

National Student Survey Summary Report: Non-traditional students

1. This summary report draws on analysis from section 9 of 'The National Student Survey 2005-2007: Findings and Trends'¹, which focuses on the experiences of 'non-traditional' students in higher education. Indicators of 'non-traditional' students fall into two broad categories: 'ascribed' and 'acquired' characteristics. Ascribed characteristics are those which belong directly to the student; in terms of 'non-traditional' groupings the key characteristics are age, ethnicity and disability. Acquired characteristics are those characteristics a student acquires by virtue of their experiences and social position; the key characteristics here are social class and type of school attended. A range of other measures of socio-economic position were tested but were found to have no significant effect on student experiences as measured by the National Student Survey (NSS)². Table 1 summarises these measures and for each measure the reference category is shown in brackets.

Table 1: Measures for 'non-traditional' student groups

'Ascribed' characteristics	'Achieved' characteristics
Age at commencement of study	Social class
Declared disability	Type of school attended
Ethnicity	

Non-traditional students: 'Ascribed characteristics'

2. The effects of the 'ascribed characteristics' are shown in Table 2. These measures are summaries taken from models which include all the student, course and institutional characteristics used elsewhere in analysis of the NSS. For ease of presentation only those characteristics pertaining to 'non-traditional' students are included in the summary table.

¹ The full report is available on the HEFCE web-site, www.hefce.ac.uk, under Publications/Research & evaluation.

² These measures included tuition fee status and the participation rate of the students' home postcode area.

Table 2: Non-traditional students, 'ascribed characteristics' summary

	Teaching and Learning	Assessment and Feedback	Academic Support	Organisation and Management	Learning Resources	Personal Development	Overall Satisfaction
Age (18 or under)							
19	ns/ns/ns	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
20-21	+/+ /ns	ns/ns/ns	-/-/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
22-30	+ /+ /+	+ /ns /+	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	ns/-/-
31-40	+ /+ /+	+ /+ /+	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	+ /ns /ns	+ /ns /ns
41+	+ /+ /+	+ /+ /+	+ /ns /ns	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	+ /ns /+
Ethnicity (White)							
Black: African	-/-/-	ns/ns/-	-/-/-	- /ns /-	- /ns /ns	-/-/-	-/-/-
Black: Caribbean	ns/ns/ns	+ /+ /+	ns/ns/ns	+ /+ /+	ns /+ /+	+ /+ /+	ns /+ /+
Asian: Indian	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Asian: Pakistani	-/-/-	- /- /ns	-/-/-	+ /+ /+	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	- /- /ns
Asian: Bangladeshi	-/-/-	- /ns /ns	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Asia: Chinese	-/-/-	+ /+ /+	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Mixed	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-	- /ns /-	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Other	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	ns /+ /ns	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Not known/Refused	-/-/-	ns/ns/ns	-/-/-	ns/ns /+	-/-/-	-/-/-	-/-/-
Disability (No disability)							
Dyslexic	- /- /ns	- /- /-	- /ns /-	- /- /-	- /- /-	- /- /-	- /- /-
Other disability	ns/ns/ns	- /ns /ns	ns/ns/ns	- /- /-	- /- /-	ns /- /-	ns /- /-

3. Table 2 summarises the effects of age, ethnicity and declared disability. Looking firstly at age, on the Teaching and Learning scale and the Assessment and Feedback scale, older students (aged 31 or over) were more positive about their experiences than those aged 18 or under on entry to their courses. However, this was not replicated across the other scales, for Organisation and Management and for Personal Development students aged 19 to 30 were less positive about their experiences than were the youngest students, while for the Learning Resources scale all age groups were less positive than those aged 18 on entry to their course.

4. The effect of ethnicity also shows some variation both between scales and between different ethnic groups. While the general pattern is one where those from 'non-White' ethnic groups are less positive about their experiences than White groups, this is far from universal. Notably, for the Assessment and Feedback, Organisation and Management and the Personal Development scales, students from Black: Caribbean groups were more positive about their experiences than were students from White groups. Students from Asian ethnic groups were less positive about than White students about their experiences of Teaching and Learning, Organisation and Management, and Learning Resources.

5. Students with dyslexia or another declared disability were less positive about virtually all aspects of their courses than were students with no declared disability.

6. With regard to the 'ascribed' characteristics associated with 'non-traditional' students, there is a suggestion in Table 2 that these groups have less positive experiences of higher education than do 'traditional' students. However, this is not universally the case with those from older age groups and those from Black: Caribbean backgrounds being notable exceptions.

Non-traditional groups: 'achieved characteristics'

7. Two 'achieved' or socio-economic characteristics were found to have a statistically significant effect on NSS scores: the parental socio-economic group and the school type the student had previously attended. As each of these measures are only easily applicable to young UK entrants the models described below excluded all those aged 19 or over on entry to the course and all overseas entrants. Data for school type was only available for the 2007 NSS cohort therefore no comparisons over time are possible.

8. Table 3 summarises the effect of socio-economic group and school type for each of the analytical scales and overall satisfaction. The other student, course and institution characteristics used elsewhere in analyses of the NSS are also included in these models but are not shown here for presentation purposes, nevertheless the effects shown are after the other characteristics have been taken into consideration in the models.

9. Table 3 shows that there are relatively few effects of socio-economic group on the analytical scales or on Overall Satisfaction.

10. Type of school attended shows more consistent effects. Students who attended a state school were more positive about Teaching and Learning, Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support, and Personal Development than students who attended an independent school prior to entering higher education.

Table 3: Summary of socio-economic characteristics

	Teaching and Learning	Assessment and Feedback	Academic Support	Organisation and Management	Learning Resources	Personal Development	Overall Satisfaction
Socio-economic group							
2	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
3	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
4	ns	+	+	ns	ns	ns	ns
5	ns	+	ns	ns	ns	ns	+
6	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
7	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
9	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
State school (Independent school)	+	+	+	ns	ns	+	ns ³

Summary

11. There are not simple patterns with regard to 'non-traditional' student groups and experiences of higher education as measured by the NSS. The evidence for the 'ascribed' characteristics of age, ethnicity and disability suggest that many of the 'non-traditional' groups are less positive about their experiences of higher education than those from the more traditional groups. However, when considering 'achieved' characteristics the evidence suggests that 'non-traditional' groups here have a tendency to be more positive about their experiences in higher education.

12. These findings highlight the need for sensitivity in understanding 'non-traditional' groups and suggest that different types of 'non-traditional' students may experience higher education in different ways.

³ The effect of a student having attended a state school is marginally not significant at the 99%, however when socio-economic group is removed from the model this effect becomes marginally significant.