

On track

Evaluation

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Ian Gillan
West Forum Evaluator



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(1) Executive Summary

Transitions

73.8% of On Track participants surveyed made the transition from college to university to pursue degree study.

46.7% of these progressing students enrolled at Glasgow Caledonian University and 26.7% enrolled at University of Paisley.

Abertay University in Dundee accounted for as many university enrolments as Glasgow University, and more than RSAMD and Glasgow School of Art put together.

Less than a quarter of respondents said that On Track helped smooth the transition into university study. Interview and focus group findings were similar, with students reporting that On Track made things easier than they would have been otherwise, but that university was still a significant culture shock.

Decision making

49.2% of survey respondents intended to progress to university study when they first enrolled at college.

A striking 82.4% of students who did not intend to progress to university **did** in fact make this transition, as did 71.4% of those who were unsure, making them more likely to progress to university than those who intended to from the start.

50.8% of surveyed students said On Track did not influence their decision about going to university.

However, 22.2% of On Track students who ended up studying in an HEI said that On Track had positively **changed their mind in favour of university study** having originally planned not to make the transition.

Demystification of HE environment

57.4% of surveyed students agreed that On Track had provided them with an insight into what university involves.

Articulation

45.7% of On Track students in university study articulated into third year of their degree. This equates to 75% of HND students and 12.5% of HNC students. 86.7% of HND students enrolling at Glasgow Caledonian University gained direct entry to third year.

Influence of family

On Track students were marginally more likely to progress to an HEI if they *did not* have a family member with a degree.

Project delivery methods

Interview and focus group participants stressed the importance of matching mentors to the subject area of their students.

The On Track pack was widely praised, and participants were keen to retain the face-to-face contact with mentors in addition to the materials themselves.

Value of project

90.2% of respondents and all interview and focus group participants said they would recommend On Track to other students, although many argued that it would be of greater utility if targeted to HNC students or HND students at the start of the academic year.

(2) Synopsis

1) **Introduction**

This report is the first objective West Forum evaluation of the On Track project. The project has run from January 2002 and is funded until July 2008. On Track was initiated to address identified shortfalls in the academic skills possessed by students making the transition from Further Education Colleges to Higher Education Institutions and to prepare them for the 'culture shock' experienced when progressing from one sector to another.

2) **Methodology**

368 of the 428 students who participated in On Track 2004-05 were still contactable. 61 of these students (17.5%) responded to a questionnaire survey that asked them about the programme material and its impact on their learning paths and choices. More comprehensive tracking of the 2004-05 cohort was not possible this session. Questionnaire findings were augmented with data drawn from a focus group of three On Track participants and two one-to-one interviews. These discussions followed a semi-structured format.

3) **Key Findings**

Transitions

73.8% of On Track students surveyed made a successful transition from college to university to pursue degree study. 73.4% of these students enrolled at University of Paisley or Glasgow Caledonian University. Only 15.5% enrolled at selecting institutions.

Less than a quarter of respondents agreed that On Track helped them make a smooth transition to university life. However, 57.4% of surveyed students agreed that On Track provided them with an insight into what university involves. Interview and focus group participants suggested that On Track had helped them make a *smoother* transition than would otherwise have been the case, but that university still represented a significant 'culture shock' for them.

45.7% of On Track students articulated into third year of their degree, including 75% of HND students.

Observations: The vast majority of On Track students make a successful transition to study in an HEI, usually into second year (with an HNC) or third year (with an HND) at a recruiting institution. While project participants rarely describe the transition as a smooth one, one may reasonably conclude that their experience of On Track renders the experience far more manageable and less daunting than would have been the case without it.

Decision making

49.2% of survey respondents indicated that they had intended to progress to university study when they first enrolled at college, and 50.8% said that On Track had not influenced their decision to go to university or not.

82.4% of students who had not intended to progress to university study at the time of college enrolment *did* in fact ultimately make the transition to an HEI, as did 71.4% of those who had been undecided either way. Such students were in fact more likely to progress to university than those who had intended to go all along. Indeed, 22.2% of the On Track students now in HEI study said that participating in the programme had positively changed their minds in favour of university study, having originally planned not to make the transition.

Observations: Roughly half of On Track students come to the programme with their minds made up about university study, and so the influence that may be brought to bear on the decision making of such students is minimal. Since On Track participants are self-selecting this is to be expected. However, just under a quarter of participants report a conversion in favour of study as a consequence of attending On Track sessions, which represents a significant cohort.

Project delivery

90.2% of respondents and all interview and focus group participants agreed that they would recommend On Track to other students.

An argument was frequently heard to the effect that On Track would be of greater utility to HNC students and HND students at the start of their academic year, in order to raise awareness of the multiplicity of study options available and guide students through the application process at an early stage.

Interview and focus group participants emphasised the importance of matching mentors to the subject area of their students. Many students reported that they had appreciated the opportunity for face-to-face contact with undergraduate and postgraduate mentors.

The On Track pack was widely praised. Participants were asked to indicate the aspects of the course that had been of greatest benefit to them, and over half identified the study skills materials in the pack.

Observations: The structure of the On Track sessions (mentors going through the materials in the pack and answering questions face to face) met with approval from the 2004-05 cohort. It may be worthwhile to reflect on the timing of the sessions in the academic year, as some students argued that they would have preferred early guidance on the application process. This awareness raising/ decision making element must, of course, be balanced against the more pedagogic component of On Track which aims to equip transitional students with the skills necessary to cope with the distinct academic demands of university life and which may be of greater benefit nearer the time of progression.

4) Concluding observations

The proportion of On Track participants making the transition from Further Education Colleges to Higher Education Institutions reflects well on the project. Participants indicated that the project provided them with a valuable insight into the university ethos and the nature of HEI study. The transition between sectors was rendered much less daunting by the preparatory ground covered and the study skills gained in the On Track sessions.

The project had its deepest impact on the cohort of students who hadn't intended to pursue university study but who had changed their minds as a consequence of On Track participation. This represents an impressive outcome for the project, particularly in view of the self-selecting nature of the participating group.

Further evaluation work is ongoing for the 2005-06 and 2006-07 On Track cohorts in order to place the findings described in this report in comparative context. For the time being, the evaluator is of the view that the results of this phase of evaluation represent an encouraging performance baseline.

(3) Introduction

The On Track project was established in January 2002 by the West of Scotland Wider Access Forum in order to support students progressing from Further Education into Higher Education.

Research has indicated that many students making the transition between sectors experience difficulties in the HE institution to which they articulate (Gallacher, 2002). Students may experience the learning environment and teaching methods of their HEI as something of a culture shock. A 'skills gap' is reported between transferring and continuing students, with many students who articulate from college found to lack the note taking, critical thinking and research skills assumed of their peers (McLennan *et al*, 2000: 33).

The On Track project was initiated to address these issues. Groups of students about to make, or considering making the transition from FE to HE undertake a 10 hour study skills programme while still at college. This programme, delivered by an undergraduate and postgraduate HE student, aims to demystify the university experience, buttress the self confidence and aspirations of students and furnish them with the skills they need to flourish in their new learning environment.

A previous evaluation of On Track was carried out in August 2005 by the project director, Yvonne Wayne, as part of an MSc dissertation. It was agreed that, for ethical reasons, it would be inappropriate for the Forum to interfere with Ms. Wayne's study. Consequently, this report represents the first objective evaluation of the work of On Track by the West Forum.

The evaluator responsible for the On Track evaluation throughout its development stage left the West Forum before the results were finalised. As such, the author drew on inherited material for this evaluation report, and cannot claim the credit for the investigative work that underpins it.

Structure of the report

The evaluation methodology was determined by means of a series of meetings and an exchange of correspondence between the West Forum evaluator Sarah Hinks, the West Forum director Bernadette Sanderson and the On Track director Yvonne Wayne in the summer and autumn of 2005. It was envisaged that there would be four strands to this process:

- (a) a qualitative questionnaire survey of On Track participants;
- (b) a semi-structured focus group of On Track participants;
- (c) one-to-one interviews with On Track participants; and
- (d) comprehensive quantitative tracking of On Track participants beyond their FE college.

In practice, the fourth of these aims remains unfulfilled. The On Track director pursued the issue of tracking students with the Wider Access Co-ordinators at the associated HEIs. She established that the institutions could in principle provide this information as long as data protection requirements were satisfied and individuals

could be identified to carry out the work. Students then signed forms granting permission for On Track to track them through their HEI but the latter issue continued to represent a stumbling block. Tracking remains a live issue for the On Track steering groups, however, so progress may well be made in the future.

In the absence of a comprehensive tracking mechanism for On Track students, the present evaluation will be divided into two sections, the first dealing with the results of the questionnaire survey and the second outlining and assessing the content of the focus group and interviews. The main body of the evaluation will focus on data pertaining to the strategic aims of the West Forum and On Track, with additional evaluation of the practical workings of the project reserved to the appendices at the end. The questionnaire sent out to students and the interview/ focus group questions are also included in the evaluation as appendices.

(4) Qualitative Survey: Questionnaire Analysis

This section of the On Track evaluation will present and assess the results of a qualitative questionnaire survey sent out to all On Track participants for the session 2004-05.

This section is divided into nine elements. The first of these outlines the methodology followed and the sample surveyed in this piece of research. After that, the academic paths pursued by On Track participants is explored, followed by a section on their educational aspirations before and after taking part in the project. This is followed by detailed analysis of the role of On Track in shaping learners' choices. These analyses will address many of the strategic aims of both the West Forum and the On Track project itself. Those which have not been covered by this stage will be interrogated in the section that follows. Thereafter, the evaluation turns to consider the articulation routes on which On Track participants have travelled in their subsequent educational journeys, before looking at the influence of family members on learners' decisions. The penultimate section then explores the pre-college background of On Track participants, before the evaluation finally investigates the experience of those students who took part in the project but did not elect to pursue further study.

Survey data also informs the content of Appendices A, B and C, which give background data on the survey sample and assess the mechanics and content of the On Track sessions.

Methodology

A questionnaire was sent out on Friday, 7th July 2006 to students who had participated in the On Track project in session 2004-05. The questionnaire was intended to gauge the impact of the project on their aspirations and subsequent learning paths, and to establish how well different aspects of the project had functioned.

Included in the correspondence was a two-page questionnaire form, a letter explaining the purpose behind it, an invitation to students to participate in On Track in the future as a facilitator, and a stamped addressed envelope with which to return their completed questionnaires to the West Forum office. The questionnaire is included in the evaluation as Appendix D.

There were 428 students on the original list of students, from which 60 were removed due to duplication of details and some students being now untraceable. Of the remaining 368 students mailed, 20 students could not be reached due to changes of address. Therefore, **348 On Track students received questionnaires.**

One student requested a second questionnaire form, but when details were checked it was found that he or she had already returned his or her first form. The second completed questionnaire was disregarded. Answers given were identical in each so there was no concern about including the student's original responses in the sample.

Forms were returned steadily until September 1st 2006. No further forms have been received at the time of writing (19th September) so analysis will proceed on the basis of the questionnaires received by this date.

The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions, one of which was further divided into 6 sub-sections. 8 of the 18 questions were presented in a tick-box format, while the rest invited the student to provide his or her own answers. In the analysis that follows, the presentation of student responses to the latter type of questions has been simplified by grouping disparate replies under appropriate generic headings. This will be flagged up at every stage and more detailed elaboration on the answers volunteered by students will be given where it is deemed useful.

Sample analysis

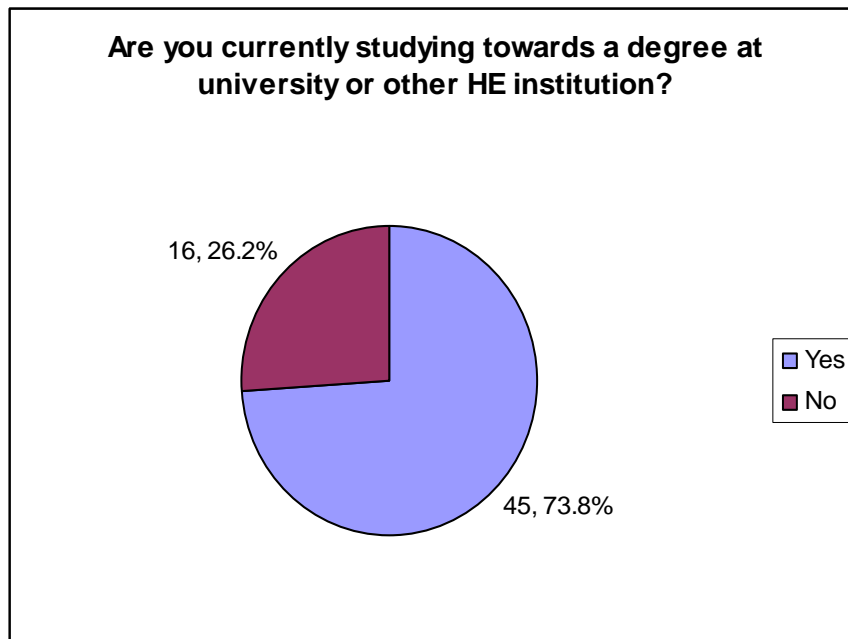
61 replies were received from the 348 students contacted, which equates to 17.5%. This is certainly a large enough cohort to generate meaningful results.

The gender breakdown of the sample is included in this report as Appendix A. The sample is also broken down according to college attended in Appendix B.

Academic path since On Track

Questions 4, 5 and 7 of the survey invited students to report on their academic progress since participating in On Track.

Question 4 of the survey asked students “**Are you currently studying towards a degree at university or other HE institution?**” Responses were as follows:



Response	Number of students	Percentage of returns
Yes	45	73.8%
No	16	26.2%

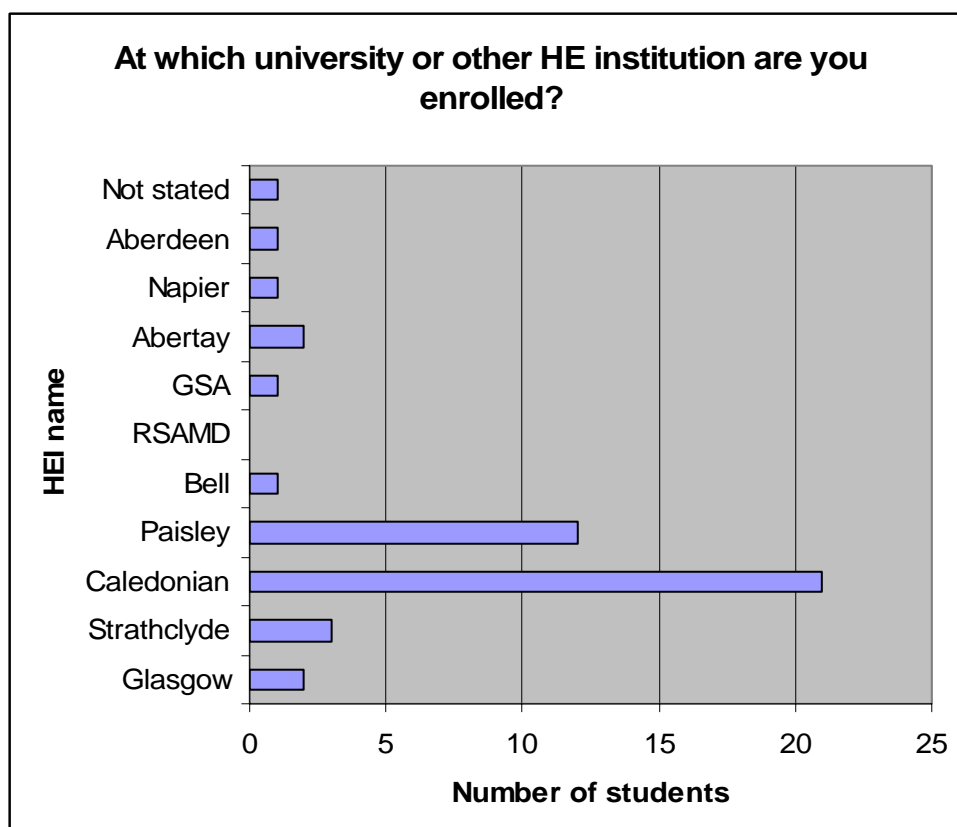
Clearly, students responding to the questionnaire indicated overwhelmingly that they were presently in Higher Education. Nearly three quarters of respondents indicated that this was the case (45 students; 73.8%). While not all participants responded to this survey we may still legitimately infer from this unambiguous result that a substantial majority of On Track students are being moved on to HE study.

The On Track project has been identified as contributing to the West Forum’s strategic objective of facilitating “progression of students from one programme of higher education to another with the maximum feasible credit transfer” by easing the transition from college to university. The findings from this section indicate that **the On Track Project has been successful in this endeavour.**

The next question related solely to those respondents who had progressed to HE study, so the sample pool is narrowed to 45.

Question 5 asked “Which university are you enrolled at?” The results can be seen in the table and graph that follow:

HEI name	No. of students	Proportion of HE students
Glasgow	2	4.4%
Strathclyde	3	6.7%
Caledonian	21	46.7%
Paisley	12	26.7%
Bell	1	2.2%
RSAMD	0	0.0%
Glasgow School of Art	1	2.2%
Abertay	2	4.4%
Napier	1	2.2%
Aberdeen	1	2.2%
Not stated	1	2.2%



As can be seen from the above table and graph, Caledonian University and University of Paisley account for the vast majority of progressing On Track students (33 of 45 students; 73.3%).

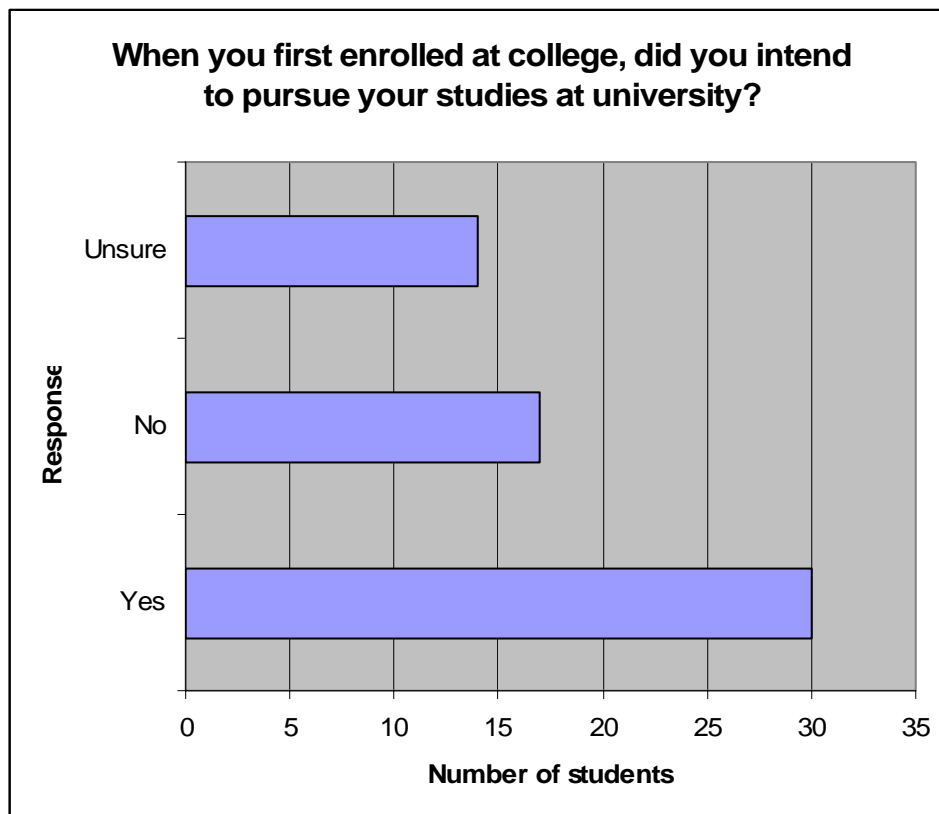
These HEIs understand themselves as recruiting institutions as opposed to selecting institutions, which perhaps helps explain this result. This is further backed up by the fact that Abertay University in Dundee accounts for as many On Track graduates as University of Glasgow (2 each) and more than Glasgow School of Art and RSAMD combined. One view may be that selective institutions represent a less attractive proposition to students emerging from the Further Education sector; alternatively the institutions themselves may be proving intractable barriers to widening access.

Observations and conclusions

The findings in this section permit the argument that On Track students are progressing to study in Higher Education Institutions in substantial numbers. That said, they are overwhelmingly represented in recruiting institutions, particularly Glasgow Caledonian University and University of Paisley.

Aspirational set of student cohort

Question 9 asked: “**When you first enrolled at college, did you intend to pursue your studies at university?**” Students were given three options, “yes”, “no”, and “unsure”. The results were as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Yes	30	49.2%
No	17	27.9%
Unsure	14	23.0%

The results show the students divided quite markedly, with roughly half of the students indicating a pre-college desire to progress to university, while an almost identical number indicated otherwise (30 answering yes; 31 not answering yes). A substantial minority of students (27.9%) indicated that, prior to college, they were actively opposed to the idea of studying at university. These figures are relevant to the West Forum’s GOALS project, which works to increase knowledge about and aspiration towards HE study among pupils from schools with low participation rates. It is fair to say that the picture painted by these figures is somewhat mixed.

More analytical material can be generated from these figures when they are compared with the actual destinations of the students involved.

Intended to progress?	Studying at HEI	Not studying at HEI
Yes	20	10
No	14	3
Unsure	10	4

(raw figures)

Intended to progress?	Studying at HEI	Not studying at HEI
Yes	66.7%	33.3%
No	82.4%	17.6%
Unsure	71.4%	28.6%

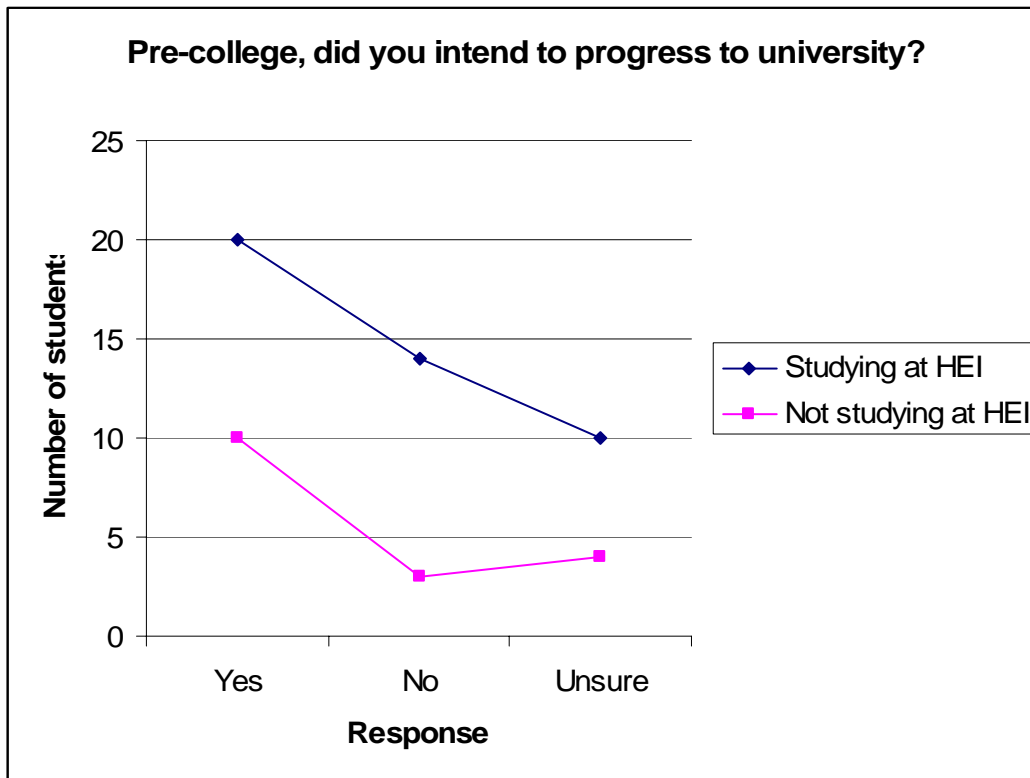
(percentages relate to subsection – read horizontally)

As may be seen from the above data, two thirds of the students who intended to progress to university when they enrolled at college did in fact succeed in this aim (20 students against 10 who are not in HE study).

More strikingly, perhaps, fourteen of the seventeen students who indicated that they *did not* want to progress to HE study in fact ended up enrolling at university. This equates to 82.4% of those students who previously displayed no interest in HE study.

With regard to those students who indicated that they had been unsure whether or not to progress to HE study at the time of college enrolment, an overwhelming majority were again found to have in fact made the next step into university level study. Ten out of fourteen students in this category were in HE study, which equates to 71.4% of ‘unsure’ respondents.

The following line graph plots these results:

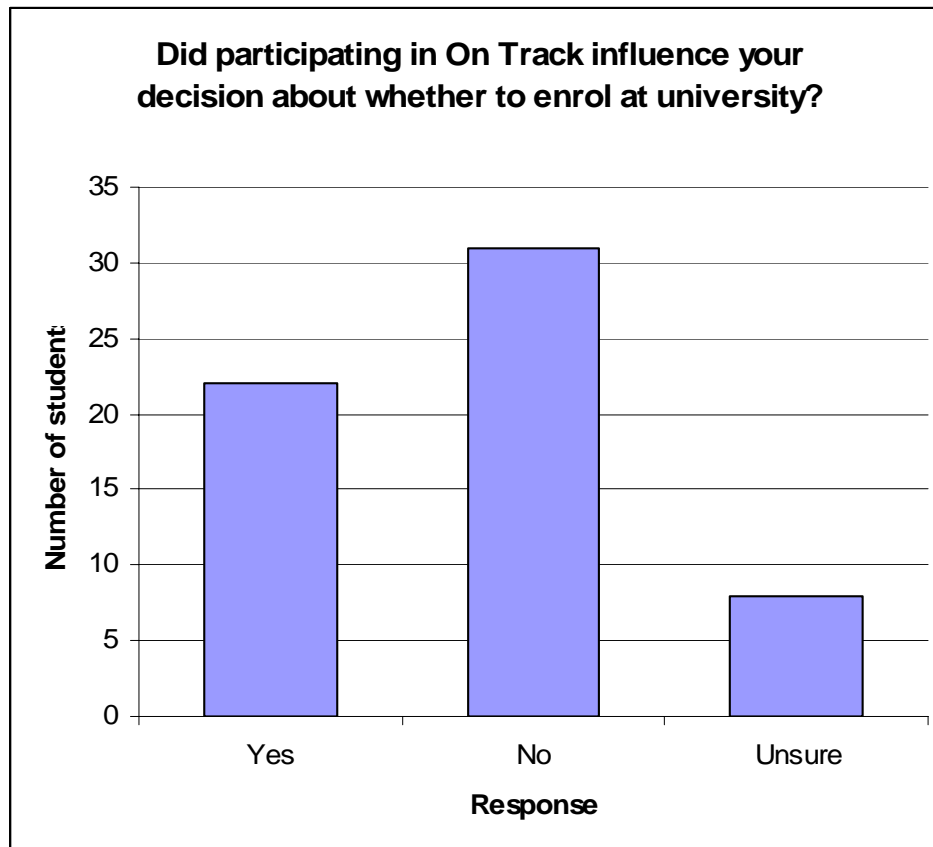


Summary and observations

The largest group of students were those who were presently in HE study having aimed to achieve this prior to FE study (20 out of 61 students; 32.8% of the sample). Nevertheless it is interesting to note that **students answering ‘no’ or ‘unsure’ to the question of whether they intended to progress to HE study were in fact *more likely to go to university than those who had such an aim in mind all along.*** 66.7% of those answering ‘yes’ did in fact progress to HE study, against 82.4% of the ‘no’s and 71.4% of those describing themselves as ‘unsure’. We may conclude that a substantial number of On Track participants changed their minds about attending university, opting in favour of HE study after all. We must assess the role of the project in affecting this change.

The role of On Track

The relative importance of On Track to the decisions students made about their learning paths, such as were discussed in the last section, may be assessed with regard to question 10 of the survey, which asked students: “**Did participating in On Track influence your decision about whether to enrol at university?**” The results were as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Yes	22	36.1%
No	31	50.8%
Unsure	8	13.1%

As can be seen from the above data, a majority of 31 students (50.8%) indicated that On Track had not influenced their decision about whether or not to enrol at university. A significant minority of 22 students (36.1%) indicated that participating in the project had contributed positively to their decision.

Taken as a whole, the On Track project may be viewed as failing in its stated aim of helping students “decide if Higher Education is the right option for (them) at the

present time”. However, closer analysis of the students’ responses uncovers a far more positive result.

The influence of On Track can be traced more usefully by taking a subsection of the sample in isolation. Of greatest analytic significance to our present purposes are those students who were identified in the previous section as having made the transition to HE study despite not intending to progress to university at the point of enrolment at college.

The following table charts the intentions of students at the start of their college course and their subsequent paths for all of those twenty two respondents who indicated that On Track had influenced their decision about whether or not to enrol at university.

	In HE study	Not in HE study
Intended to progress	7	2
Didn't intend to progress	6	0
Unsure whether to progress	4	3
Total	17	5

(All students in the table answered ‘yes’ to the question of whether On Track influenced their decision about whether or not to enrol at university)

Out of the total sample of sixty-one students, seventeen were at university and felt participating in On Track had contributed to this decision. Of these seventeen, seven were at university, had intended to progress to university and felt On Track had helped make this decision; six were at university, had *not* intended to make this progression and felt On Track had influenced their later decision; while the remaining four were at university, had been unsure about applying and felt On Track helped them choose to do so. Of the remaining 5 students who are not in HE study and indicated that On Track had helped them make this decision, three had been unsure about applying while two had previously been keen to do so.

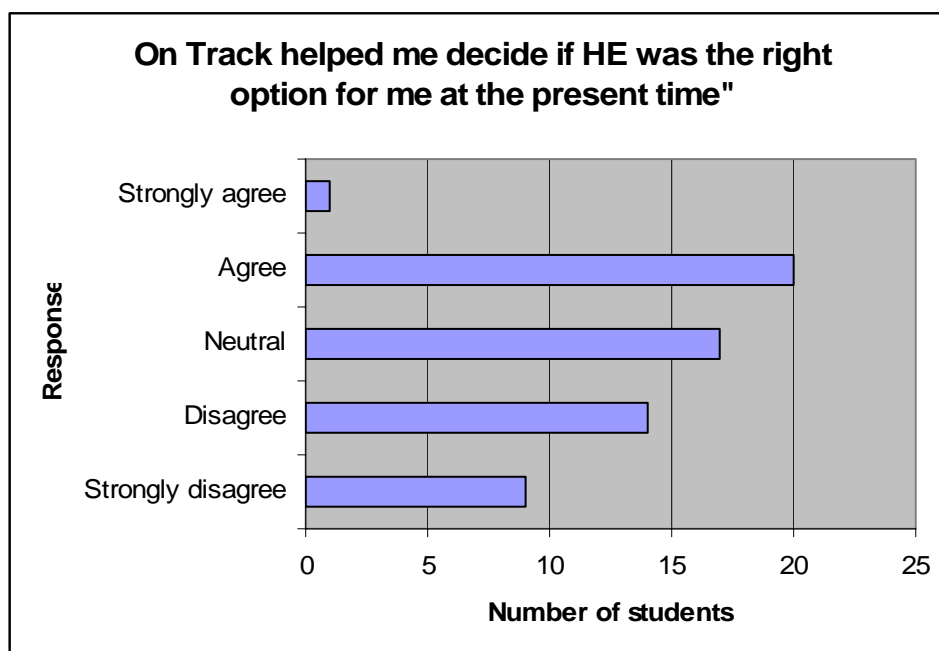
It may therefore be observed that **On Track positively helped twenty-two students make decisions for or against HE study (36.1% of the sample)**. Of these twenty-two, seventeen were helped to decide that they did indeed wish to apply (27.9% of the sample and 37.8% of the surveyed On Track students presently in university education). Breaking this figure down further, **ten students who were either unsure about applying to university or set against doing so ended up at an HEI and indicated that On Track had helped them make this choice (16.4% of the sample and 22.2% of the On Track students studying at higher education institutions)**.

Conclusion

While a majority of respondents indicated that participation in On Track had not influenced their decision about whether to apply to university, there was a substantial cohort of the sample for whom the On Track project not only persuaded them of the benefits of university study but actually changed their minds to be in favour of it.

The next question took the form of a statement to which participants were asked to indicate their degree of agreement. The possible answers were 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neutral', 'agree' and 'strongly disagree'.

The statement presented to students was as follows: “**On Track helped me decide if Higher Education was the right option for me at the present time.**” These were the results:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	1	1.6%
Agree	20	32.8%
Neutral	17	27.9%
Disagree	14	23.0%
Strongly disagree	9	14.8%

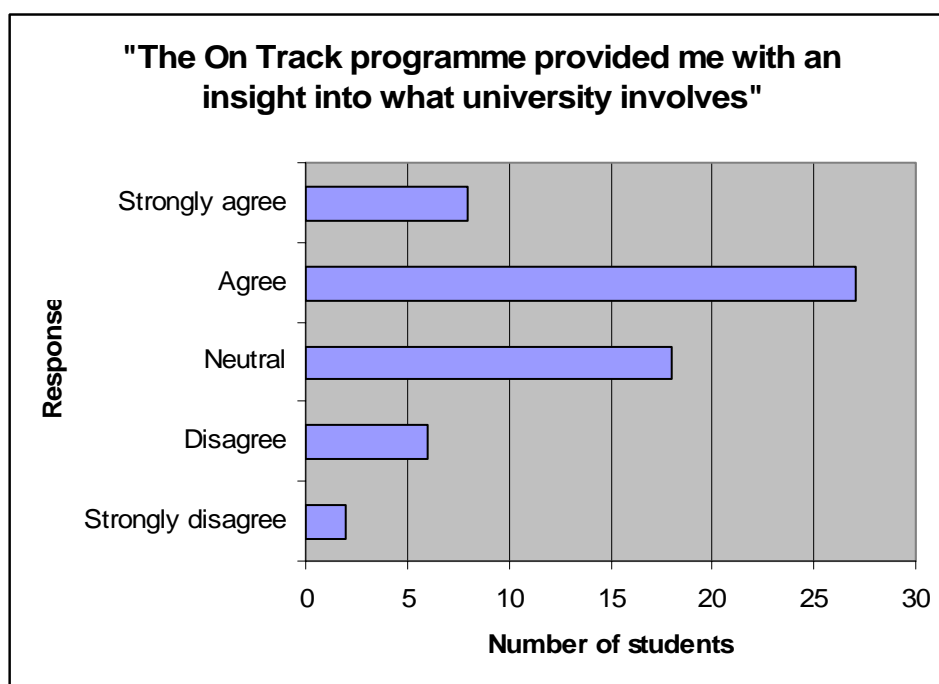
The most common response to this statement was 'agree', but agreement was far from overwhelming. **Disagreement or strong disagreement was in fact more likely than agreement or strong disagreement** (23 students; 37.7% against 21 students; 34.4%). A large minority remained neutral on the issue.

Conclusion and recommendation

The results of this section suggest that the project perhaps needs to build on its existing strengths in this area and improve in future in order to deliver on its stated strategic aim of helping “you decide if Higher Education is the right option for you at the present time”.

The results of the above question tally with the results of question ten (Did participating in On Track influence your decision about whether to enrol at university). This time, twenty one students registered positive agreement, whereas it was twenty in the previous instance. The students registering disagreement fell from twenty eight to twenty three, with the remainder expressing neutrality on the issue.

The next question followed the same format, this time based around the following statement: **“The On Track programme provided me with an insight into what university involves.”** This addresses directly the stated aim of the On Track project to “provide insight into what Higher Education involves”, and the responses were as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	8	13.1%
Agree	27	44.3%
Neutral	18	29.5%
Disagree	6	9.8%
Strongly disagree	2	3.3%

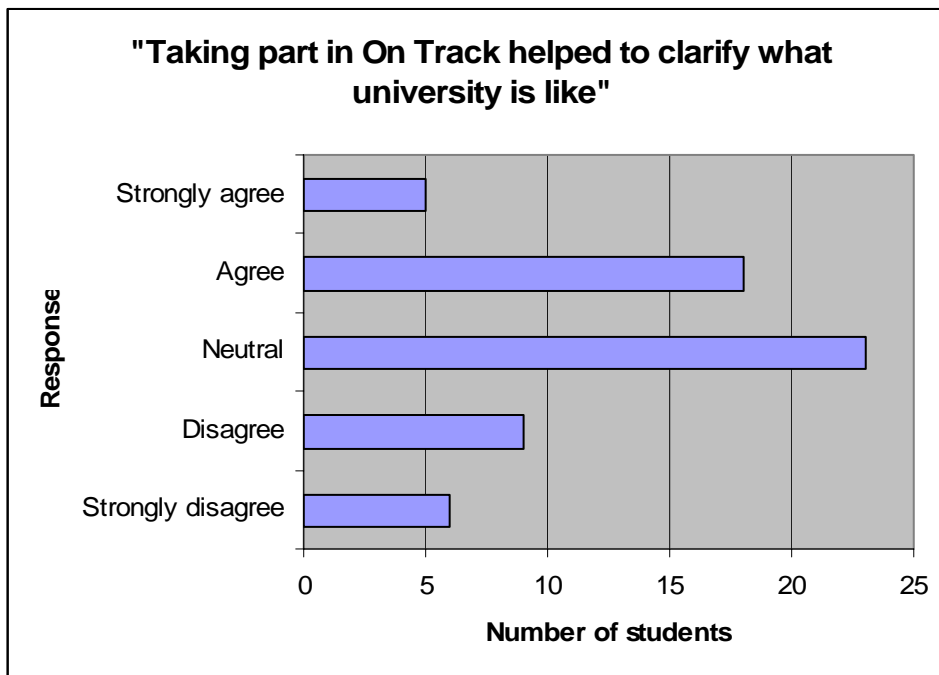
This enquiry got a very positive response from students, with **a clear majority agreeing moderately or strongly** (35 students; 57.4%) and a small minority registering disagreement with the statement (8 students; 13.1%).

Conclusion

The above result indicates that the project is succeeding in its aims in this strategic area.

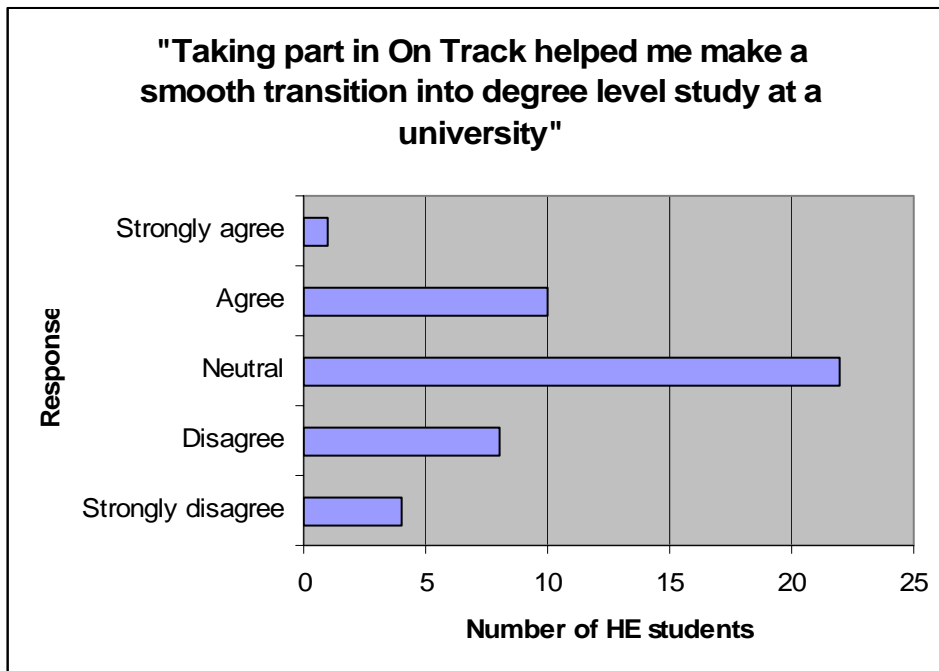
This conclusion is further supported by the response to a related question. This time the statement read: “**Taking part in On Track helped to clarify what university is like.**” The results were as follows:

Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	5	8.2%
Agree	18	29.5%
Neutral	23	37.7%
Disagree	9	14.8%
Strongly disagree	6	9.8%



Once again, the most common response to this statement was neutrality (23 students; 37.7%), but the students registering agreement or strong agreement add up to the same proportion of the sample. The remainder (15 students; 24.6%) expressed disagreement. Therefore, a quarter of students felt On Track had failed to clarify what university life is like, but over a third felt it had been successful in this aim.

The final statement in this section of our evaluation was as follows: “**Taking part in On Track helped me make a smooth transition into degree level study at a university.**” Again, this statement addresses directly another of On Track’s stated aims, this time to “help you make the smooth transition into degree study at a Higher Education Institution”. The evaluator deemed the responses of participants not in university study to be irrelevant to this analysis so the sample was narrowed to forty five. The responses are detailed below:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	1	2.2%
Agree	10	22.2%
Neutral	22	48.9%
Disagree	8	17.8%
Strongly disagree	4	8.9%

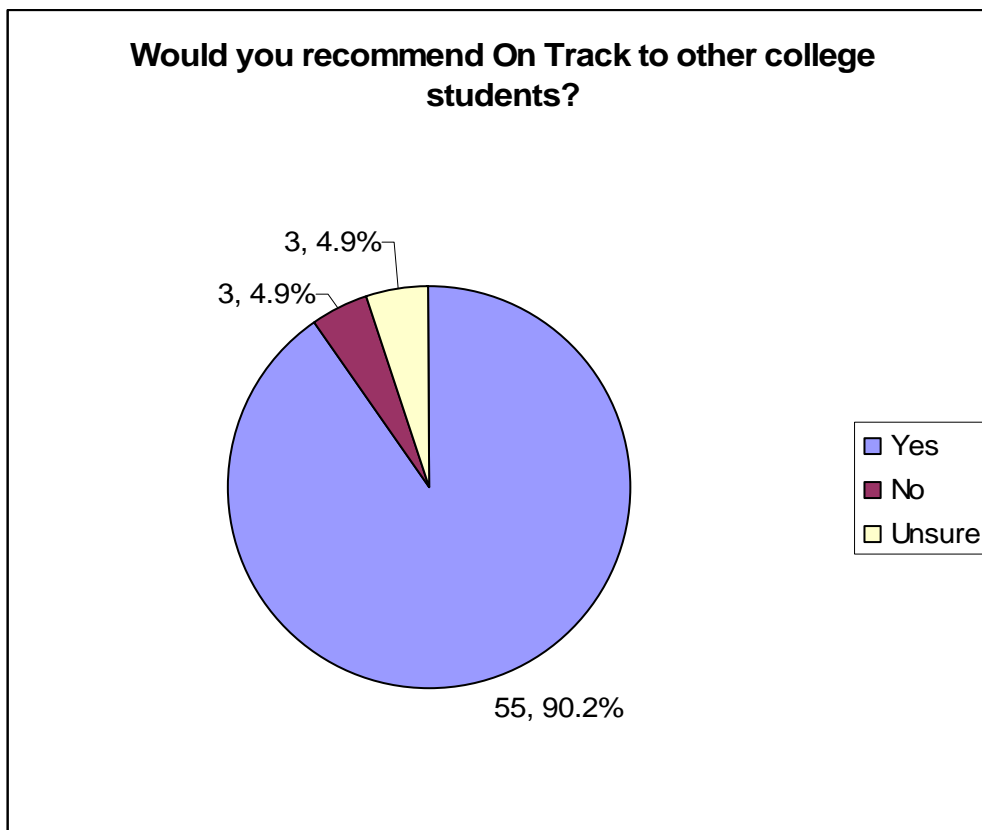
Eleven out of forty five respondents expressed agreement of some degree with the statement (24.4%), while twelve disagreed (26.7%). The remainder, almost half, were neutral on the issue.

Conclusions and recommendation

The picture is mixed at best, although the fact that less than a quarter of respondents indicated that On Track helped smooth their path to university suggests that the project perhaps needs to do more in future to deliver on this strategic aim.

Finally, for this section of our analysis, students were asked about the value of the project as a whole. Question fifteen asked “**Would you recommend participation in the On Track programme to other college students?**” Students were given three options in this case: ‘yes’, ‘no’ and ‘unsure’. The results were as follows:

Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Yes	55	90.2%
No	3	4.9%
Unsure	3	4.9%



Clearly, respondents were **overwhelmingly positive** about the idea of recommending On Track to other college students. Over 90% of the sample answered this question in the affirmative (55 students; 90.2%).

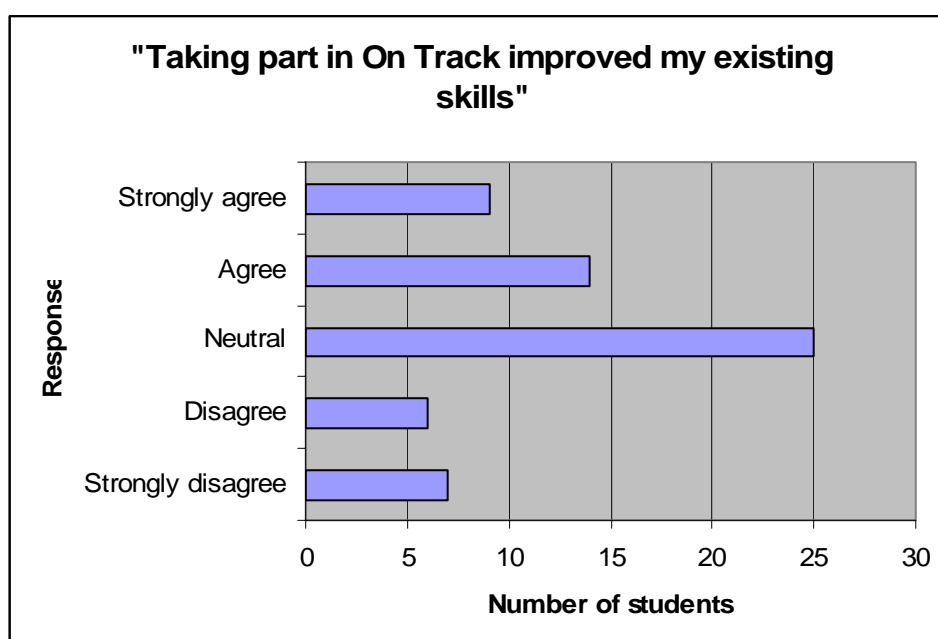
Conclusion

Such unambiguous approval of the project from participants must be considered in the light of other, more mixed responses to earlier questions, but clearly represents a strong argument in favour of the project’s continuance in some form or other.

Additional On Track aims

Students were asked for their thoughts on the view that: **“Taking part in On Track improved my existing skills.”** This addresses directly one of the project’s stated strategic aims: “Improve your existing skills”. It could also be read as addressing a further aim: “Equip you with additional skills”. The results were as follows:

Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	9	14.8%
Agree	14	23.0%
Neutral	25	41.0%
Disagree	6	9.8%
Strongly disagree	7	11.5%

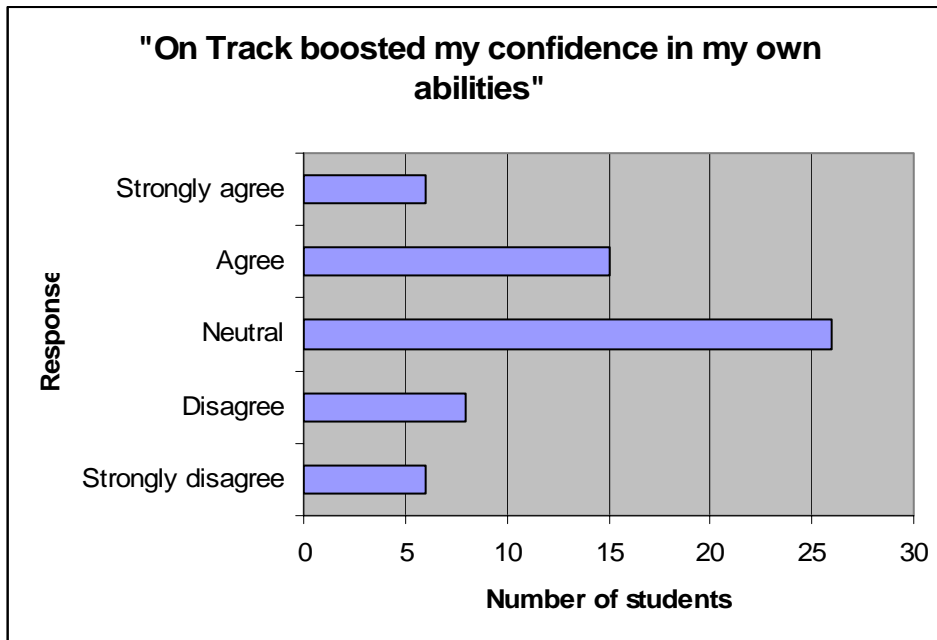


The most common response to this statement was neutrality (25 students; 41%). However, of those students who registered a positive response, agreement was much more likely than disagreement (23 students; 37.7% against 13 students; 21.3%). More than a third of respondents thought On Track had improved their skills, but more than three fifths were unwilling to make such a claim.

Conclusion

This is a mixed picture but represents good potential on which to build in future.

Students were then asked to respond to the statement: **“On Track boosted my confidence in my own abilities.”** This question addresses On Track’s aim to “Boost your confidence in your own abilities”. The response was as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Strongly agree	6	9.8%
Agree	15	24.6%
Neutral	26	42.6%
Disagree	8	13.1%
Strongly disagree	6	9.8%

The responses to this question were very similar to the previous one. Again, neutral responses were by far the most likely (26 students; 42.6%), while agreement was more likely than disagreement (21 students; 34.4% against 14 students; 23.0%). As above, then, slightly more than a third of respondents thought their confidence in their abilities had grown as a result of On Track, but nearly two thirds were unwilling to make such a claim.

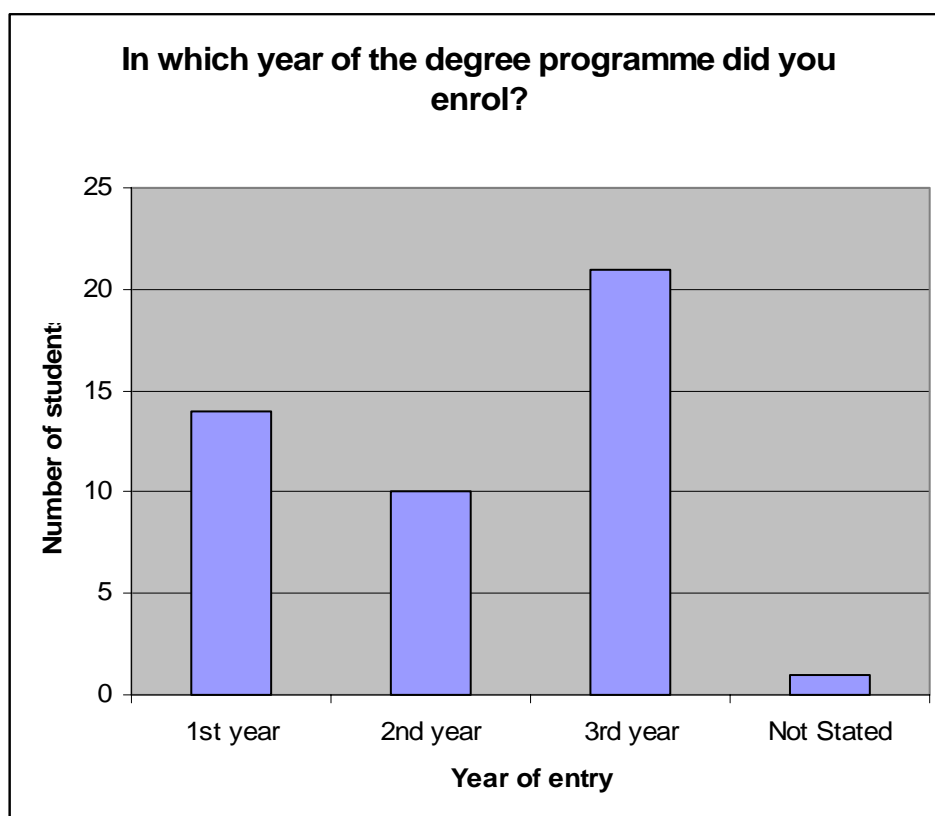
Conclusion

As with the previous section, the responses to this survey question are mixed but represent good potential on which to build in future.

Articulation routes

Question 7 asked HE students “**In which year of the degree programme did you enrol?**” The results were as follows:

Year of entry	Number of students	Proportion of HE students
1st year	14	30.4%
2nd year	10	21.7%
3rd year	21	45.7%
Not stated	1	2.2%



This question sought to examine the impact of articulation routes on learner journeys. While the On Track project is not concerned with establishing articulation routes for students, the paths taken by participants are of interest in order to gain insight into the particular pressures and opportunities experienced by FE-HE progressors.

A strong degree of emphasis has been placed in widening access circles on co-ordinating progression between the FE and HE sectors, in order to maximise credit transfer for transitional students. One approach has been to argue that FE students progressing from HNC and/ or HND courses should be able to articulate to the second

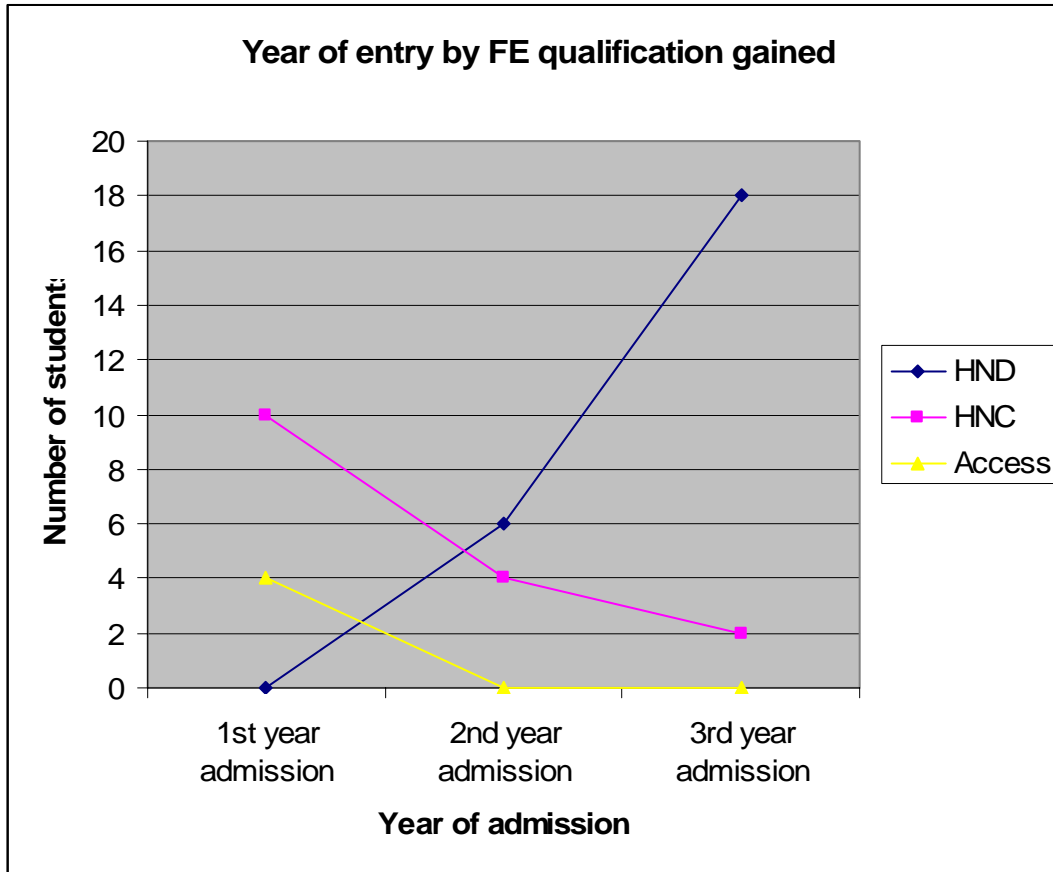
or, ideally, third year of a university degree in the equivalent area. This is pursued in order to imbue the students' HN qualifications with the appropriate amount of respect, as well as to minimise the length of time spent in study and the financial pressures concomitant with that.

The responses received to this survey question present a mixed picture. The results indicate that a large majority were deemed to have fulfilled the requirements to miss the first year of their degree course (31 students; 67.4%). Indeed, a substantial minority went straight into third year (21 students; 45.7%). The picture is made more obscure, however, by the fact that a substantial minority had to begin their degree in first year (14 students; 30.4%) and a majority of respondents failed to be admitted into the third year of their degree (24 students; 52.1%).

Why were some students required to enter their degrees at first or second year level? Part of the explanation must be that the students surveyed were not all studying at HND level. Those studying towards an HNC would struggle to convince admissions departments that they had earned the credits necessary for entry at a higher level than second year, while Access students usually gain entry at first year level.

The table and line graph that follow break down the year of HE entry of students by the FE qualification they were studying towards when they participated in On Track:

FE qualification	1st year admission	2nd year admission	3rd year admission	Total
HND	0	6	18	24
HNC	10	4	2	16
Access	4	0	0	4
Not stated	-	-	-	1



The table and line graph demonstrate strikingly that all HND students surveyed were deemed to have fulfilled the requirements of first year degree study, and three quarters of them moved directly into third year (18/24 students; 75%). HNC students, by contrast, were likely to be required to enter their HE degree at first year level, with ten out of sixteen students in this situation (62.5%). However, two HNC students were in fact granted direct entry to third year. Access students, as predicted, were all granted entry into first year.

Looking more deeply at the HE institutions to which students were applying, the perhaps surprising tendency towards first year level entry of HNC students may be more easily explained.

	First year admission	Second year admission	Third year admission
Glasgow University			
HND			
HNC	2		
Access			
Strathclyde University			
HND		1	
HNC	1		
Access	1		

Caledonian University				
	HND		2	13
	HNC	1	2	1
	Access	2		
Paisley				
	HND		3	3
	HNC	4	2	
	Access			
Bell				
	HND			
	HNC			
	Access	1		
GSA				
	HND			
	HNC	1		
	Access			
Abertay				
	HND			1
	HNC			1
	Access			
Napier				
	HND			1
	HNC			
	Access			
Aberdeen				
	HND			
	HNC	1		
	Access			

As the table demonstrates, five HNC students subsequently enrolled at ancient or selecting universities (Glasgow, Strathclyde, Glasgow School of Art and Aberdeen). All five were required to enter their degree at first year level, which accounts for 50% of those HNC students entering at this level. By contrast, those HNC students who enrolled at Caledonian University were spread across all three entry levels (one at first year, two at second year and one at third year level). Abertay admitted the HNC student in the sample directly into third year. However, University of Paisley tended to admit HNC students into first year more often than not, with four out of six finding themselves in this category. Overall, one may conclude that ancient and selecting institutions will almost certainly refuse to admit HNC students at a level higher than first year, while the picture in recruiting universities is more opaque. Certainly, though, articulation paths are far less hostile to HNC students at these institutions, particularly at Caledonian University.

Only one HND student enrolled at an ancient or selecting institution, in this case the University of Strathclyde. The student was in fact admitted at second year level, which represents a reasonably generous articulation route. However, with only one student in this category no conclusions should be drawn.

Nearly all other HND students were admitted to HEIs at third year level. Thirteen out of fifteen of Caledonian University admissions were into third year (86.7%) as were

the admissions of both students Abertay and Napier. A mixed picture was again identified with regard to University of Paisley, however, with the six HND students being divided between second and third year (3 students each).

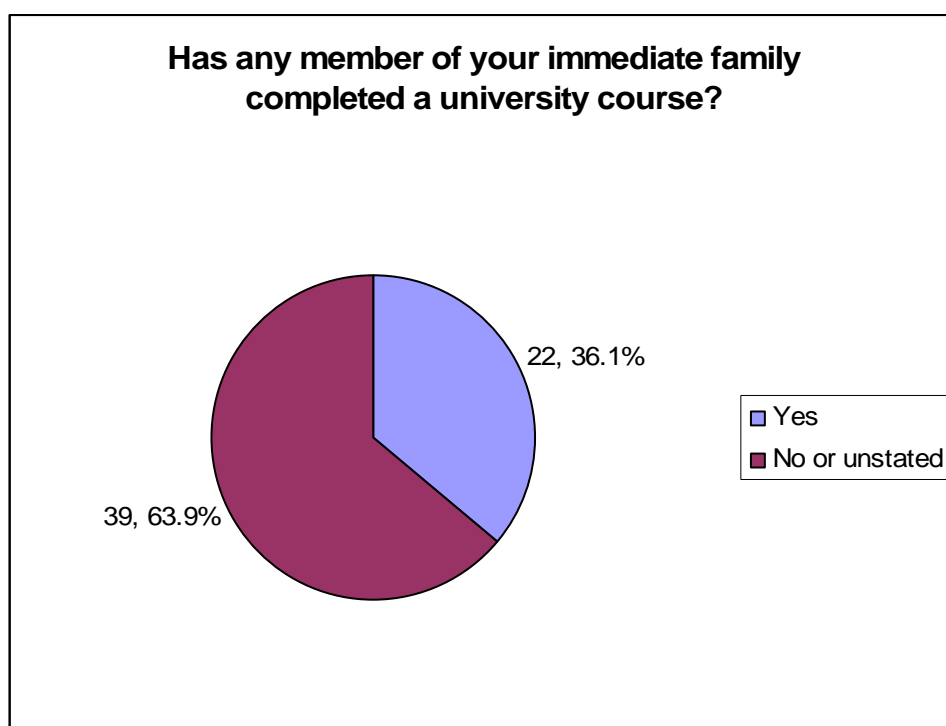
Conclusion and observations

FE students entering the HE sector found articulation routes to be far from generous at ancient or selecting institutions, with HNC students admitted at a level no higher than first year. More surprisingly, University of Paisley, a recruiting institution, was only marginally more generous to those HNC students who returned a questionnaire. HND students will be deemed to have fulfilled the requirements to be granted entry to at least second year in recruiting institutions, with Caledonian University generally admitting students into third year of their degree. There was too small a sample of HND students applying to ancient or selecting institutions to make useful comparisons however. All access students were admitted to first year regardless of the nature of the institution.

Family influence on HE study

The final question in the questionnaire was as follows: “**Has any member of your immediate family previously completed a course in a university? If yes, please give details**”. The purpose of this question was to explore the socio-economic status of the On Track participants, adopting parental qualification as an indicator of this. The results were as follows:

Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Yes	22	36.1%
No or not stated	39	63.9%

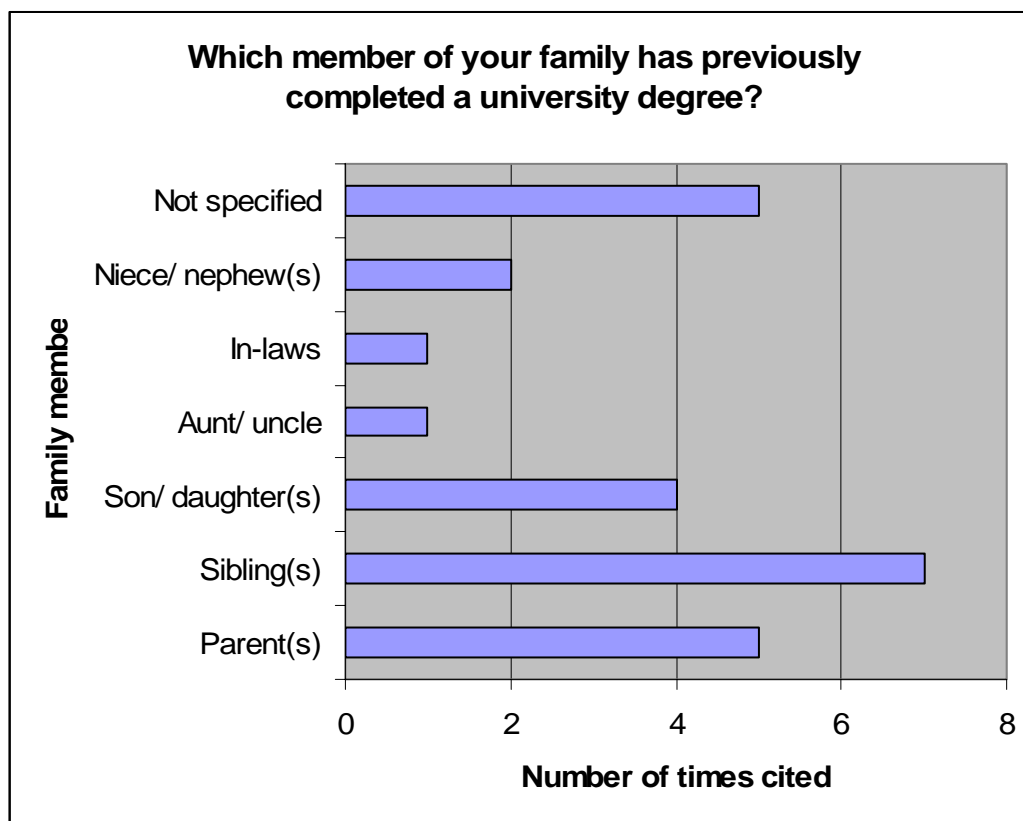


Just over a third of students in the sample (22 students; 36.1%) identified themselves as following in the footsteps of an immediate family member, while slightly under two thirds (39 students; 63.9%) indicated either that there was no previous history of HE study in their families or provided no response.

The detailed responses of those whose relatives had been at university were as follows:

Family member	Number of times cited	Proportion of responses
Parent(s)	5	20.0%
Sibling(s)	7	28.0%
Son/ daughter(s)	4	16.0%
Aunt/ uncle	1	4.0%
In-laws	1	4.0%
Niece/ nephew(s)	2	8.0%
Not specified	5	20.0%

Family member	Number of times cited	Proportion of sample
Parent(s)	5	8.2%
Sibling(s)	7	11.5%
Son/ daughter(s)	4	6.6%
Aunt/ uncle	1	1.6%
In-laws	1	1.6%
Niece/ nephew(s)	2	3.3%
Not specified	5	8.2%



Seven students in the sample had siblings with a degree (28% of positive responses and 11.5% of the sample as a whole). This was the most common response. Five students declined to specify which relative had studied in HE, while a further five indicated that their parents had been to university (20% of positive responses and 8.2% of entire sample). Interestingly, four students were in fact following in the footsteps of their own son or daughter in pursuing HE study (16% of positive responses and 6.6% of the sample).

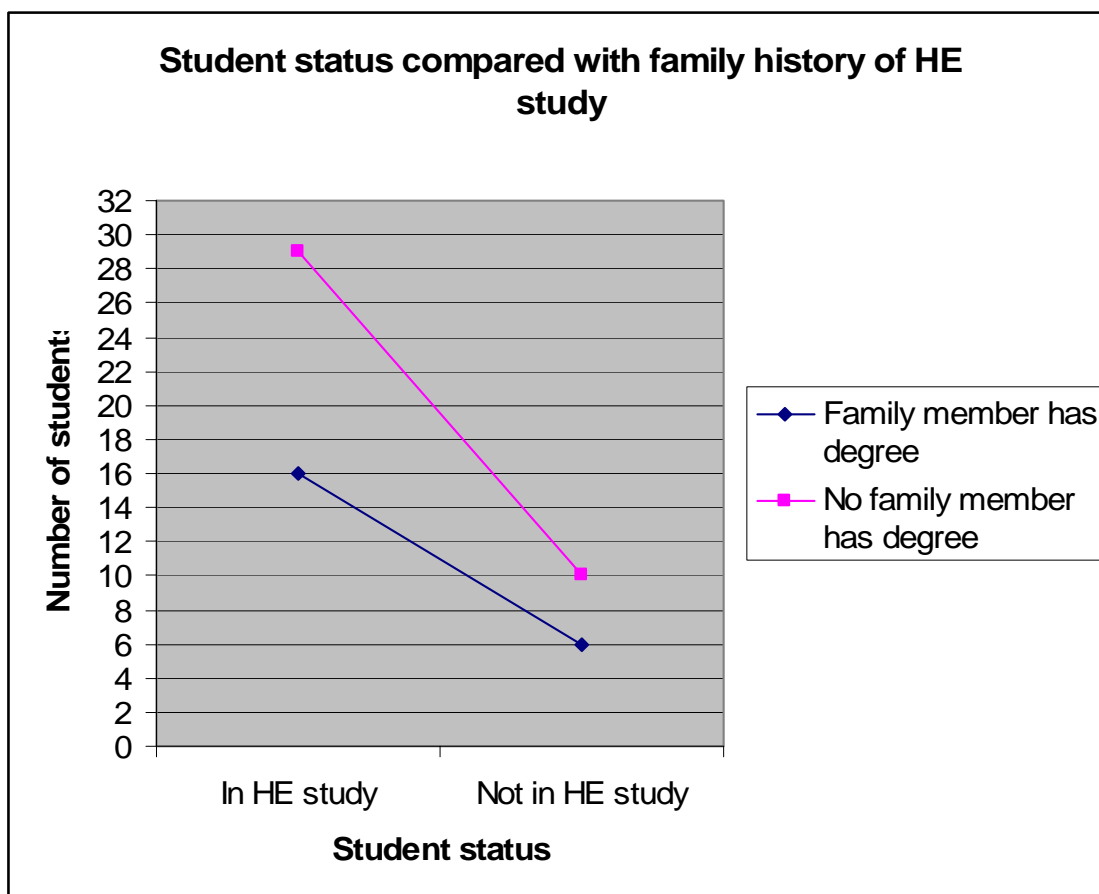
The following tables and graph show the relationship between the respondent's presence or otherwise in an HE institution and whether or not they were following in the footsteps of a family member.

	In HE study	Not in HE study
Family member has degree	16	6
No family member has degree	29	10

(Raw figures)

	In HE study	Not in HE study
Family member has degree	26.2%	9.8%
No family member has degree	47.5%	16.4%

(Percentages of whole sample of 61 students)



As shown above, almost half of respondents (47.5%) were in HE study and were the first in their families to do so. Over a quarter of respondents (26.2%) were in HE study following in the footsteps of a family member. **Looking specifically at HE students then, 35.6% were following in a family member’s footsteps, while the remaining 64.4% were first generation HE students.**

Less than one in ten respondents (9.8%) had a family member with a degree but had elected not to follow them into HE study, while 16.4% of respondents had chosen not to go into HE study and had no family history of degree study. Looking therefore at non-HE students in isolation, 37.5% had a family member with a degree while 62.5% did not.

	In HE study		Not in HE study
Family member has degree	35.6%	Family member has degree	37.5%
No family member has degree	64.4%	No family member has degree	62.5%

Percentages of particular subsection ‘in HE’/ ‘not in HE’

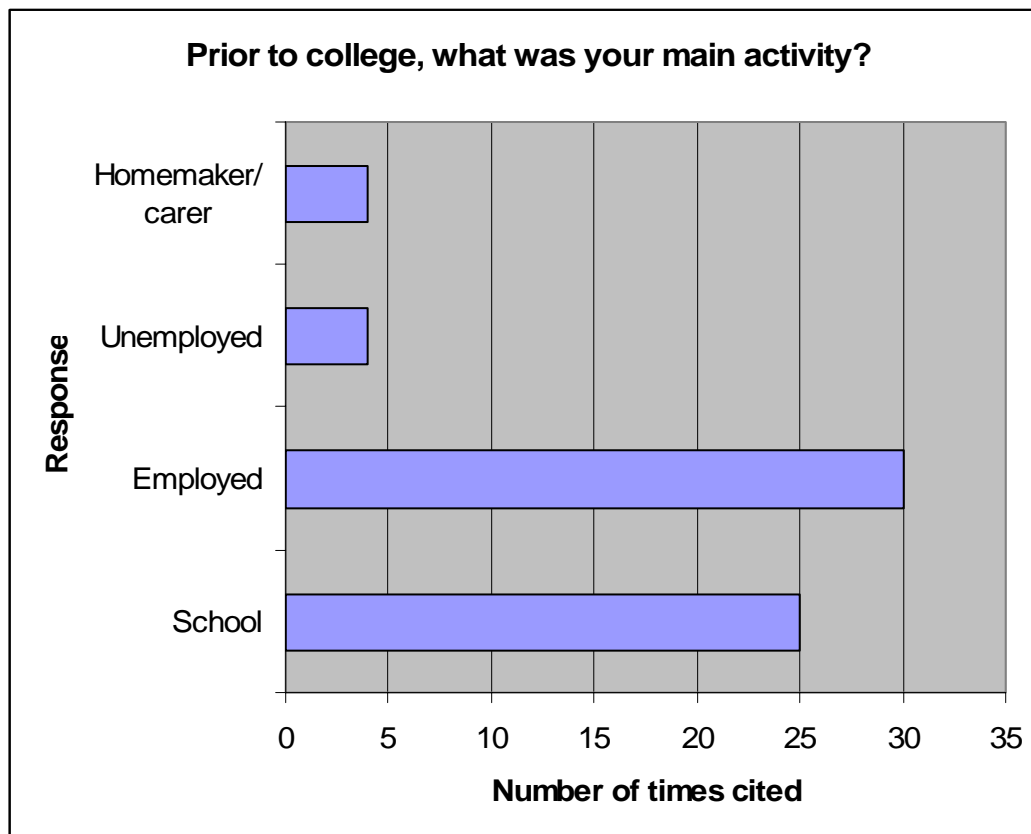
Concluding observation

A marginal tendency can be identified from these figures to the effect that **On Track students who choose not to go into HE study are slightly more likely to have a family member with a degree than those who do opt to pursue a course in HE.**

Students' pre-college background

Question sixteen asked students “**Prior to college, what was your main activity?**” Students were given four options: ‘school’, ‘employed’, ‘unemployed’, and ‘other, please specify’. In practice, the ‘other’ responses were all the same so the results are displayed with ‘other’ replaced by ‘homemaker/ carer’ in the following table and graph. It should also be noted that two students indicated that they were in school and employment at the same time, so sixty three responses were received from the sample of sixty one respondents.

Main activity prior to college	Number of times cited	Proportion of all responses
School	25	39.7%
Employed	30	47.6%
Unemployed	4	6.3%
Homemaker/ carer	4	6.3%



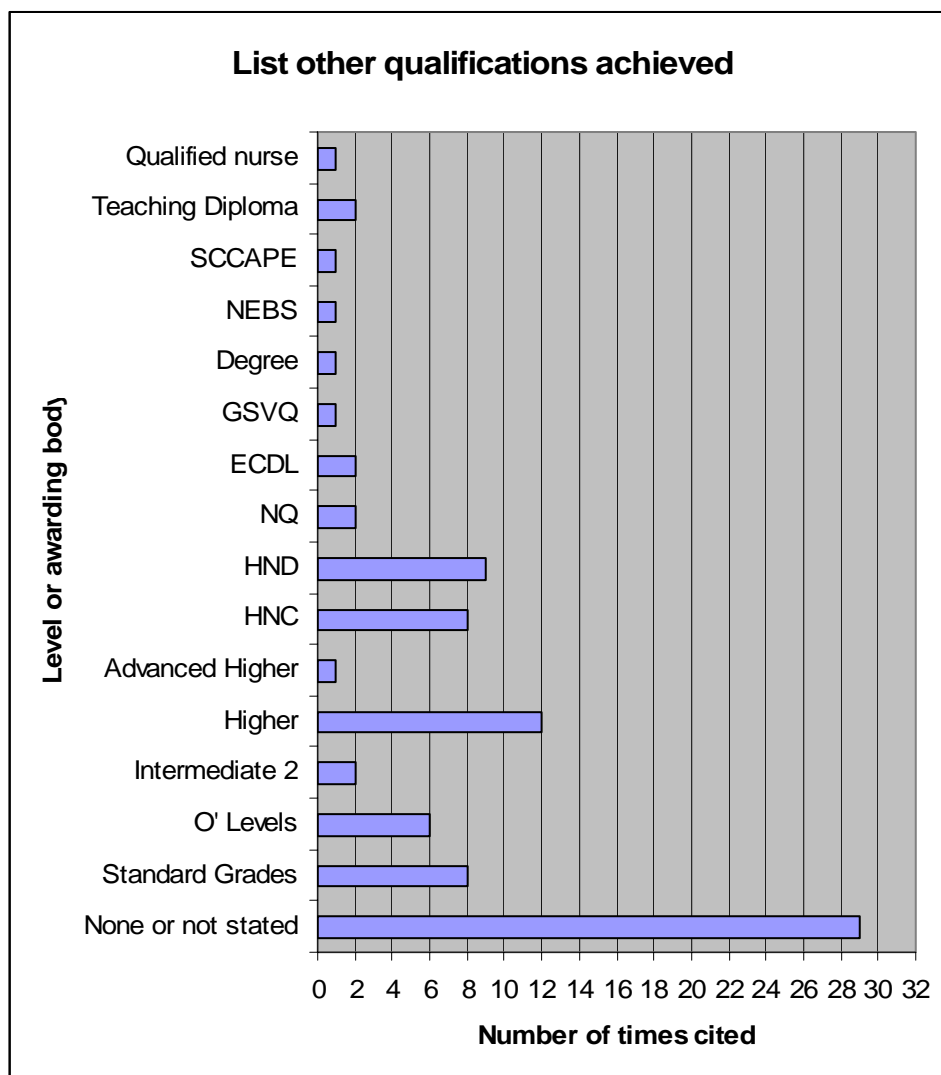
A substantial minority of responses indicated school as the main activity of the student prior to college. This amounted to 39.7% of cited replies. An even more substantial minority cited employment as the student's previous major activity, amounting to 47.6% of replies. Since the two additional responses are explained by

students citing both school and employment, we may recalculate the proportion of the sample for whom school or employment was their previous major activity.

Main activity prior to college	Number of times cited	Proportion of sample
School	25	41.0%
Employed	30	49.2%

More than 90% of students in the sample were previously in school and/ or employment. **Nearly half of respondents went to college from employment, while two fifths were school leavers.** The remainder were split evenly between students who had previously been looking for work and students who had been caring for dependents.

For question seventeen, students were told “**If you have any other qualifications, please list these below**”. This was an open question with no restriction on the number of responses students could offer. A huge range of qualifications were volunteered and the results are presented below.



Level or awarding body	Number of times cited	Proportion of all responses
None or not stated	29	33.7%
Standard grade	8	9.3%
O' level	6	7.0%
Intermediate 2	2	2.3%
Higher	12	14.0%
Advanced Higher	1	1.2%
HNC	8	9.3%
HND	9	10.5%
NQ	2	2.3%
ECDL	2	2.3%
GSVQ	1	1.2%
Degree	1	1.2%
NEBS	1	1.2%
SCCAPE	1	1.2%
Teaching Diploma	2	2.3%
Nursing Diploma	1	1.2%

Level or awarding body	Number of times cited	Proportion of sample citing this qualification
None or not stated	29	47.5%
Standard grade	8	13.1%
O' level	6	9.8%
Intermediate 2	2	3.3%
Higher	12	19.7%
Advanced Higher	1	1.6%
HNC	8	13.1%
HND	9	14.8%
NQ	2	3.3%
ECDL	2	3.3%
GSVQ	1	1.6%
Degree	1	1.6%
NEBS	1	1.6%
SCCAPE	1	1.6%
Teaching Diploma	2	3.3%
Nursing Diploma	1	1.6%

Eighty six responses were given by the sample of sixty one students. Just over a third (33.7%) of the responses given was either 'none' or not stated. The twenty nine students who gave this response in fact amount to 47.5% of the sample. This represents a significant minority, although perhaps the open nature of the question, not to mention its position late on in the survey, may have dissuaded some students from listing qualifications they did in fact possess.

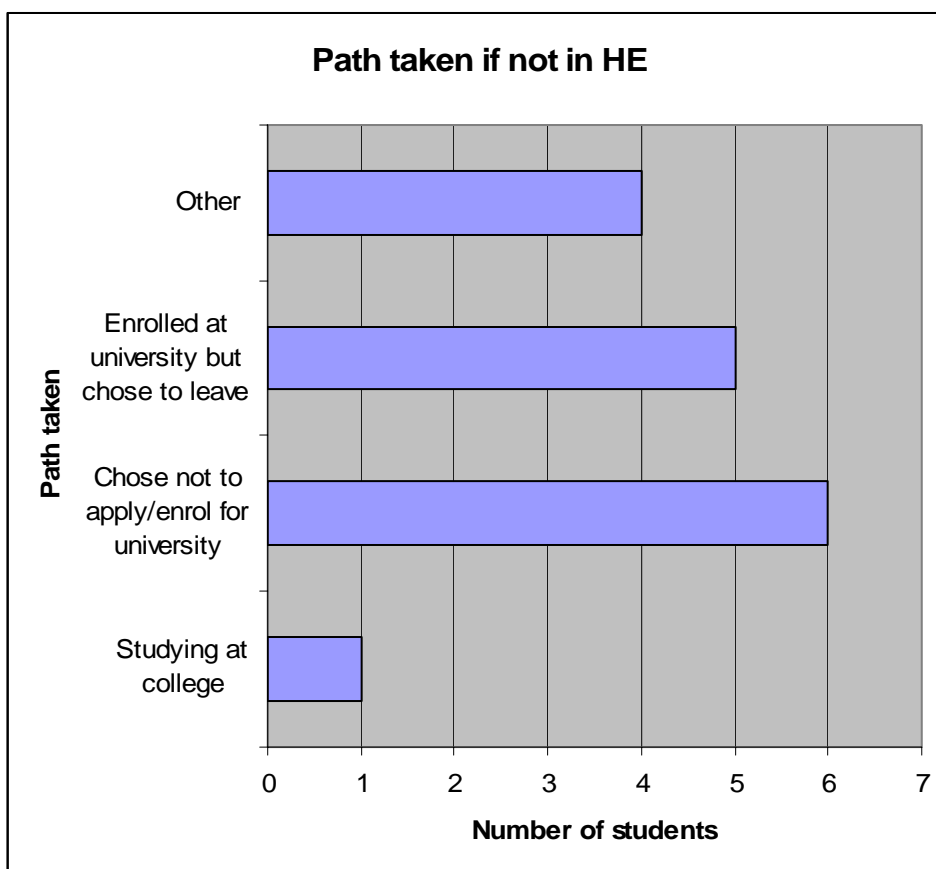
Summary

For those students who did identify previous qualifications, the most frequently cited was one or more Higher grades. Twelve students or 19.7% of the sample possessed one or more Higher. Nineteen students held FE qualifications at NQ, HNC or HND level (31.1% of the sample). Fourteen different types of qualification were identified in all.

Respondents no longer in study

Question eight only affected the On Track students who indicated that they were no longer in study. It asked, “**If you are not currently studying towards a degree at university, did you: continue your studies at college? Decide not to apply for/enrol at university? Enrol at university and decide to leave? Other, please explain**”. The responses were as follows:

Path taken	Number of students	Proportion of those not in study
Studying at college	1	6.3%
Chose not to apply for/enrol at uni	6	37.5%
Enrolled at uni but chose to leave	5	31.3%
Other	4	25.0%



The four students who answered 'other' described their subsequent life paths. One was taking a year out before applying to university; another had already completed a degree since completing his or her On Track course and was now a graduate; the third student already possessed a degree from a period of study prior to participation in On Track; while the fourth student had been prevented from pursuing further study due to ill health.

Conclusions, observations and recommendations

As was argued above, the figure of 45 On Track students in HE represents an impressive return from 61 students surveyed. The findings from this question show that one student from the remainder is still in the education system at college, while two more have degrees to their name and a fourth is intending to apply after a gap year. Nevertheless it would be rewarding to attempt in future studies to map out the reasons for On Track students opting not to pursue further study in HE, as was the case for six of the students in this survey, or for choosing to leave after enrolment. The aspirational set of the students involved may perhaps have been insufficiently broadened despite the best efforts of the On Track project; on the other hand there may well have been entirely separate and insurmountable factors at work, such as obligations to dependents, financial restraints or students simply concluding that they've achieved what they set out to achieve.

(5) Focus Group and One-to-one Interviews

This section of the evaluation analyses the content of a focus group and two one-to-one interviews carried out by the previous Forum Evaluator in late September 2005. The purpose of these conversations was to construct narratives of individual learners' experiences of On Track and its influence on their learning paths beyond their participation in the project. While the questionnaire survey analysed in the previous section of the report itself represents a largely qualitative method of evaluation, semi-structured discussions allow participants to raise their own points and issues. This has the potential for opening up the evaluation process to encompass hitherto unforeseen themes and insights.

Methodology

A focus group was held on September 27th 2005 in Central College of Commerce in Glasgow. Three former On Track students attended. The format of the semi-structured discussion is affixed to this report as Appendix E.

Two one-to-one interviews were carried out with former On Track students. The discussions followed the same format as the focus groups (Appendix E). The first of these took place on September 26th 2005 at Glasgow Caledonian University, and the second was hosted by Central College of Commerce on September 30th.

The focus group and both interviews were recorded on tape and transcribed by a third party for later qualitative analysis by the evaluator. Participants in interviews and the focus group were assured that their responses would remain anonymous.

(6) Focus Group

As was stated above, a focus group was held on September 27th 2005 in Central College of Commerce in Glasgow.

Participant analysis

Three former On Track students attended. One student had participated in On Track while studying towards an HNC in Healthcare at Cardonald College, another had been working through an HND in Management at Glasgow College of Food Technology (now Glasgow Metropolitan College) and the third studied Business IT at HND level at Kilmarnock College. The Healthcare student said he or she had participated in On Track in session 2003-04 while the other two participants answered that their involvement with the project dated from the 2004-05 session.

Learning path since On Track

One student, who had been studying Healthcare at HNC level, progressed from there into year one of a nursing degree at Glasgow Caledonian University, before dropping out at the end of the year.

Another student, who had been studying towards an HND in Management, entered directly into third year of a degree in Management at Glasgow Caledonian University and has since graduated. At the time of the focus group he or she intended to study towards a postgraduate degree in social policy management in session 2006-07.

The third student, who had been studying Business IT at HND level, also entered third year directly to study Business IT at University of Paisley. The student was due to graduate in November 2006 and intended to undertake further study in the form of "Microsoft certification".

Although only three students attended the focus group they represent a variety of subsequent learning paths. All three progressed to study in an HEI, with two completing their degrees and another dropping out after one year.

Transition from college to university

A stated aim of the On Track project is to ‘help you make the smooth transition into degree study at a Higher Education Institution’. This relates to the West Forum’s strategic aim “to facilitate progression of students from one programme of Higher education to another with the maximum feasible credit transfer”. The focus group discussion addressed this aspect of the project.

Two students remarked on the usefulness of campus visits as a means of acquiring insight into the workings of a university. One representative remark was: “...we went to Caledonian, they allowed us to go in to the library and gave us a password to search for books and go to the bookshop to look for books, so when I went to university I didn’t have any problems because I knew what to do.”

On Track also equipped students with skills necessary for university life. This has additional significance for two other On Track aims: ‘Improve your existing skills’ and ‘Equip you with additional skills’. The focus group participants were highly complimentary about the sessions on presentation skills – “...if I hadn’t had On Track I’d have been lost with my presentation” – and essay writing – “I found all the essay stuff of help: the structuring and then the signal words and the referencing”.

Indeed, the work on referencing was singled out by all three participants for special praise: “...the bit I found really handy was the referencing”; “...referencing was very, very useful”; “it was referencing...where I found On Track invaluable...if we hadn’t done On Track we would have been lost, I would have said.”

Another On Track aim is to ‘provide insight into what Higher Education involves’. One student commented that hearing “about the differences between college and university” was “useful”, while the other two echoed this point in their discussion of the role of the student mentors. “The guys we had were great because they did not pretty it up at all, they weren’t all doom and gloom but they were very honest. I think they were really honest about what you were going to face so you weren’t under any illusions when you got (to university)...it wasn’t like they were discouraging, it was just like, well you’re going to have to face exams and you’re going to have to face this and that...”

The two students who were granted direct entry to third year agreed that such articulation routes have their drawbacks. One student remarked: “I went into third year so I was the only one coming in at that level so everyone was a stranger in that class so to find someone you can deal with in that group is very, very difficult.”

As well as the social aspects of this sudden transition, direct entrants experienced academic disorientation at university. “The problem I had was (lecturers saying) ‘things will be different this year, now you’re in third year more will be expected of you’. Well we don’t actually know what was expected of us in first or second year so how are you supposed to know what’s expected in third year?” The same student remarked: “By the time you get to third year they all assume that you’ve already done it (learned to reference and construct essays) and that you already know it, and that’s great for people that have been there a year or two but for guys coming in to direct entry there wasn’t really a lot there.” This point was developed by the student who

went into first year of his or her degree: “Even in my first year they assumed that we got it all at college...I thought you would get handouts in your first year because a lot of folk had been out of education so they hadn’t been in college or anything, but because they were older it was assumed that they knew too.”

On Track has a further aim, namely to ‘help you decide if Higher Education is the right option for you at the present time’. One student described On Track’s contribution to his or her choice of university as follows: “On Track was good because it told me all about the different uni’s and how to do my CVs and things like that”. The other two students had already applied to university when they participated in the project.

Conclusions and observations

The students all stated decisively that On Track had equipped them with skills crucial to academic success at university which they would not otherwise have gained from their colleges. It appeared from the students’ remarks that universities assume their students possess knowledge in certain areas as if all university entrants have travelled down identical learning paths. It may be argued that On Track performs a valuable role in counteracting a skills shortfall among FE-HE progressors. If neither the university sector nor the college sector is willing to address this issue then it is crucial that On Track reaches as many students as possible before they make the transition to university study.

In terms of guiding students through the transition between sectors, the timing of the project has a bearing on what it can achieve in this area. Groups established early in the academic year will have more opportunity to address learner choice and guide students through the application process. Having said that, later groups will be able to keep a tighter focus on what students will be confronted with at university when they get there.

On Track sessions

The focus group discussion moved on to assess the value of the On Track teaching materials and the mentors who deliver the sessions.

The above section detailed the students' approval of the sessions on referencing, essay writing and presentation skills. One student did speculate on a possible weakness of the latter session, but ultimately rejected it: "I think the only thing that On Track didn't do...was say you have to make a short presentation in front of the class. I think that would have been good...The thing is though, nobody would have turned up, they just wouldn't have gone. So the guys would have come down from On Track and nobody would have been there."

The student who dropped out of his or her course remarked that the skills gained in the On Track sessions had transferable utility. "I even use On Track in my work experience...Is it very useful in the working environment for reports and things like that".

Students were asked if there was anything they thought might have been better prepared for. The students all answered that "adjustment to group work" was their major difficulty at university, but "they probably wouldn't be able to help with that...it's something you just need to experience". On Track may wish to consider whether this is in fact the case. Perhaps group work could be built into the structure of the project.

The students were asked about the role of the mentors. One complained that his or her mentors had concentrated almost exclusively on preparing students for Glasgow Caledonian University as opposed to University of Paisley, and this concern about institution specific expertise was echoed by a second participant. Having said that, all three participants complimented the mentors for their willingness to answer questions: "I found the sessions really helpful because I had so many questions...I would constantly go back to the poor guys with questions so I found it really helpful to have a voice there, you'd have that face to face contact where you could ask questions, because the pack was really helpful but there's always going to be other things that are going to crop up".

Two students observed that the On Track pack had been of use not only to the students who participated in the project but also for other FE-HE progressors who lacked certain academic skills. One student remarked: "(other college progressors) didn't know anything about On Track...you share what you know and what you do, so the information from On Track was also helpful to them."

A second student developed this point: "I found that in my class as well. Even those from the older generation who hadn't done any education for four or five years...I would get my On Track folder out and they would ask about it, and they found it helpful for structuring their essays, doing their references and even when they were doing their presentations they found it really helpful because they were in the same boat as me."

Two weaknesses emerged from the discussion of the On Track project. The consensus was that the session on note taking had not been of value: “I never used it at all” and “I thought it was a bit boring actually” were representative remarks on this aspect of the course. Secondly, the students agreed that a full day was too long for a campus visit: “There’s only so much you can do, you’re sitting in a lecture room for three hours already”. There was concern that much of the day was filled with extraneous information. A half day was deemed sufficient for this component.

Finally, one student made the intriguing observation that other students from his or her college “are in their second year (of university) now and they say it is a lot more helpful in their second year than it was in their first year. In second year you do get help from your lecturer but you’re basically told ‘get on with it’.” Perhaps students progressing from college into first year of a degree do not face the same problems in terms of academic adjustment to university life as do students articulating into year two or three. This would suggest HEIs provide study support to students in first year, neglecting students who articulate to a higher level of study from college. Of course, those college students who only gain entry into first year at an HEI experience the heightened pressures of time and money associated with long term study so this gain in support is perhaps small consolation.

Conclusions and observations

The focus group found that the On Track sessions provided valuable support to progressing students in terms of academic study skills. Referencing, essay writing and presentation skills were praised, although the note taking session was deemed superfluous to the participants’ needs. The On Track pack, around which the sessions are structured, was also complimented as being of use to college students in general, not just On track participants. It was also noted to be of benefit in certain workplace scenarios.

The group suggested that the campus visit may be reduced to a half day from a full day. The issue of group work was also raised. While students deemed it beyond the scope of On Track to deliver usefully in this area they may perhaps be considered to be overly pessimistic in their assessment.

The On Track mentors were praised for their willingness to answer questions and explain the material in the pack. The focus group participants were asked if the pack would have been sufficient on its own, to which all three responded decisively that the presence of the mentors was of central importance. There were some concerns that their expertise was at times overly specific to their own institution, however.

(7) Semi-structured interviews

The Forum Evaluator carried out two one-to-one interviews with former On Track students. The first of these took place on September 26th 2005 at Glasgow Caledonian University, and the second was hosted by Central College of Commerce on September 30th.

Learning paths of participants

The first interviewee had participated in the On Track programme in 2003-04 while working through an HND in Human Resource Management at Central College of Commerce. He or she gained direct entry to third year three of a Human Resource Management degree at University of Paisley, from which he or she graduated. The student is now working towards a postgraduate degree in Careers Guidance.

The second interviewee participated in On Track in 2003-04 while working towards an HND in Audio Technology at James Watt College. The student gained direct entry to year three of a degree in Audio Technology with Multimedia at Glasgow Caledonian University, and was in his or her honours year at the time of the interview with a view to going into teaching in the future.

Transition from college to university

One student participated in the programme after applying to university. This student commented that he or she “knew the route” by that stage, but that it would be “really handy to have a cut down version of On Track at HNC level...to give students more information about the transition”. The other participated prior to applying, and remarked that “getting the information before I made a decision was useful,” although he or she “knew I was going to Paisley.”

One student commented: “At HNC level they spoon-feed you, reminding you when your outcomes are due, and although it’s a wee bit less at HND you still get lots of help.” He or she continued by observing “even though I went through On Track, university was still a big culture shock”. This point was echoed by the other interviewee who remarked that he or she “felt like a fish out of water...I had never done academic exams like that before (and didn’t know about) the mechanics of it, like writing your details on the front of your answer books”. In terms of essay writing, “university requires you to be much more analytical, less descriptive...this was touched on by On Track but maybe not enough...it would have been beneficial to cover this in more depth”.

One student remarked that, “for financial reasons”, he or she would not have gone to university if direct entry to third year had not been available. Having said that, the same student revealed that his or her fellow students had indicated that a preferable route is to “get your HNC and then go into second year to do a ‘sandwich’ year at university”. The second interviewee remarked of third year entry: “It’s a really short term...before you know it you’ve got loads of deadlines...I wasn’t prepared to hit the ground running.”

One student remarked that he or she “had no academic worries (about university)...it was more a case of ‘where do I find the library?’” However, the other interviewee experienced significant difficulties in his or her HEI when it emerged that the cohort in his or her class who had progressed from college had not been trained to use a particular software package that would be central to their coursework. “The lecturers assumed we had used the software before...they were very surprised when we said we hadn’t been taught how to use it...we were given no support at all and told we just had to pick it up ourselves...the different routes of the people in the class weren’t taken into consideration at all.” The student commented that the articulation route he or she had progressed along was well established, so it is surprising that such a discrepancy could have developed and endured.

Conclusions and observations

Both interviewees argued that On Track is of greater value when delivered before students apply to university in order to guide them through the application process. However, as was argued above, there is perhaps a risk that the information about university life may be forgotten by some students who do go through the programme early in the academic year.

Neither student thought that On Track had prepared them fully for just how different university life is to the college experience.

It is important to minimise the difficulties encountered by students going through a transition between sectors, so effective liaison between institutions in the college and university sectors can help avoid problems such as the one described here. Of course, this is not a matter that On Track can affect, but it does give a useful insight into the factors that can undermine students when they pursue a different learning trajectory to other people in their classes.

On Track sessions

One interviewee stated decisively that “our college prepared us better (for university) than the On Track programme”. As a Human Resource Management student, he or she was, for example, “well prepared for doing presentations...there was nothing new in On Track as far as that was concerned...in fact the mentors’ presentation skills, their acetates and their use of the equipment in the room could have been better...we were expecting experts and it detracted from the credibility of what they were doing”. The interviewee commented that his or her class had lacked continuity of undergraduate mentors, and those they got “weren’t familiar with Paisley University”. The postgraduate mentor was an English Literature student who “couldn’t identify with our subject”. Having said that, the interviewee “liked the face-to-face aspect of the sessions... (It would have been useful) if delivered better and with continuity of the undergraduate tutor...It was good to get an idea of what university was like from the tutors”.

The second interviewee also noted that his or her mentors were from dissimilar subject areas “but the course was quite generic so it didn’t matter. I think that’s a good thing”. The mentors were “really helpful...the sessions themselves were useful...especially being able to ask the mentors how they found the transition”. This participant commented that he or she had only received “informal” support from college about the transition to university.

One interviewee found the materials in the pack “really handy...especially the stuff on structure, reports, referencing...I probably used ten to fifteen per cent of it”.

The other interviewee singled out the campus visit for praise: “It was good to look about, familiarise yourself with the layout instead of going in cold...I would certainly recommend it (providing) you get access to the university and the library and the materials”. This student summed up his or her experience of On Track thus: “It’s a worthwhile course to do, probably earlier though, in the latter part of the HNC year if possible to give them information about what it’s like in H. E. as early as possible”.

Conclusions and observations

Both students stressed their view that On Track would be of greater value to students in their HNC year. They were unconvinced of the utility of On Track after the application process was complete.

Both interviewees noted the value of face-to-face sessions with mentors in order to learn from their own experiences of the transition to university. The interviewees disagreed about the quality of the sessions themselves, however. One interviewee was unimpressed by the standard of course delivery. Human Resource Management students may require mentors with well developed presentation skills to avoid losing credibility in the eyes of their mentees. On Track strives to match mentors to the subject areas of their students and the testimony of one interviewee suggests this is of crucial importance. The other student de-emphasised this, however, deeming the material sufficiently generic as to render the subject expertise of the facilitators irrelevant.

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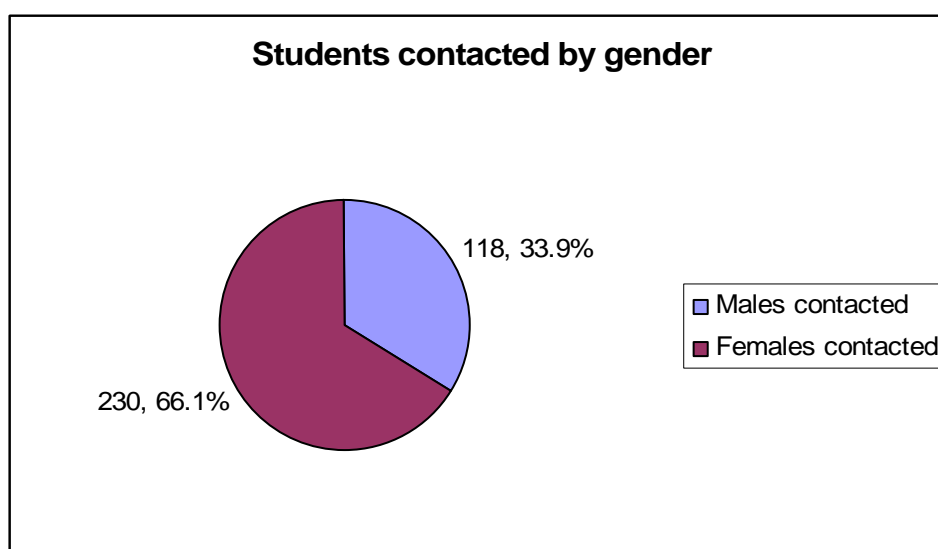
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Appendix A: Sample breakdown by gender

The gender breakdown of the questionnaire sample is of interest in the context of the findings published in the *Learning For All* report to the effect that “women are more likely than men to participate in higher education institutions at almost all ages... (and) women are much more likely to participate in FE colleges at both advanced and non-advanced levels” (Learning For All, SFEFC/ SHEFC Widening Participation Review Group 2005: 16).

Of the 348 students contacted, 118 (33.9%) were male and 230 (66.1%) female.

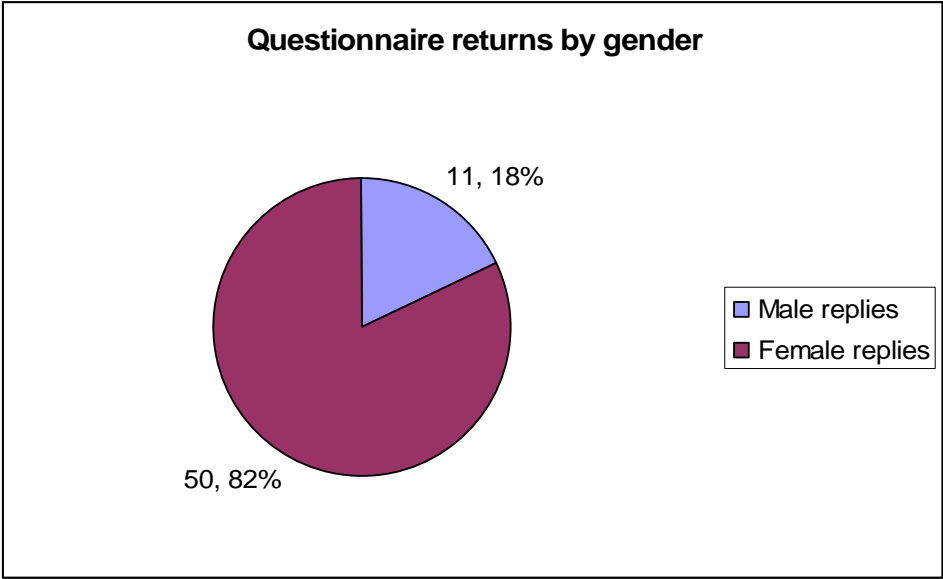


Gender	Number	Percentage
All contacted	348	100.0%
Males contacted	118	33.9%
Females contacted	230	66.1%

11 replies were from male students, which equates to 18.0% of the total number of replies, and 9.3% of the male students contacted.

51 replies were from female students, which equates to 82.0% of all replies, and 21.7% of the female students contacted.

Therefore, female students were more than twice as likely to return a questionnaire.



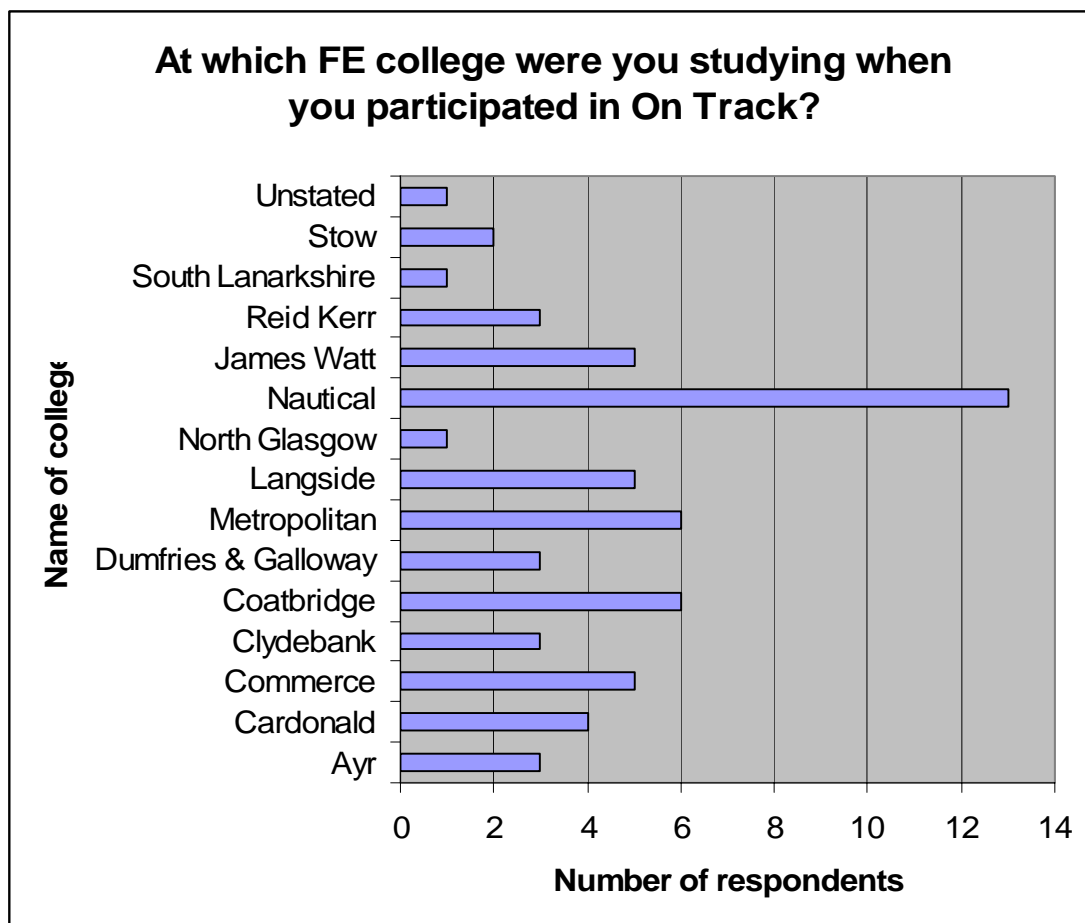
Gender	Number	Percentage
All replies	61	100.0%
Male replies	11	18.0%
Female replies	50	82.0%

Appendix B – Educational context of respondents who participated in On Track

This appendix is divided into three sections. The first breaks the sample down by college attended, the second outlined the time of year in which students participated in the project and the third assesses the academic subject focus of the sample.

Where students participated in On Track

The first question in the questionnaire asked students **“What FE college were you attending when you participated in On Track?”** The range of responses is set out in the graph and table below:



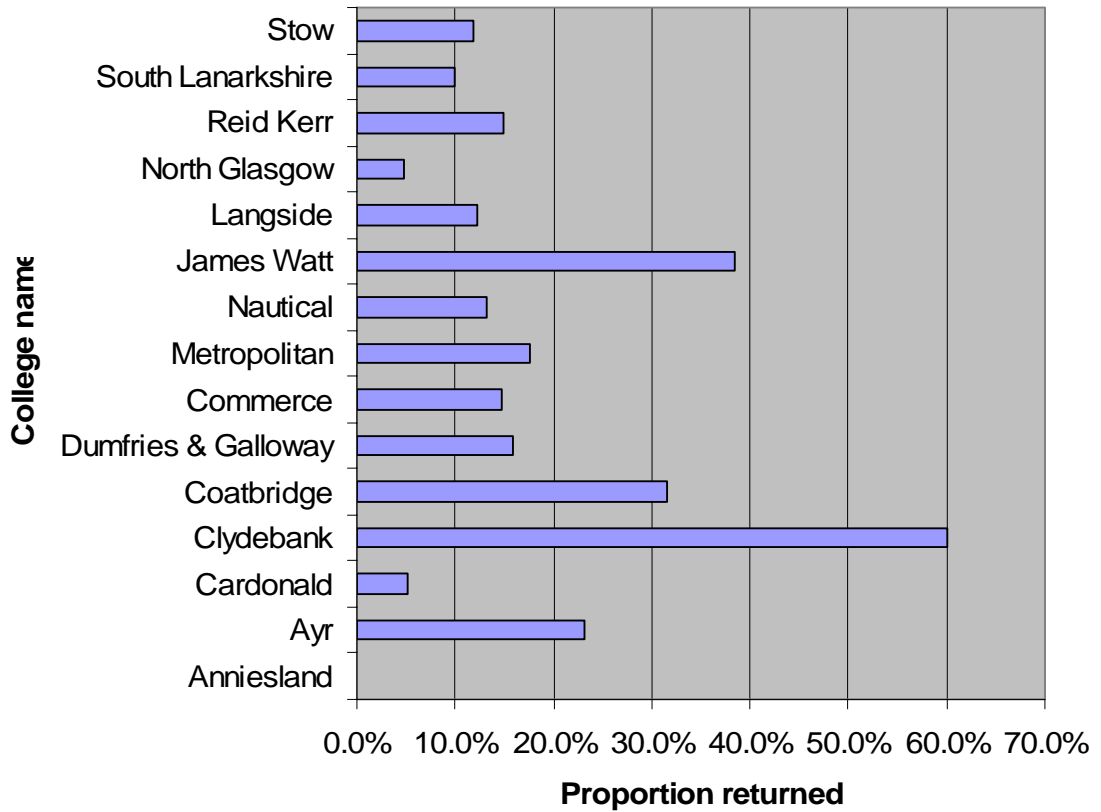
Name of college	Number of returns	Percentage of all returns
Ayr	3	4.9%
Cardonald	4	6.6%
Commerce	5	8.2%
Clydebank	3	4.9%
Coatbridge	6	9.8%
Dumfries & Galloway	3	4.9%
Met	6	9.8%
Langside	5	8.2%
Nautical	13	21.3%
North Glasgow	1	1.6%
James Watt	5	8.2%
Reid Kerr	3	4.9%
South Lanarkshire	1	1.6%
Stow	2	3.3%
Unstated	1	1.6%

As can be seen from the graph and table above, students from the Glasgow College of Nautical Studies returned their questionnaires in far greater numbers than anywhere else (13 students; 21.3% of all returns). There was also a reasonable response rate from Coatbridge College students (6 students; 9.8%), although it must be borne in mind that the similarly impressive returns by students from what is now Glasgow Metropolitan College are somewhat misleading. This is because those students participated in On Track as matriculated students of one or other of Glasgow Metropolitan College's constitutive institutions, the Glasgow College of Building and Printing or the Glasgow College of Food Technology.

The graph shows that students from 14 of the 15 participating colleges returned at least one questionnaire, so the results culled from their surveys will reflect adequately the breadth of On Track activity.

It is difficult to calculate the exact proportion of students from each participating college who returned a questionnaire, because only 348 of the 428 students who enrolled on the project ultimately received a survey form. With this health warning in mind, however, the following graph and table give an indication of the 'hit rates' of the participating colleges:

Proportion of surveys returned by college



College name	Number of participants	Number of returns	Proportion returned
Anniesland	5	0	0.0%
Ayr	13	3	23.1%
Cardonald	78	4	5.1%
Clydebank	5	3	60.0%
Coatbridge	19	6	31.6%
Dumfries & Galloway	19	3	15.8%
Commerce	34	5	14.7%
Metropolitan	34	6	17.6%
Nautical	99	13	13.1%
James Watt	13	5	38.5%
Langside	41	5	12.2%
North Glasgow	21	1	4.8%
Reid Kerr	20	3	15.0%
South Lanarkshire	10	1	10.0%
Stow	17	2	11.8%
Unknown	4	-	n/a
Unstated	-	1	n/a

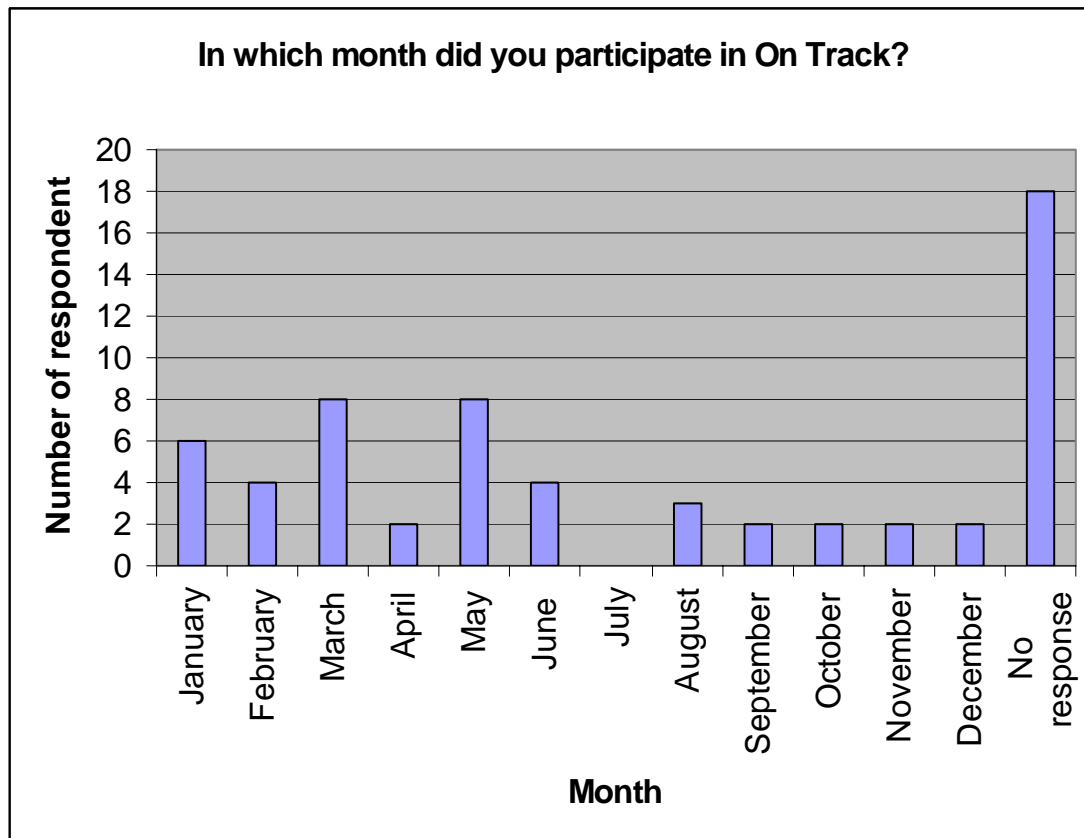
As can be seen from the above figures, Clydebank College students were the most likely to return completed questionnaires, with 60% of surveyed students doing so. Strong return figures were also achieved by students from James Watt College (38.5%) and Coatbridge College (31.6%). Glasgow Metropolitan College and Ayr College were the other two colleges with proportionate returns at a higher level than the figure for the entire sample (17.5%).

Perhaps the most striking statistic to be drawn from these figures is the impressive level of participation in On Track by students from Cardonald College (78 students) and Nautical College (99 students).

When students participated in On Track

The question relating to this element of the student questionnaire asked “**Which month and academic year did you take part in On Track?**” This has been divided into two separate questions for the purposes of this analysis.

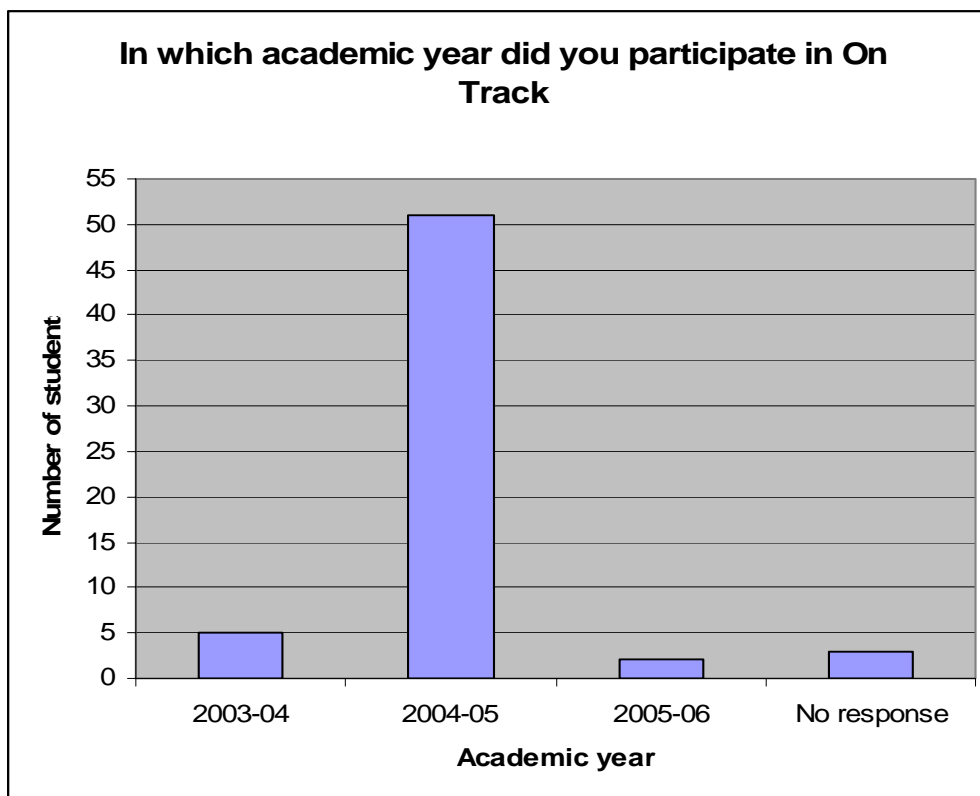
To address the month of participation first, student responses were at times confused since the On Track project takes place over ten hourly sessions which spill out over the period of a single month. For the purposes of this analysis the month in which the students began their course has been taken as decisive.



Month	Number of students	Percentage of all returns
January	6	9.8%
February	4	6.6%
March	8	13.1%
April	2	3.3%
May	8	13.1%
June	4	6.6%
July	0	0.0%
August	3	4.9%
September	2	3.3%
October	2	3.3%
November	2	3.3%
December	2	3.3%
No reponse	18	29.5%

As can be seen from above, a plurality of 18 students (29.5% of all students returning a questionnaire) provided no response to this enquiry. This is not entirely surprising, since some students surveyed may have received their questionnaires as much as 20 months after their participation in On Track drew to a close. In terms of those students who did answer this question, the most common time for participation was between January and March (18 students; 29.5%), with the summer term of April to June slightly less common (14 students; 23.0%).

Students were also asked to indicate the academic year in which they participated in On Track. The results were as follows:



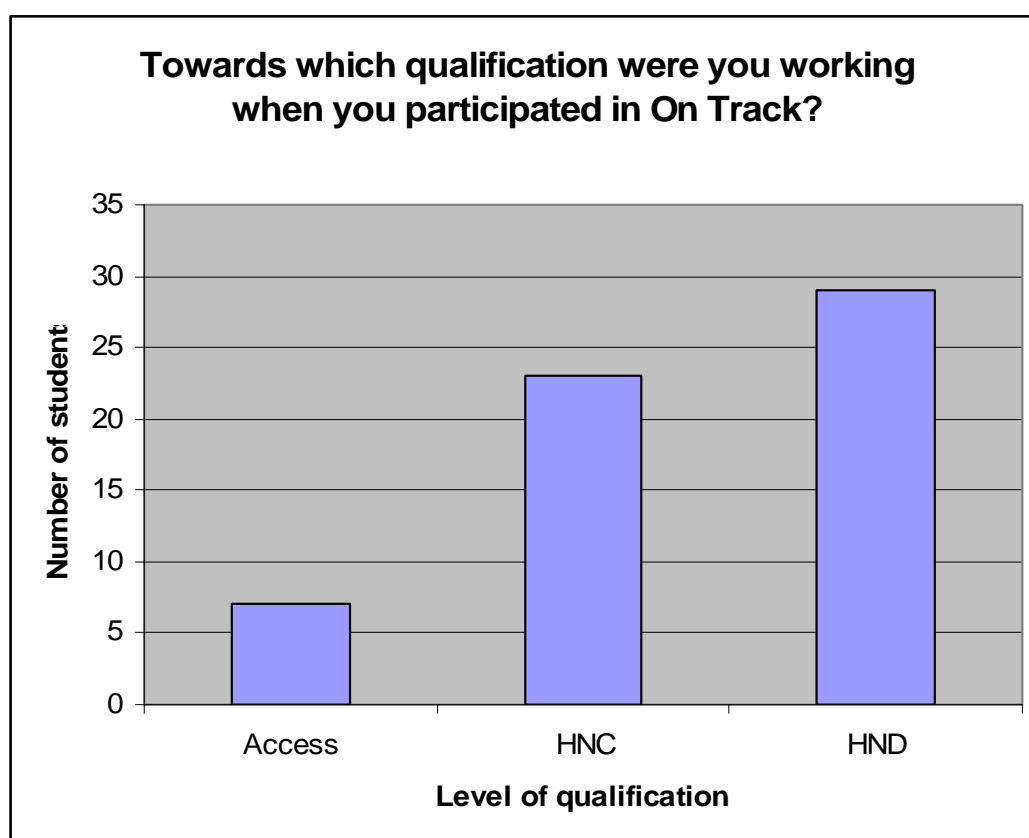
Academic year	Number of students	Percentage of returns
2003-04	5	8.2%
2004-05	51	83.6%
2005-06	2	3.3%
No response	3	4.9%

Only students identified as being in the 2004-05 cohort were contacted. The appearance of students indicating participation in a different academic session may be the consequence of a simple error, either by the student completing the survey or in the student database. Regardless, it is clear that the overwhelming majority of students surveyed indicated that they had participated in On Track in the academic session 2004-05.

Subject focus of On Track participants

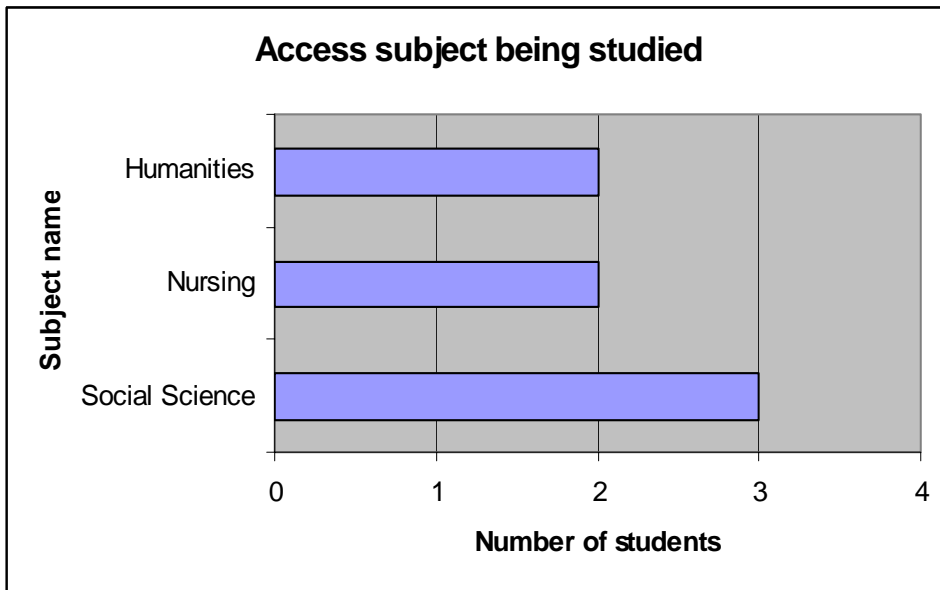
The second question students were asked in the survey was: **“What qualification were you studying for when you participated in On Track?”** The following clustered column chart and table outline the level of qualification being worked towards:

Level of qualification	Number of returns	Percentage of returns
Access	7	11.5%
HNC	24	39.3%
HND	30	49.2%



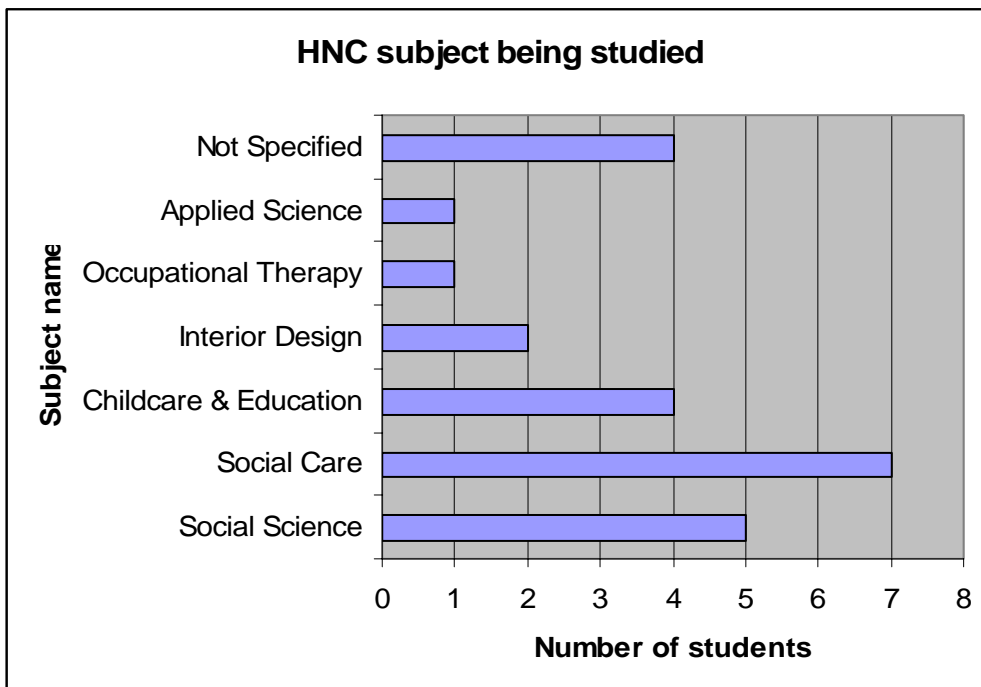
Clearly, the vast majority (54 students; 88.5%) of On Track students were studying at HN level, with almost half of all returns (30 students; 49.2%) being received from HND students. This reflects the emphasis placed by the On Track project on reaching students who may potentially go to study at a Higher Education Institution in the near future.

Looking more closely at the responses from Access students, respondents were studying the following range of courses:

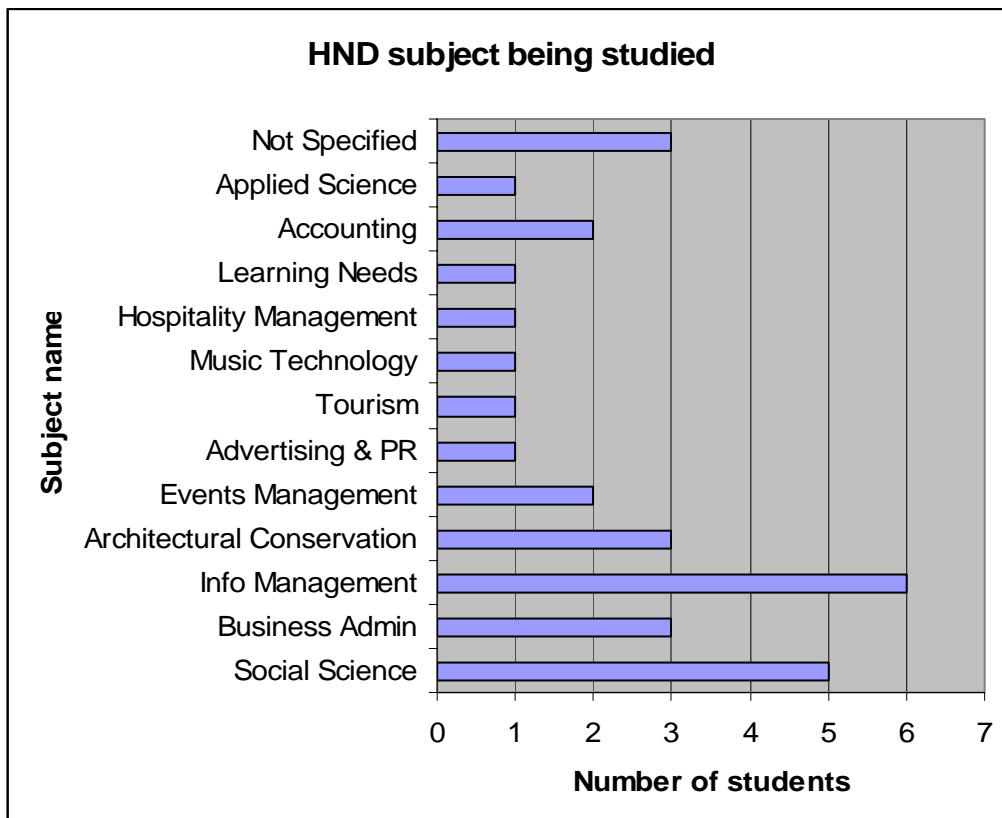


Access subject	Number of students	Percentage of access students
Social Science	3	42.9%
Nursing	2	28.6%
Humanities	2	28.6%

More useful analysis can be derived from these figures when set alongside the breakdown of HNC and HND courses as seen below:



HNC subject	Number of students	Percentage of HNC students
Social Science	5	20.8%
Social Care	7	29.2%
Childcare & Education	4	16.7%
Interior Design	2	8.3%
Occupational Therapy	1	4.2%
Applied Science	1	4.2%
Not Specified	4	16.7%



HND subject	Number of students	Percentage of HND students
Social Science	5	16.7%
Business Admin	3	10.0%
Info Management	6	20.0%
Architectural Conservation	3	10.0%
Events Management	2	6.7%
Advertising & PR	1	3.3%
Tourism	1	3.3%
Music Technology	1	3.3%
Hospitality Management	1	3.3%
Learning Needs	1	3.3%
Accounting	2	6.7%
Applied Science	1	3.3%
Not Specified	3	10.0%

Among Access and HNC students, a strong tendency towards social subjects may be identified. In the Access group, all 7 students were studying one of either social sciences, humanities or Access to teaching. In the HNC group the social science, social care, childcare and occupational therapy students collectively accounted for 17 out of 24 students (70.8%).

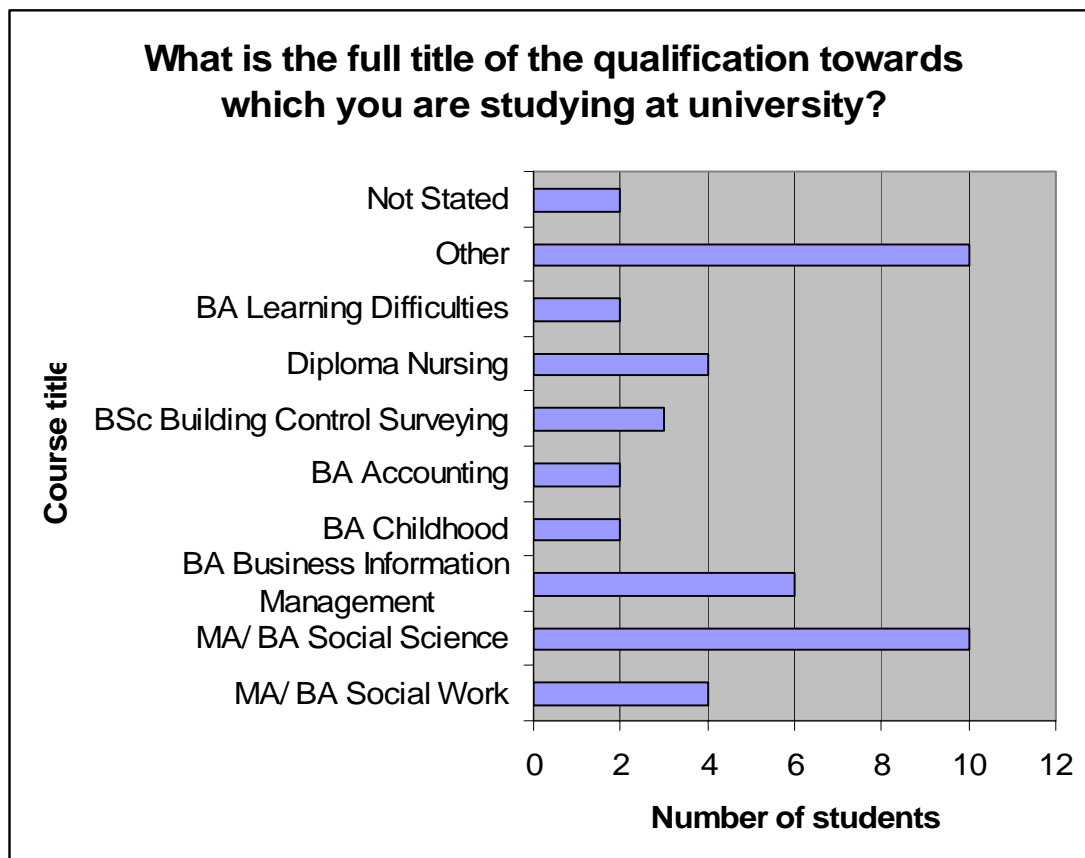
Such a weighting in favour of social subjects was not identified among HND students however. Social science and learning needs accounted for 6 out of 30 students (20%). Far more popular were business and management-related courses – business administration, information management, events management, advertising & PR and hospitality management - which collectively accounted for 13 HND students (43.3%).

The recent 2006 On Track annual report observes that analysis of the project for the academic year 2005-06 (the year after most of the cohort under discussion participated in On Track) suggests that work should be done to develop teaching materials for science students (West Forum, 2006: 9). Interestingly, the sample surveyed here included only one HND science student, one HNC science student and no Access science students at all. On Track staff detect a social science bias in their mentoring materials. This survey shows that 30 out of 61 respondents (49.2%) were studying social subjects. The question of which factor determines which would require more detailed assessment however.

Observations and conclusions

To proffer a preliminary suggestion we may ponder whether these findings reflect the fact that HN qualifications were traditionally geared towards vocational training. This focus may have been compromised by the need to equip HN students with the additional skills required for university study since the FE sector has become an alternative route into Higher Education Institutions (Osborne *et al* 2000). This shift notwithstanding, many HN courses naturally retain the stamp of the vocational training out of which they have grown, leading to an emphasis on socially based learning.

This conclusion may be supported further by the results of a further survey question. Students were asked: “**What is the full title of the qualification that you are studying towards at university?**” A wide variety of responses were volunteered by respondents to this open question. The results were categorised for purposes of analytical clarity and were as follows:



Course title	Number of students	Proportion of HE students
MA/ BA Social Work	4	8.9%
MA/ BA Social Science	10	22.2%
BA Business Information Management	6	13.3%
BA Childhood	2	4.4%
BA Accounting	2	4.4%
BSc Building Control Surveying	3	6.7%
Diploma Nursing	4	8.9%
BA Learning Difficulties	2	4.4%
Other	10	22.2%
Not stated	2	4.4%

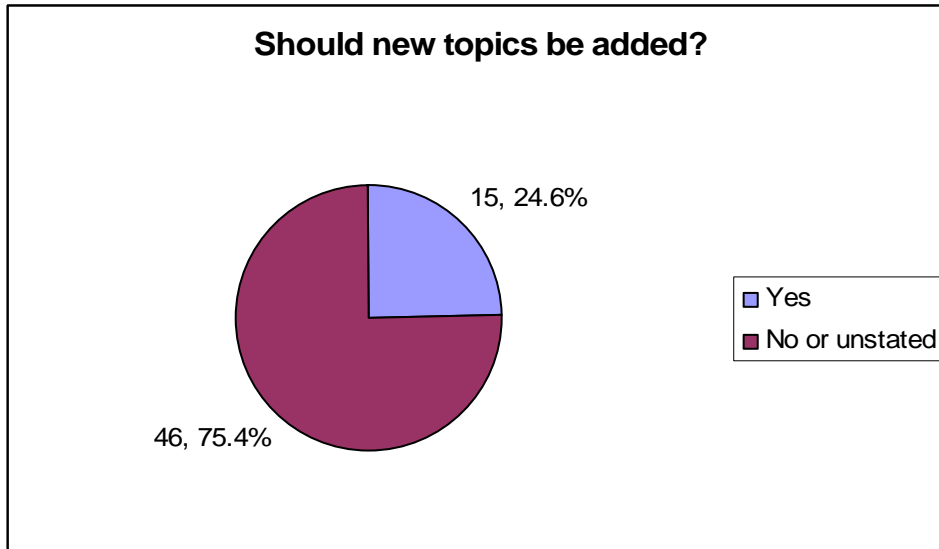
The 'other' category encompasses a wide variety of courses, all of which had enrolled one On Track student. These courses were:

- BSc Food Bioscience;
- BSc Zoology;
- BSc Occupational Therapy;
- BA Hospitality Management;
- BA Mass Media Communications;
- BA International Travel Tourism Management;
- BA Human Resource Management;
- B. Arch. Architecture;
- Events Management (level not stated)
- Commercial Music (level not stated)

Social subjects account for 23 of the 45 HE students (social work; social science; childhood; nursing; learning difficulties; occupational therapy), representing 51.1% of the students progressing from On Track. This dovetails closely with the earlier finding that 30 out of the full sample of 61 students (49.2%) who responded to the questionnaire had been studying towards an FE qualification in a social subject at the time when they participated in On Track.

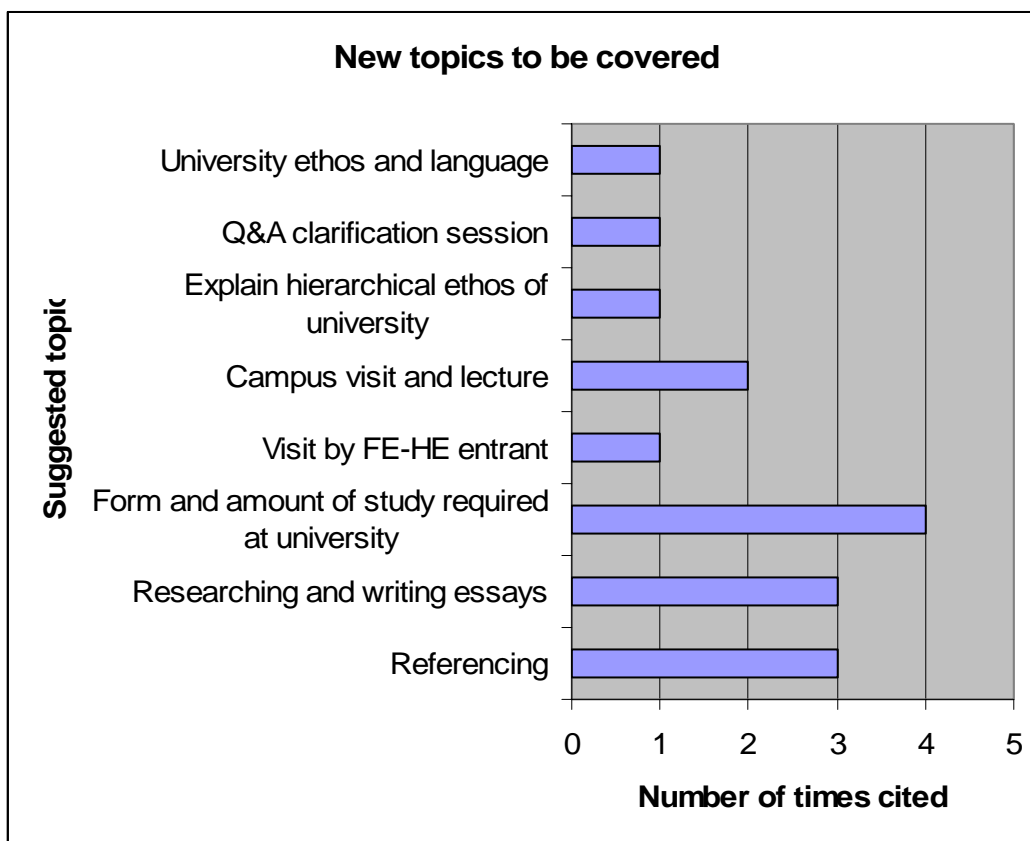
Appendix C: Structure and content of On Track sessions

For question twelve, students were asked “**Are there any topics that were not part of the On Track project that you think should be included?**” This was an open question. The results have been displayed firstly in terms of ‘yes’ or ‘no/ not stated’ replies, followed by more detailed examination of the specific suggestions made by respondents.



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Yes	15	24.6%
No or not stated	46	75.4%

As the above data shows, most students either failed to answer this question or made no suggestions for new topics. However, roughly a quarter of students volunteered ideas, one in fact volunteering two possible innovations. They were as follows:



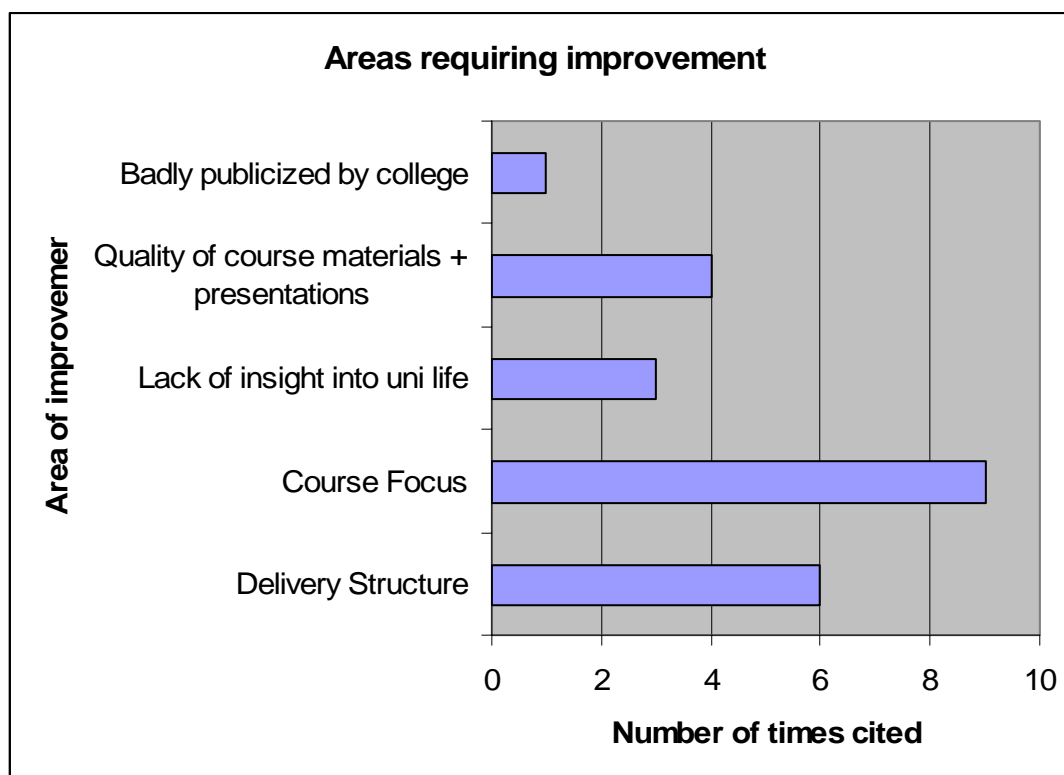
Response	Number of times cited	Proportion of total responses
Referencing	3	18.8%
Researching and writing essays	3	18.8%
Form and amount of study required at university	4	25.0%
Visit by FE-HE entrant	1	6.3%
Campus visit and lecture	2	12.5%
Explain hierarchical ethos of university	1	6.3%
Q&A clarification session	1	1.4%
University ethos and language	1	6.3%

Ten of the sixteen suggestions relate to university coursework preparation – referencing, essay technique and study technique – amounting to 62.5% of the suggestions volunteered by respondents. A further two relate to the university ethos (12.5%). These responses reflect students’ wishes to map their own aspirational and intellectual sets against the requirements expected of them at university.

Observations

Many of the ideas suggested by students already form part of the On Track provision. The recent 2006 On Track annual report indicates that efforts are being made to provide campus visits for all students who wish to attend them.

Question thirteen continued this theme by asking students “**Are there any other changes/ improvements that you think should be made to the On Track programme?**” The results of this open question were as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of sample
Delivery Structure	6	26.1%
Course Focus	9	39.1%
Lack of insight into uni life	3	13.0%
Quality of course materials + presentations	4	17.4%
Badly publicized by college	1	4.3%

The twenty two students who indicated changes and improvements could be made volunteered twenty three suggestions between them.

The area most frequently cited as requiring improvement was the course focus, which was identified by more than a third of those students who answered this question (9 students; 39.1%). Two of these respondents wanted more information on referencing, while two more wanted to visit a university campus. The other five suggestions were as follows: more on essay writing; more on exams and marking systems; more on

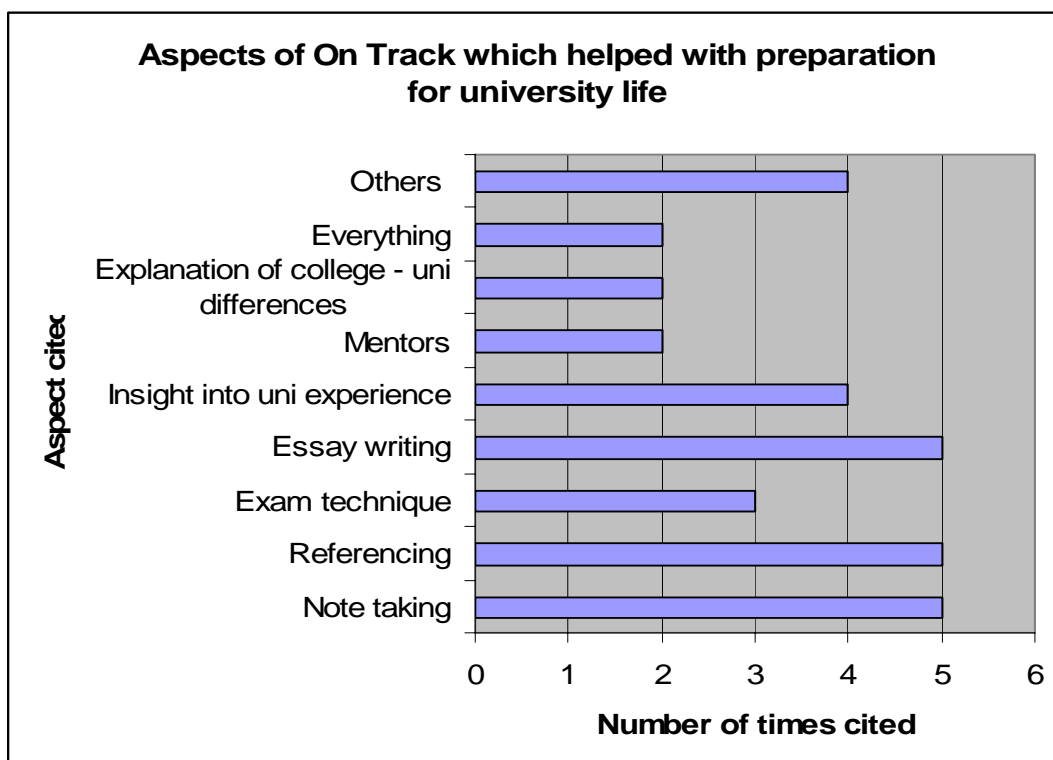
time management; more on funding applications; and more emphasis on the experience of mature students with families.

More than a quarter of those students who wished to see improvements to On Track were concerned with the delivery structure of the course (6 students; 26.1%). The specific suggestions were that the course structure was unclear (cited twice), the course wasn't long enough and had to be rushed (also cited twice), that there should have been one-to-one sessions with tutors and that On Track was delivered too early in the college session.

Four students (17.4%) were concerned with the quality of course materials and presentations. One student viewed the tone of the facilitators as being too close to college teachers, while the quality of handouts and powerpoint presentations were each criticised once each. Most strikingly, one student argued that "changes are required in all aspects of the program".

The remaining suggestions were concerned with a lack of insight gleaned into university life (3 students; 13.0%) and poor publicity by the college (1 student; 4.3%).

Question fourteen asked students **"Where there any aspects of the On Track programme that you feel were useful for preparing you for life at university?"**
The response to this open question was as follows:



Response	Number of students	Proportion of subset
Note taking	5	15.6%
Referencing	5	15.6%
Exam technique	3	9.4%
Essay writing	5	15.6%
Insight into uni experience	4	12.5%
Mentors	2	6.3%
Explanation of college - uni differences	2	6.3%
Everything	2	6.3%
Others	4	12.5%

The responses to this question resemble those given to an earlier question ('Are there any topics that were not part of the On Track project that you think should be included?'), where students were asked what they felt had been missing from the project. Again, a majority of responses were concerned with coursework preparation, encompassing note taking, referencing, exam technique and essay writing (18 responses; 56.3%). A further six responses were concerned with the university ethos (18.8%) while two students praised the role of On Track mentors (6.3%). Two students happily indicated their pleasure with 'everything' (6.3%). Four students' contributions were categorised as 'other', being cited only once. They were as follows: 'Library tour and IT guide'; 'Drawing diagrams from oral explanations'; 'Information sheets'; and 'Useful in determining *not* to apply to university at the present time'.

Concluding observations and suggestions

The cross-over in student responses suggests either that course provision is patchy and inconsistent between cohorts, or that the students in question did not attend all of the sessions. Flagging up the content of past and forthcoming sessions may combat this; as indeed might the earlier suggestion that a question and answer session could be added to the end of the course, perhaps with a revision element built in.

Appendix D: On Track Survey for Participants

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible. All questionnaires are strictly confidential and will not be revealed to the On Track team.

1. What further education college were you attending when you participated in On Track?

2. What qualification were you studying for when you participated in On Track?

3. Which month and academic year did you take part in On Track?

Month _____ Year _____

4. Are you currently studying towards a degree at university or other higher education institution?

Yes

No **Please go to question 8**

5. Which university are you enrolled at?

6. What is the full title of the qualification that you are studying towards at university?

7. What year of the degree programme did you enrol at?

1st year 2nd year 3rd year

8. If you are not currently studying towards a degree at university, did you:

Continue your studies at college?

Decide not to apply for/enrol at university?

Enrol at university and decide to leave?

Other, please explain

9. When you first enrolled at college, did you intend to pursue your studies at university?

Yes No Unsure

10. Did participating in On Track influence your decision about whether to enrol at university?

Yes No Unsure

11. Please circle how much you agree or disagree with the following statements (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)

a. The On Track programme provided me with an insight into what university involves

1 2 3 4 5

b. On Track helped me decide if higher education was the right option for me at the present time

1 2 3 4 5

c. Taking part in On Track improved my existing skills

1 2 3 4 5

d. On Track boosted my confidence in my own abilities

1 2 3 4 5

e. Taking part in On Track helped me make a smooth transition into degree level study at a university

1 2 3 4 5

f. Taking part in On Track helped to clarify what university life is like

1 2 3 4 5

12. Are there any topics that were not part of the On Track programme that you think should be included?

13. Are there any other changes/improvements that you think should be made to the On Track programme?

14. Were there any other aspects of the On Track programme that you feel were useful for preparing you for life at university?

15. Would you recommend participation in the On Track programme to other college students?

Yes No Unsure

16. Prior to college, what was your main activity?

School Employed Unemployed

Other, please specify _____

17. If you have any other qualifications, please list these below

18. Have any member of your immediate family previously completed a course in a university? If yes, please give details.

**Thank you very much for your feedback.
Please return this questionnaire in the stamped addressed envelope provided**

Appendix E: On Track Focus Group Schedule

- i. Welcome and introductions. Explain the purpose of the evaluation and the confidentiality arrangements.
- ii. Which college did you attend?
- iii. Level and subject of study?
- iv. Present situation (e.g. employment, HE/FE)?

If HE :-

- v. Which subject studied?
- vi. Which level joined (e.g. advanced entry)
- vii. Had you already decided to go on to an HEI after college before you attended your On Track session?
- viii. Perceptions of success of On Track in general in preparing for life at an HEI?
- ix. Issues and concerns before starting HEI?
- x. Did On Track help you with any of the following:
 - Degree level study
 - Performance in exams and assessments
 - Lecture note taking
 - Knowledge of resources (e.g. library, financial assistance)

If not HE:-

- xi. Before On-Track, did you know you did not want to attend an HEI?
- xii. What were your influencing decisions?
- xiii. Do you intend to study at an HEI at a later date?
- xiv. Was there any information you would have liked that was not included?

General

- xv. Do you feel the tutors were helpful in explaining all you wished to know?
- xvi. Anything else you would have liked to know more about?
- xvii. What do you feel are the main differences between college and university (*for both those who are and are not attending HEI*)?
- xviii. Overall, better idea of what life at university was like? Do you think that On Track gave a true reflection of university life (*for those now attending HEIs*)?