties such as sound issues that interfere with learning. Online lectures are often considered less engaging and this impacts on students' motivation. Students noted that online learning often made them feel disconnected from the City community and less engaged with the wider student population. *"Online has been really unengaging, tiring, and exhausting. Student is finding it really un-motivating."*

Students feel that the content in lectures does not always correlate with seminar discussions and assignments and lecturers rely too heavily on pre-recorded material. Students have faced conflicts in timetables between in-person and online classes. Students described frustration at attending campus for one or two hours of teaching a day. Some students described frustration at travel costs associated with attending campus for a minimal teaching time. Some students also struggle to access support via email or don't know where to go for help with classes. *"Assignments and coursework are confusing due to lack of guidance and support."*

Assessment and feedback

51% of students were positive with how their exams and studying had been. 10% of students had no exams or assessment and 6.2% were not concerned at all about their assessments. 6.4% of students were stressed about their assessments, 5.2% were worried about how their assessments had gone.

Students most frequent concern was regarding clustered deadlines, having deadlines for multiple assignments on the same day. Clustered deadlines was most frequently raised by SASS students and then SMCSE students. A number of students in Bayes raised that their deadlines were well spaced out and highlighted how this reduced assessment related pressure.

Students coded responses to "How are you feeling about exams and assessments?"

Poor quality feedback for assessments was the next most frequently raised concern by students in relation to exams. Students described feedback as vague and not constructive or enabling the student to improve. Students also described not feeling their grade correlated with the feedback provided.

Lack of preparation or support from lecturers before assessments was also frequently raised by students. Some students, most notably in SHS, described receiving little support from academic staff with a lack of past questions and mock papers as well as making the link between teaching content and assessments. Students raised the importance of receiving clear expectations from academics and for further support in meeting these expectations.

Other feedback raised highlighted some students were worried about harsh marking taking place and the impact this would have on outcomes, technical difficulties during online assessments and the potential impact and not having enough time to complete assessments.
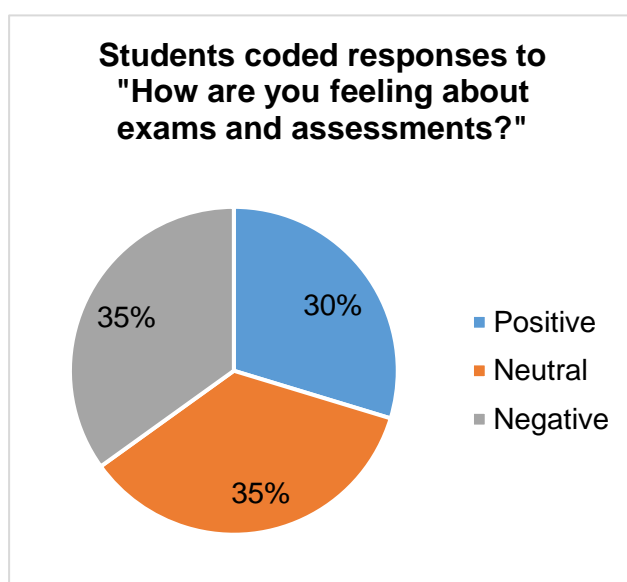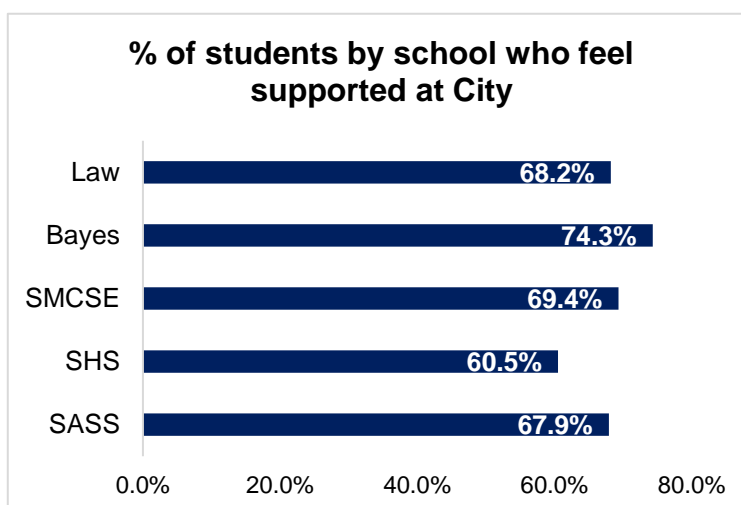
Support

70% of students felt supported at City. Only 6% of students did not feel supported. There was a significant disparity in the level of support felt by students across the different schools. Students in Bayes felt the most supported (74.3%) whilst students in SHS felt least supported (60.5%).

% of students by school who feel supported at City

School	%
Law	68.2%
Bayes	74.3%
SMCSE	69.4%
SHS	60.5%
SASS	67.9%

Students were asked during their check-ins why they felt supported or not supported. Students most frequently felt supported because their tutors and academic staff were responsive and supportive. Students strongly linked how supported they felt with the timeliness of communications from staff. This was most notable when students' personal tutors proactively contacted them, responded promptly to emails and were considered friendly and approachable.

Students praised timely communications from City for supporting them. Students also praised various areas of Student and Academic Services for supporting them with numerous students highlighting the impact of the Careers Service, City Buddies and City Cares. *"Personal tutor makes sure that the student has full access to learning and is always ready to reply to the student's queries."*

Similarly for students who did not feel supported the most frequent reason for this was due to academic/programme related staff being unresponsive through emails and difficult to contact. Undergraduate students in particular raised experiences of contacting lecturers or module leads through emails and not hearing back or having delayed response times. Some students also described how slow response times and poor communications from some wider university services left them feeling unsupported. *"Communication has been really bad and the response has been slow. It is hard to chase and find the correct person to contact."*

The impact of the industrial action was raised by students as leaving them feeling not supported. Students raised frustrations around the impact of lost learning and on campus teaching as a result of industrial action. Many students highlighted they wanted the University to provide more support for students who have been impacted by industrial action.

Community

67% of students felt a sense of community at City in comparison to 47% of students in the February 2021 check-ins. 24% of students did not feel part of a community.
The % of students from each school feeling a sense of community was between 65%-67% showing little variation.

Undergraduate, postgraduate taught (PGT) and postgraduate research (PGR) students all felt a similar level of sense of community. 70% of PGR students felt a sense of community in comparison to

only 63% of PGT.

Students who feel a sense of community are often those with friends on their programme and in their classes or involved in societies and student events. Students described how in person learning was more sociable and enabled them to create more friendships and connections. A large proportion of students also attributed their sense of community to events delivered by the Union and City. Student's sense of community also came from the support they received from staff. Feedback highlighted having strong supportive relationships with academic and professional staff was essential to students' sense of belonging. Students also highlighted that City's diverse and inclusive community enabled them to feel a sense of community.
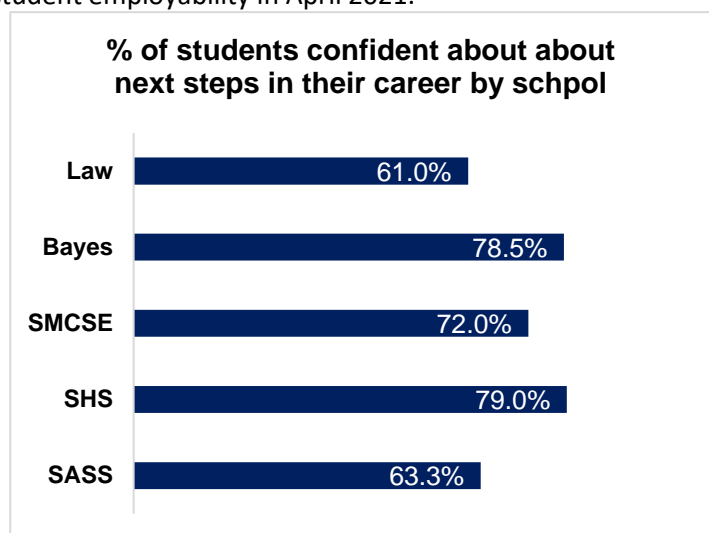
The most prominent reason students did not feel a sense of community is because their teaching was mostly or all online. Students who were not on campus very often because of this or for other reasons such as lack of motivation or travel costs also lacked a sense of community. Some students also stated their lack of a sense of community came from not attending many events. This was for a range of reasons such as a lack of events and also because they had little time in their schedule. There were a significant number of postgraduate taught students who highlighted their challenge of making friends on a master's programme.

When asked what activities and events students wanted to see more of at City the most common answers were careers fairs, closely followed by other careers events. Students also wanted to see more societies, games nights and evening events.

Employability

71% of final years felt confident about the steps they need to take to find a job of further study post-graduation, an increase of 14% from 2021. This suggests there is a growing confidence amongst final year students at City of the graduate job market. This is in contrast to the lack of confidence highlighted by the Union's research into City student employability in April 2021.

Final years in SHS (79%) were the most confident about the next steps they needed to take, closely followed by Bayes students (78.5%). Law students had the least number of students confident about their next steps. Notably, 15% of Law students were not confident or not confident at all about their next steps. In comparison in SHS, only 4.3% of students were not confident or not confident at all and in Bayes only 3.9% of students were not confident in their next steps.

% of students confident about about next steps in their career by schpol

School	%
Law	61.0%
Bayes	78.5%
SMCSE	72.0%
SHS	79.0%
SASS	63.3%

40% of all students we spoke to had used the careers service so far this year. The most common reason why students had not accessed the careers service was because they were too busy (27%) or didn't want to think about the future yet (15%). Some students noted that they did not need to use the careers service as they had careers modules embedded in their programme whilst other students had already secured a job.
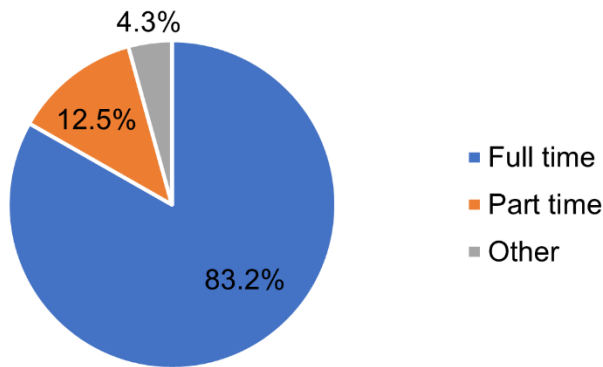
Student worries

Students were asked what their worries at the time were, with many students citing concerns previously raised in this report. 67% of students did not have any worries when asked. Exam and assessments worries were the most frequently raised concern with 10% of all students who received a check-in worried about their exams and assessments. Many students were worried awaiting exam result whilst others raised concerns regarding inadequate feedback.

The check-ins were delivered during periods of industrial action from City UCU and Unison. Industrial action was raised as an issue by 5% of students with the frequency of students rising strikes increasing as the project was delivered. Some students raised concerns regarding lost teaching and concerns that they would be assessed on teaching missed. A small proportion of students who raised strikes as issues were worried about getting value for money through their course as they were missing teaching time. Students also expressed frustrations regarding the closure of campus and moving teaching online as result. Students raised frustration at the disruption to their personal timetables when teaching was rescheduled due to industrial action and the impact that has on their jobs or caring responsibilities. Students frustrated at teaching moving online during university closure days often raised concerns previously regarding online teaching such as teaching not being engaging or persistent technical difficulties.

2.9% of students were worried as they were struggling with their course. 2% of students expressed their worries regarding the war in Ukraine. Students who raised the war in Ukraine were signposted towards the statement released by City and the support services included. 2% of students were concerned about finding a job post-graduation.

Appendix 1- Question set

This only includes the questions and does not include the bulk of the script or support services students were signposted towards dependent on the responses given by students.
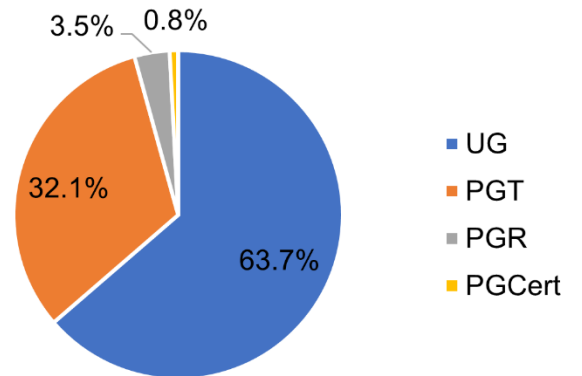
1. Is now a good time?

2. Is it okay to make a note of your responses?

3. Have you had in-person teaching this academic year?

    a. How are you finding the way your course is being delivered? (Prompts: How have you found online lectures? How have you found in person teaching? How have you found smaller group teaching? What worked well about it? How could it be improved?)

    b. How have you found your course being delivered online? (Prompts: How could it be improved? Was there anything you liked better online than when delivered in person? If so why?)

4. How are you feeling about your recent exams and assessments?

5. On a scale from 1-5, 1 being not at all supported and 5 being very supported, how supported would you say you feel at City, University of London?

    a. Why do you feel this way?

    b. Are you aware of support services available?

6. We know it is important for students to feel and connected and feel a sense of community at university. Would you say you feel part of a community at City this year?

    a. and why is that?

    b. What activities and events would you like to see more of at City?

7. Are you graduating this year?

    a. On a scale of 1-5, 1 being not confident and 5 being very confident, how confident do you feel about the steps you need to take to find a job / further study post-graduation?

    b. Why is that?

    c. Have you used the careers service?

    d. How has your experience been using the service?

8. Is there anything your worried about at the moment?

9. Is there anything else not covered that you'd like more help with or any other questions you have?
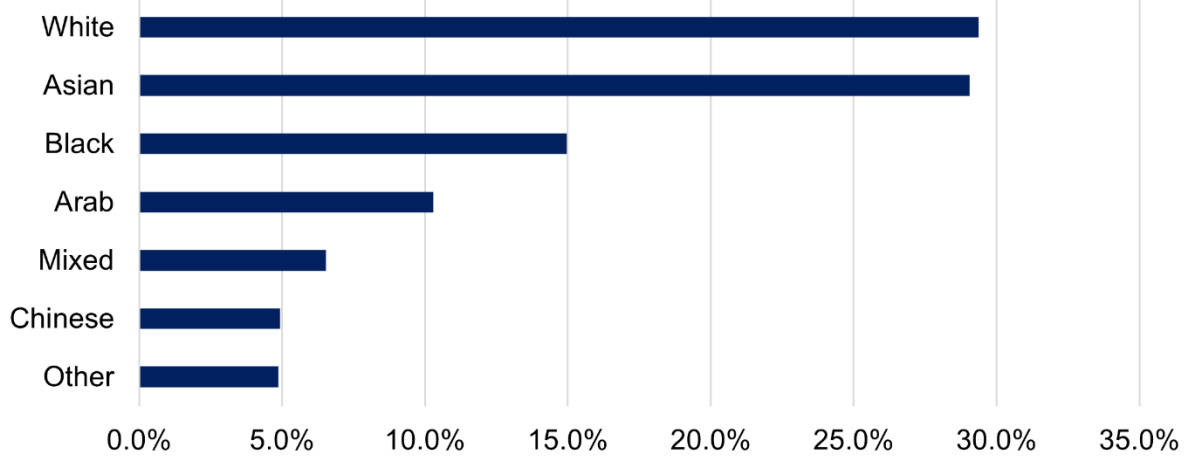
Appendix 2- Demographic breakdown
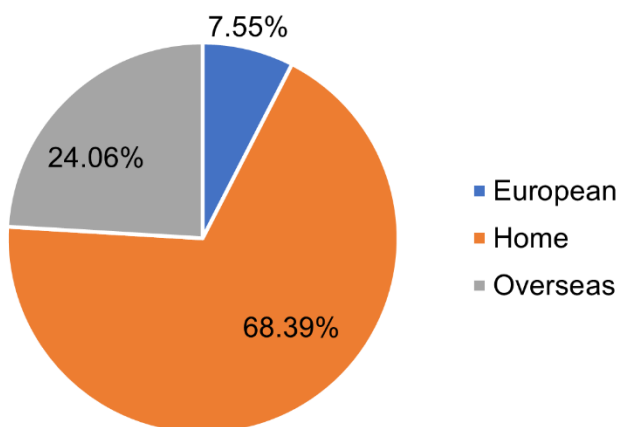
% of check-ins by mode of study

- Full time: 83.2%
- Part time: 12.5%
- Other: 4.3%

% of check-ins by student type

- UG: 63.7%
- PGT: 32.1%
- PGR: 3.5%
- PGCert: 0.8%

% of check-ins by ethnicity

Ethnicity	%
White	~29.5%
Asian	~29%
Black	~15%
Arab	~10.5%
Mixed	~6.5%
Chinese	~5%
Other	~5%

% of check-ins by fee status

- European: 7.55%
- Home: 68.39%
- Overseas: 24.06%

% of check-ins by disability status

- Disability disclosed: 7.7%
- No known disability: 92.3%

% of students with disasbility disclosued by status

Category	Percentage
Deaf or have hearing impairment	0.8%
Blind or have visual impairment	1.7%
Mobility difficulty or physical impairment	3.3%
Long standing illness such as cancer, epilepsy	8.3%
Two or more impairments or disabling conditions	9.1%
Mental health condition	33.9%
Specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia	43.0%