



GRADUATE UNION

FLASH SURVEY REPORT:

IMPACT OF COVID19 ON POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

UG - undergraduate
PG - postgraduate
UCU - University and College Union
PGT - postgraduate taught
PGR - postgraduate research

I. INTRODUCTION

Quantitative and qualitative data from the Flash survey offered an insight into the concerns of students during COVID19, especially in relation to the university response. Data presented below have been extracted on May 28th 2020, 7:58 am MDT. The Flash Survey was launched on Friday 15 May and gathered, at the point of writing, 847 responses in total, with a completion rate between 90% (627 responses) and 100% (220). Eleven questions (Q1 to Q11) were asked to the students, of which Q11 provided us with qualitative data (see Appendix). The first part of this report will present qualitative data analysis, and the second part will break down the quantitative dataset.

2. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

There were 220 responses to the open-ended Question 11 in the survey (*Do you have any additional comments, questions, or concerns you would like to share with the Graduate Union?*). These responses have been thematically analysed. Respondents highlighted a number of issues which have been divided into seven broad themes: communication and consistency; fees and funding; research and teaching; student welfare; accommodation; visa and immigration and graduation and Michaelmas 2020. Each theme is discussed below. Details in the responses that might reveal the identity of students have been removed.

2.1. Communications and Consistency

Students reported a general impression of inconsistency in the communication they received. This highlights the challenges for the University's various structure such as colleges, departments, research facilities like laboratories and libraries to streamline coherent messages to postgraduate students.

"University wide communications and College communications = brilliant. Faculty communications have been poor and infrequent, very much felt unsupported from a faculty level."

"The COVID-19 outbreak response has really highlighted the 'disjuncture' between the University and Colleges at Cambridge. I witnessed different Colleges adopting wildly different approaches to the outbreak, with some providing far more support than others. Inequalities between Colleges is already an issue in normal times, but in moments like these it becomes particularly significant. I would have liked to see the University and Colleges take a more concerted approach to dealing with the crisis."

Several students reported perceptions that Master's and PhD students were a lower priority for the University compared to the undergraduate students. Official communication that explicitly stated "Master's and PhD students were lowest priority" was cited.

"My research plans were completely changed because of the pandemic. I had to leave the UK suddenly and return to the [...] to be with my family and my research methodology no longer resembles what it did two months ago. My MPhil

program is supposed to end with the submission of my dissertation on August [...] and, in an ideal world, I would want the opportunity to have an extension on my dissertation and return to the UK once it is safe so that I could complete my in-person fieldwork [...]. I know the question of when the University will be reopen is still up in the air but none of the communications from the university or my department have indicated if this would even be a possibility. In the University's response I feel the one-year MPhil students are being entirely forgotten."

Master's students have highlighted the lack of acknowledgement in University communications about the effects on Master's research such as, significant changes in research questions and research methodology. The limited communication targeting Master's students who feel that they are in most urgent need of it due to imminent exam/dissertation submission deadlines contributes to a sense of being neglected by the University.

Students are particularly worried about their future at the university and lack of transparent communication about the University and Colleges' plan for the next year. They perceive this lack of planning as hindering their ability to make logistical arrangements of travel to Cambridge and their ability to continue with their research. The array of concerns included:

Will PhD students be subjected to separate rule or will they have to follow the same advice as undergraduates or research staff? Will room contracts in college, especially for purposes of rent, begin once the student arrives in college or will the student be expected to pay for an empty room even when travel bans restrict them from coming to the UK? What will happen to belongings that are left in the room that cannot be shipped to the student's address? Who will pay for return flights? Will the University 'chip in' on the cost of buying equipment required to enable students to work from home?

For Master's students, the ability to plan quickly was deemed particularly urgent as articulated by the following student's response:

"Very vague policies of the different colleges regarding the way actual Master's will be able to finish their year at Cambridge (would we be able to come back in July if the situation gets better, would we be able to stay at least a few days at Cambridge to at least pick up our stuffs, etc.) I am talking as an international student who cannot make a return trip in one day at Cambridge."

Furthermore, the University's communication of reopening research facilities seems to have generated a divide between STEM and non-STEM students where the latter feel neglected. For example:

"I'm concerned that I'm hearing rumours of STEM students being allowed to return to their research before non-STEM students. Non-STEM students often need resources they can't access remotely as well, I think a lot of us would be grateful if this rumour could be cleared up so we know what's happening to us!"

Respondents showed vigilance toward the tone of messaging sent out by the University, colleges and departments. While students indicate a desire to be informed about the practical side of matters such as how their academic research will progress or how they will return back to the university, students are mindful of the empathy, care and humanity in communications sent to them. This scrutiny demands the University and Colleges to be mindful of the dynamics

of the larger social context within which education is delivered. These dynamics include but are not limited to: students' level of income, household constraints, their responsibilities towards their families and societies and their personal reaction to the pandemic. Two students' response below articulate this:

"...I have been very ill with covid-19 ... I was dismayed that the school of [name] were so tone-deaf to send everyone an email to say this pandemic ought to be an "opportunity" to be even more "productive" and they don't envision any need to extend deadlines or account for the enormous upheaval in peoples' lives. Very out-of-touch with reality. My college [...] has been very good, and I am grateful to them for all their assistance, understanding and guidance."

2.2. Fees and Funding

The section below will discuss students' thoughts about funding extension, hardship funds and tuition fees.

Funding Extensions

Students have expressed an array of concerns and questions about funding extensions. While all respondents indicated that they would benefit from funding extensions for their PhDs, most are worried about whether they will be eligible for it if they are funded by non UKRI bodies such as their college, departments, Cambridge Trusts, Gates Cambridge and other funding bodies. Testimonies from students explain such instances:

"I am funded through a private enterprise [...] The enterprise may be out of business by the end date of my funding [...] I also do not think I will receive enough [hardship funds] to cover my expenses, even if I apply both to college and to the general hardship schemes."

"I have funding from the European Research Council who haven't said anything about an extension in funding."

Respondents have called for consideration for funding extensions for first and second year PhD students in addition to final year students. Even though the University communication has highlighted that extensions will be granted to PhD students on a case by case basis, there is suspicion and fear that their applications for extensions will be denied in the future.

"..... By saying that funding will be considered on a "case by case basis" ensures that individual students themselves must take on the overwhelming bureaucratic burden of petition for our own individual cases, when the impacts of the pandemic are felt by all and thus, students can therefore be classified as a class impacted. The university is making it harder and more taxing for students, putting us at a further disadvantage and disenfranchisement in a time of significant stress."

Hardship Funding

The responses indicate that students who are self-funded or funded by private bodies are most concerned about access to hardship funds. Statements showed that students have lost their jobs and/or they have no access to social security payments from governments Respondents

therefore worried about how they can continue their PhDs and whether the hardship funds they receive will cover the costs of continuing their studies at the University. The responses below provide examples:

“The indirect impact of COVID on my research is that the economic crisis has reduced ... income, ...Because of this I will be struggling to find time to work on my PhD properly.”

“I am concerned that I might not have enough funds to sustain myself in Cambridge If I cannot return to my country by the end of June.”

Tuition Fees

Students have cited the severe ‘disruption’ to teaching, learning and research activity including the access to resources to justify a demand for reduction in tuition fees. Teaching was firstly impacted by the UCU strikes in Lent term. The COVID19 crisis that soon followed resulted in teaching moving online. However, as the University shut down, most students were forced to move to locations outside Cambridge/UK. Students perceive the lack of access to research facilities like laboratories, libraries, college events, class trips, peer group learning and networking, among others, a significant detriment to their overall university experience. Thus, they believe the high fees for postgraduate education, particularly for international students, is no longer justified. Students in Master’s degree courses particularly reported feelings that their tuition fees are no longer proportionate to their truncated university experience. Examples of such responses are provided below:

“Given the circumstances, I think the university are for the most part doing their best. It would be easy for me to be angry that I am missing XYZ, but given the circumstances most of this is out of the universities control. I am however, frustrated that I am continuing to pay the full tuition fee when I lost out on 4 weeks of lectures/contact time with supervisor due to strikes already, none of which were rescheduled. I also haven't been able to access all the books I need to online (And I think we can all agree reading ebooks is just not the same); when we have had lectures, it is really hard to engage in discussion with students and staff about research which is always really helpful. If this is something other students feel the same way about, especially for the one year students who won't have the time made up, it would be really good to see the graduate union push for some kind of compensation.”

“I am pursuing [an] expensive and highly intensive course for 9 months of study and depends a lot on collaborative learning experience. The experience is highly impaired and course burden has substantial increased with all exams getting converted intoassignments. It's taxing, considering current situation and clearly reflects that University has not given much attention to the intensity. In addition, the job market iss impaired, resulting in a high loss of perceived value [of the degree]. I request a fair consideration by University for a part refund to us.”

“I have gone into debt to be able to pay the university fee. Now, I am frustrated that almost half of my time in Cambridge was cut due to the Industrial Action and the Covid-19 pandemic. I would like a partial refund of my university fees.”

2.3. Research and Teaching

The section below will discuss responses related to academic issues. These include resource access, fieldwork, supervisors, teaching standards, assessments, submission extensions and post submission/viva.

Resource Access

Three major areas were highlighted by responses in terms of resource access. The first was that students experience difficulty and setbacks due to their inability to afford equipment/technology to do their work from home. A student's response provides an example:

"...I don't have a laptop and I am typing my final essay on Google Docs from my phone."

The second was students' inability to access library resources such as borrowing books, accessing archives. Several responses illustrate this:

"... I can work remotely (in the main) but I am beginning to come up against primary research resources in archives and libraries which I need to access but can't. I think the University and colleges need to concentrate on getting libraries open as soon as possible - it would be relatively easy to design simple social distancing measures for both staff and readers."

"My only concern is libraries are opened as quickly and safely as possible and/or greater online resources, esp. foreign languages."

"The lack of e books had cost me a fortune as I've had to buy copies for myself to continue. My library can't always get all the titles are some are pretty niche."

The third was the setbacks to work suffered due to the inability to access laboratories and uncertainties about the re-opening of facilities. For example:

"..... There is a general consensus that first year PhD students can just fill the time by writing their first-year assessment but this does not take into account the work that had to be stopped abruptly which will lead to major delays into getting things running again. Also first year students have the less amount of data so it's easy to run out of things to do".

"The biggest impact for me is related to uncertainty: will research buildings (and which ones) reopen in the next future? Will they not?"

Fieldwork

Respondents were generally concerned about the lack of communication to acknowledge the centrality of fieldwork for research projects:

"So far the information we have received about accounting for lost research time and planning for a return has been very focused on access to labs and we haven't had any guidance about postponed/ cancelled fieldwork. I understand that there is a lot of uncertainty around when this will be possible again but it

would be reassuring at least to have an acknowledgement that the university / department [...]are aware of delays of this type as well.”

Students are also worried about the lack of clarity about when and how they can conduct their fieldwork. This clarity is particularly pertinent as the inability to conduct fieldwork has led to significant restructuring of research projects for Master’s students. As one student explained, “*My research methodology no longer resembles what it did two months ago.*” Moreover, delays or cancellation of fieldwork for PhD students can have equally detrimental effects such as bring unable to collect any data on the research topic.

Supervisors

Supervisors are central to guiding the academic progression of postgraduate students through the uncertainty generated by the COVID19 pandemic. Some responding students have directly expressed concern about unresponsive supervisors as shown by statements below:

“No man's land! can't get supervisor to respond to emails about essential changes to make research methods (now remote). Have continued without support...”

“I feel abandoned by my supervisor who is extremely unresponsive. Sometimes it takes two weeks for her to reply to an email.”

Others have described academic concerns which seems to indicate that they have received little guidance from the supervisor. They have cited concerns about being unable to obtain required material from fieldwork or datasets and worried about “how to get through” or that they are “trying to find a way”.

Teaching Standards

The responses show differing opinions about online teaching. While a student described “...the teaching standards [to] have dropped by being online” another stated that online teaching has increased accessibility for students:

“Online lectures and talks should not revert to classroom-only post-pandemic. This has always been exclusionary and disenfranchising to part-timers.”

Assessment

The majority of concerns related to assessments were expressed by Master’s students. They worried about the lack of safety net in conjunction with the unrealistically high expectations for standard of assessed work, lack of clarity about how colleges will administer and invigilate exams and obtaining final transcripts without marks/grades. The responses below provide examples:

“MPhil programs are not creating no detriment policies, which does not take into account significant changes to work due to mental health, lack of access to important resources, and other extenuating circumstances.”

Students examined by thesis also highlighted the lack of clarity in communications about assessment. The statement below provides an example:

“We had an email from the university saying this impact on our research would be accounted for with our thesis and vivas. How will this happen? The

longer this goes on do we get more compensation and more lenient examining of our thesis? Will external examiners be made aware of the situation Cambridge has?"

Submission Extension

There is consensus in the responses that due to changes in working environment and limitations in accessing resources, the departments must extend submission deadlines. The responses below highlight this issue:

"It's difficult to keep house when everyone's home all day, home school [...] and finish writing a thesis. My writing productivity has dropped dramatically, simply because I'm interrupted so much and a great deal of my mental energy goes into making an entirely home-based existence work for my family. I wish I could have an automatic 6-month extension of all my deadlines, with no penalties. I'm still working and making progress ... it's just very slow."

"Extremely concerned about lack of changing deadlines for major submissions when it was no longer possible to conduct fieldwork. Department was extremely unhelpful and has emphasized the great uncertainty without responding to external pressures we're facing (beyond having to adjust major research plans in response to COVID-19 related lockdown)."

Students also indicated that the extension of deadlines need to be an ongoing consideration in the future as the University looks to reopen its research facilities. This is because students' access to resources is likely to be reduced and productivity will be negatively affected:

"Coordination with supervisors is affected in a major way. Further, due to the lockdown of the research facilities lab-based work as of now is not happening at all. Even when the institutes get opened up again, working in shifts for the foreseeable future will have a considerable delaying effect on lab-based research work, which my degree is based on. It would address a lot of the uncertainty that me and others in my situation have, to know that there will be extensions to our degree time and funding to compensate for the time lost."

Post Submission/Viva

Students reported concern due to lack of clear guidelines and communications about viva arrangements and results. The three responses provide examples:

"We had an email from the university saying this impact on our research would be accounted for with our thesis and vivas. How will this happen? The longer this goes on do we get more compensation and more lenient examining of our thesis? Will external examiners be made aware of the situation Cambridge has?"

".... a delay in receiving the report from my viva has really affected the start of a new job and made that transition quite difficult and even more so as I was not able to plan when I would receive that report and how long it will take degree committees to approve my correction once I submit them. It feels like deadlines for me have not changed at all and I am still held to the strict deadlines but that nobody else in the university needs to meet the deadlines"

that they would normally have in the process of a viva, more communication with students would alleviate some of these feelings I think.”

Furthermore, students reported their own set of financial hardship suffered due to the university’s policy to withhold hardship funds and other forms of support to those who have finished their viva. Respondents reported perceptions of being neglected by the university. For example:

“The university seems to have abandoned any responsibility towards students post-viva, regardless of the outcome of their viva. Funding is denied, even when pre-covid it was available. There is minimal support through institutional links - students can no longer even get an (exploitative) TES contract, as hiring has been completely frozen. Students cannot move on with their lives, as everything has been suspended (except, of course, rent payments). Students in this situation have been left in limbo - apparently not quite students enough for the university bureaucracy, but inhibited from becoming anything else.”

“Please do consider funding for those who finished their viva under lockdown. We are stuck! I need financial support in visa fees and no one can help.”

2.4. Student Welfare

This section will discuss responses related to disability and mental health, safety concerns and caring responsibilities.

Disability and Mental Health

The consistent issue highlighted by students is that the pandemic has taken an emotional toll which in turn adversely affects their productivity. Several student accounts provide examples:

“Productivity is at an all time low, and the stress of exams makes life extremely difficult when no studying has been done due to mental health issues.”

“While my research is not directly impacted, I am finding concentrating very difficult.”

“The emotional stress, and impact this has on productivity should be considered as we move forward. Incl. both concerns relating directly to COVID, such as illness/family concerns, but also other stressors like the uncertainty, difficult working environments, family difficulties/strain of living at home etc. It's nice to be told not to worry if we're being less productive, but this is only reassuring in so far as practical adjustments will be made accordingly.”

Students who had pre-existing mental health conditions and disabilities described how significant hardship has been posed by the pandemic. By their accounts it appears that existing institutions and structures have failed to adequately support them. The university and colleges need to increase resources of the DRC and UCS services, especially now, even though we do not have clarity on what next terms are going to. As flagged with committees of the University (e.g. Students' mental health and wellbeing), for non-medical health support, the DRC is

delivering much more work during COVID19 than predicted, a +30% help than they were last year.

“Part-time, mature students who have intermitted twice in the past find they haven't a form which really expresses their situation. I have dyslexia and have been totally overwhelmed with the endless cover every possible permutation affecting students without focusing delivery of information on the specific group confusing and time consuming to read. I still don't know exactly which forms to complete even after approaching those who make the rules and uphold them. Also I have not been able to work on my thesis for weeks. I am shielding alone without a decent phone or internet - it being so unreliable that I am having to make freedom of information requests of the providers and BTOpenreach and examine their legal responsibility to provide a reliable service. There are other issues I have had to deal with involving endless hanging on the ends of phones and admin because of being unable to leave my home due to the crisis.”

“The DRC and university response for disabled graduates has been shocking. Even my department, supervisor and college, all of whom know I am disabled, seem to show no interest in helping except to suggest I should de-register by the head of my PhD program. It's like they just wanted to get rid of me. DRC can't do anything. Trying to work with college who just appointed a welfare officer and she has been the best. In the past my college have been good, even when it's not their responsibility or job.”

Students were particularly critical of funding bodies dismissing mental health concerns as demonstrated by the response below:

“[...] had a meeting about AHRC funding extensions, where they relayed to us the 5 categories the university (and the relevant internal bodies) are using as acceptable reasons for delays to research - with regard to possible funding extensions. Many of us in the Zoom were shocked that 'Mental Health', namely stress/anxiety related to the pandemic and resultant inability to concentrate or focus, something I gather is affecting MANY grads, wasn't in these reasons/categories (although category 'e' is 'illness', there's clearly quite a big difference between clinical anxiety, and this form of stress/anxiety).

Safety

Respondents were mostly worried that the University may force them to go back to buildings and research facilities before they felt safe doing so.

“I'm concerned about the rushed reopening of some labs and departments. There is no contingency plan/guideline if someone is infected with coronavirus in the same workplace.”

“It is crucial to minimise pressure in returning to attend laboratories or university events in person. The pressure to disclose being in a risk group, as well as pressure for someone not in a risk group but who generally likes to be careful and might have a fragile health is very difficult to handle. I think it is important to avoid any discrimination based on health or on how careful different personalities are.”

International students highlighted the risks of travel to the UK including concerns about mandatory quarantine and the possibility of being forced to leave the country if there is a second wave of the pandemic. The response below provides examples:

“I am currently outside of the UK, with my family, and have concerns returning too early to Cambridge because of the travel/flight itself, the two week quarantine (I have no extensive social network and no family in the UK) and only be able to go back to the lab for few hours a week due to social distancing, as well as the possibility of a second shut down in case the infection rate increases again. I think there should be a stepwise plan of students getting back to work, UK resident first, then students currently in Europe and then students from the rest of the world; eventually setting priority to final year students.”

Furthermore, a need was identified for the university to consider the safety of students with underlying health conditions while undertaking its future planning:

“I am in a high risk group due to chronic illness and therefore have to shield. I think it is also important for the university to know that there might be students who are more vulnerable despite their young age when they plan for the future.”

Caring Responsibilities

Many postgraduate students juggle family responsibilities and employment (particularly part-time students) with their studies at Cambridge. COVID19 has added caring responsibility on to students. Respondents have described difficulties in balancing the demands of academic work with their role as care givers. There is a call to consider the difficulties faced by students who are pregnant at this time as they may not fall into the caregiver category at this time but “seriously impacts [their] physical and emotional ability”. Below are some examples:

“Home schooling whilst trying to write up my thesis is difficult.”

“My [spouse]has Covid-19..... I had to delay submission of my First Year Report and have yet to apply for an Extension As a result of [my spouse’s] illness and shopping shortages around where we live in [location], I was unable to progress my report. I have sufficient data that I collected from field work. Now that my [spouse] is getting better I can focus on my research but will need an extension.”

2.5. Accommodation

The concerns for accommodation consisted of anger at how students were treated by the college at the onset of lockdown and worry about future housing. A student described a particularly difficult situation of being forced to move out of college and becoming “essentially homeless” as their country went into lockdown. Due to the need to support their family, the student had to intermit and find a job. The student has asked their college whether it is possible to apply for accommodation for several months so they can finish their PhD. Yet the college is non-committal about letting the student enter the room ballot. This experience is summarised as:

“..... Kicking graduate students out of the place they have been told to call home with only a few days notice is just another example of a system biased

to the needs of privileged undergraduate students with financial support. Coming to Cambridge for a PhD was a massive mistake.”

“I am worried that my college won't let me return to Cambridge (I live in college accommodation) even when the labs reopen, due to how they have communicated with us.”

As many students left Cambridge in a rushed manner their belongings are in college facilities. Students are concerned about the storage and access to the belonging they have left behind. The following response provides an example:

“It would be helpful to have more clear information on whether or not we can extend the time which colleges will allow us to store possessions in rooms that we cannot clear due to being stranded abroad.”

Respondents highlighted the lack of communication from colleges and the University about whether they would provide accommodation in the future. They also sought clarity on issues of whether/how their college will support international students during the mandatory 14 day quarantine upon arrival into the UK. The following responses provide examples:

“I would like the University to allow returning to college accommodation for students who left Cambridge, since my lab [name] is opening ..and my work will be further delayed if I can't return to Cambridge.”

“I am extremely concerned about the likelihood of having to self-quarantine when research students are allowed to return from abroad - I would be reassured if the University committed to provide resources (financial and otherwise) if Colleges are unable (or unwilling) to provide adequate spaces. (In addition to plane tickets and other unanticipated costs, a two-week hotel stay, for example, would be financially crushing.)”

“Please encourage the colleges to publish their plans for allowing postgraduates to return to accommodations should the situation allow. Currently those of us who left in a rush have no idea whether we can return this summer or not, and if we can how the colleges will deal with accommodation and importantly quarantine support for international returners.”

2.6. Visa and Immigration

Respondents have raised two issues pertaining to visas and immigration. Firstly, the call for longer post study visa extensions in light of the difficulties to seek a job in the present climate:

“Graduating in this climate has severely limited job prospects in the UK for international students. To stay in the country, a sponsorship from an employer is needed before our current visas run out. The government has introduced a 2-year post-study work visa but unfortunately those graduating this year are not eligible for it. If something can be done at the national level to make 2020 graduates eligible for this scheme, a lot of the graduands would be very relieved.”

Secondly, there is a call for clearer procedure on intermission for Tier 4 students:

“...Please ask the international students office to come up with clearer intermission guidelines as they relate to tier 4 and leaving the UK. If a student is still in Cambridge and cannot return home due to closed borders and might want to intermit, how can the university provide support when after the intermission application, the home office will ask the student to leave the UK within 60 days?”

2.7. Graduation and Michaelmas 2020

Students have asked for clear communication about how graduation will take place. Concerns have also been raised about the possibility of deferring admissions next year and there is a call for more information about what students can expect Michaelmas term to look like. The examples of responses are provided below:

“It has been very frustration that there has been no information about graduation, which is today. Seems there will not even be virtual recognition, and no opportunities to visit campus with my family and participate in a future event once I graduate today.”

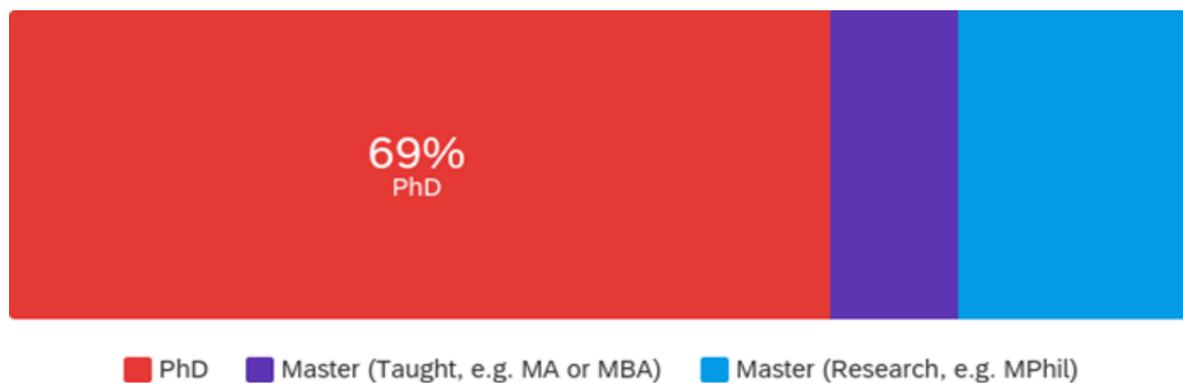
“Thank you for all you do, GU. As an international student with a conditional offer to continue onto the next degree in September, I would find it very helpful to learn Cambridge's decision about having classes online or in person in Michaelmas term 2020 as soon as possible. While the situation is evidently very uncertain, I hope Cambridge will not decide / announce the decision too late, because this impacts international students heavily (given visa applications, etc.)”

3. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data, available in Tables 1 and 2 below, is unpacked in the present section, with a special emphasis on data concerning the impact of COVID19 on degree completion timelines, levels of satisfaction and equality profiles.

In terms of types of courses, of the 847 respondents, 69% were PhD and 31% were Master's students (i.e. 10.9% PGT or Taught, e.g. MA or MBA; and 19.9% Research Master's, e.g. MPhil). In terms of years of study, one year only course (23.46%) and 1st year students (23.58%) represent the majority of postgraduate student respondents, followed by 2nd year (22.87%), 3rd year (16.00%) and 4th year or more (14.10%).

Figure 1. Percentage of respondents to the Flash Survey per type of courses.



3.1. Impact on degree completion timelines and extensions.

A large portion of respondents (41%) have pointed out that they have experienced a major delay or major disruption to their degree completion timelines. This was broken down into the survey into three types of major delay or major disruption, including:

- Delay and major change of research strategy - I can work remotely, but I have had to change the direction of my research because I can no longer access certain resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.). (20%, 191)
- Major delay - same as above, but in addition, I have lost a significant amount of time, e.g. because I had to discard samples, abandon studies before completion, etc. (11%, 105)
- Major disruption - I cannot work remotely because my research requires resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.); (10%, 92)

This group is followed by students who have experienced delays and changes of research strategies (35%), more specifically those students who agree on the statement, “My progress is delayed because I'm limited to background reading/data analysis/writing, but little work on my main research priorities has been done”.

Figure 2. Impact on degree completion timelines.

Q6 - How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected your degree completion timeline? Sel...

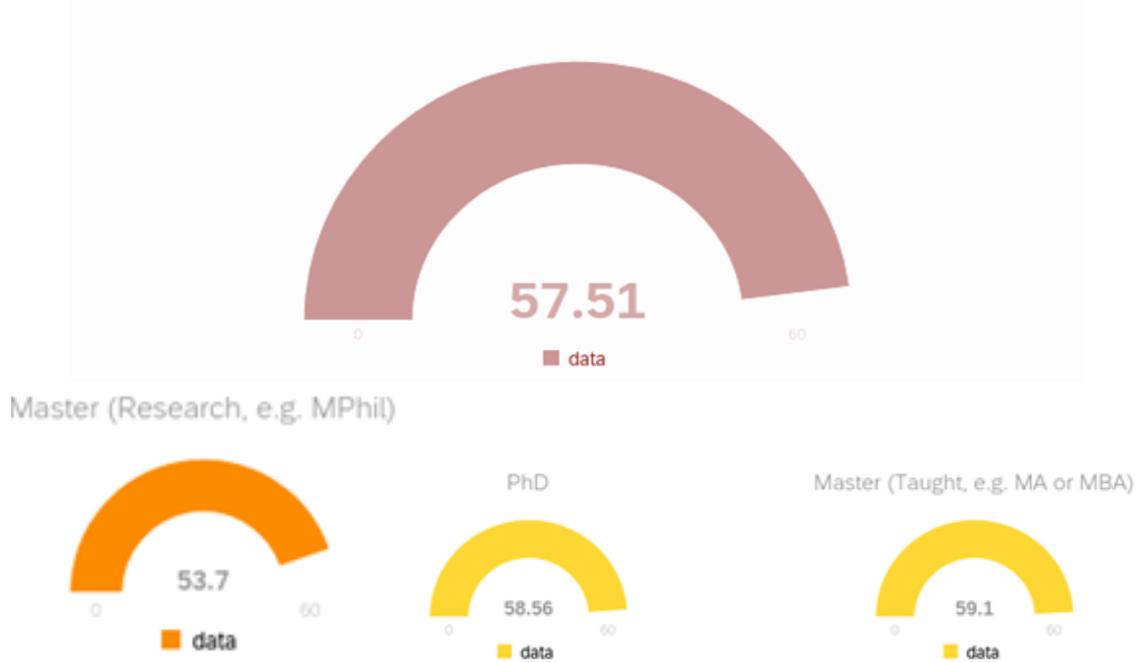


- Minimal impact - I can work remotely, and there has been minimal impact to my progress. I have shifted my research priorities to COVID-related work and am not spending as much time as I normally would on my main research topic. (22%, 208)
- Delay and minimal change of research strategy - My progress is delayed because I'm limited to background reading/data analysis/writing, but little work on my main research priorities has been done. (35%, 334)
- Delay and major change of research strategy - I can work remotely, but I have had to change the direction of my research because I can no longer access certain resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.). (20%, 191)
- Major delay - Same as above, but in addition, I have lost a significant amount of time, e.g. because I had to discard samples, abandon studies before completion, etc. (11%, 105)
- Major disruption - I cannot work remotely because my research requires resources (lab, field sites, archives, etc.); (10%, 92)
- Delay post submission - I have written my thesis, but the process following the submission has proven to be difficult, e.g. the Degree Committee is taking too long to assess my documentation, the online Viva is problematic, the revisions and corrections are affecting my ability to look for jobs, etc. (2%, 16)

The above figures sum up to a total of 76% of respondents who experienced significant and major delays and disruption. The fact that such disruptions are remarkably widespread goes against the position of the University to have a case-by-case approach to extensions, especially of submission deadlines.

Given the above, the University should embrace a **blanket approach to extensions** of submission deadline during COVID19, Other institutions (e.g. KCL) have granted a blanket extension of 3 months to all postgraduate students. This would be quite straightforward to do, notwithstanding the possibility of a large number of records needing to be manually updated. Whilst this could serve to reassure final year students, especially international students, but also 1st and 2nd and 3rd year students. The Graduate Union believes that a similar approach could also be used to funding extensions, given the large scale of delays and disruptions identified by the survey.

Figure 3. Above: average level of satisfaction (mean) of student respondents. Blow: level of satisfaction broken down per type of courses (i.e. PhD and Masters). Figures are available in Tables 1 and 2 below.



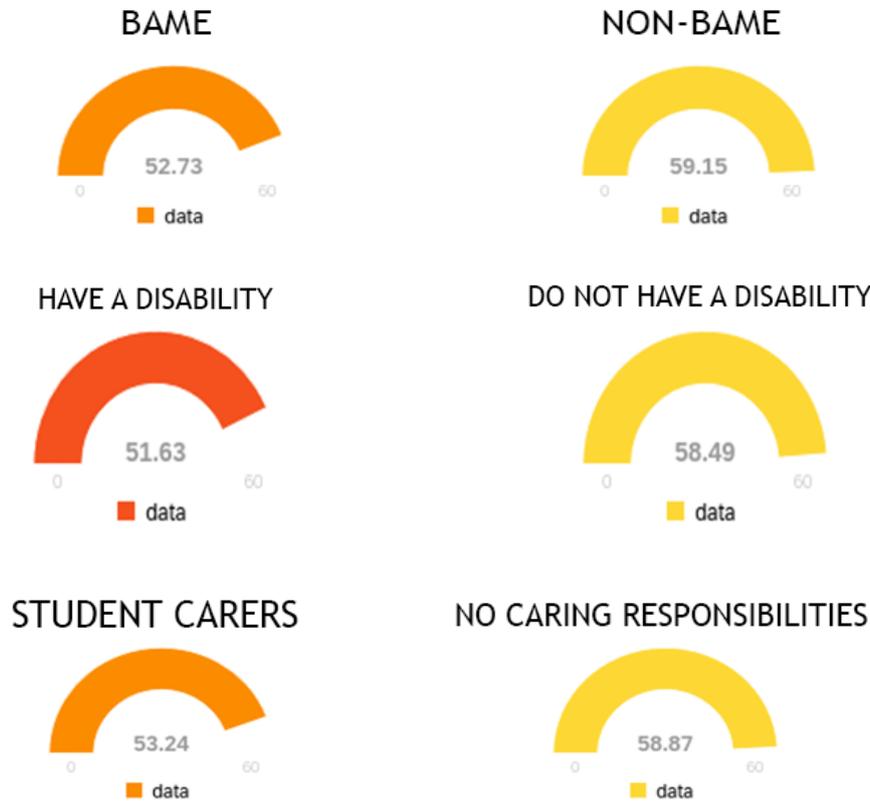
3.2. Satisfaction and equality profiles

Postgraduate respondents have also pointed out that the level of satisfaction with the response of the University to COVID19 was constantly low, between 50-55% across courses and years of study. Research Master's students in particular have reported a concerning low level of satisfaction (c.53%), with 'one-year-only course' disproportionately unsatisfied with the University response (see Figure 3).

The low level of satisfaction overall seems to characterise the whole postgraduate student community, but certain sections of the population have reported a particularly strong negative response. There appears to be a correlation between certain students with protected characteristics and the lowest level of satisfaction. These include, but are not limited to, BAME students (52%), students with disabilities (51%) and students with caring responsibilities (53%). This correlation seems to follow a similar trend of an overall lower level of satisfaction of these groups observed in other surveys (see GU Mental Health Survey 2019, and GU International Student Experience Report 2020). Students with disabilities have reported the lowest level of satisfaction with the university response to COVID19.

On the impact of COVID19 on BAME students, phenomena such as Brexit and the recent COVID19 pandemic have exacerbated targeted racism and violence against minorities such as African-Caribbean, Black, Asian and European communities. For instance, a January 2016 survey on the impact of Brexit showed that 71% of people from ethnic minorities faced discrimination, an increase from 58% reported in previous years^[1].

Figure 4. Levels of satisfaction of students with caring responsibilities, of students with a disability, and of BAME students.



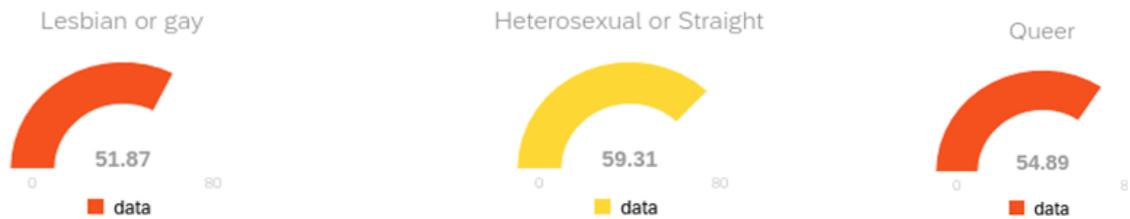
Following the COVID19 pandemic, on May 2020 the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres^[2] said that “the pandemic continues to unleash a tsunami of hate and xenophobia, scapegoating and scare-mongering” and urged institutions to “act now to strengthen the response against the virus of hate.” It is likely that with protective measures like social distancing changing the nature of human interaction, discrimination and harassment may emerge in newer forms, including being exacerbated on online platforms. These types of considerations should be included in an inclusive university response.

Particularly concerning is also the correlation between low level of satisfaction and sexual identities (see Figure 5), in particular gay, lesbians and queer students have reported. There are guidelines^[3] on COVID-19 and specific impact on LGBTI people and what authorities and institutions should be doing to mitigate impact, which could be implemented by the task forces.

We note that the sample sizes when broken down by demographic characteristics are in some cases quite small, however it is concerning to see a pattern of lower satisfaction for students with protected characteristics or who are caregivers across all different breakdowns. Combined with the context noted elsewhere in this analysis, our view is that further investigation of and action on the impact of Covid-19 on equality is warranted.

In order to tackle issues of inequalities and lower levels of satisfaction among students with protected characteristics, Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) [4] of the COVID19 strategies and policies of the University should be undertaken as frequently as possible, and the resulting EIAs reports should be made public. Senior consultants of the Equality and Diversity section of the University should be more involved in strategic meetings of the University, and papers should be circulated to them for EIAs.

Figure 5. Level of satisfaction correlated to sexual orientations.



APPENDIX: TABLES

Table 1. Questions and responses

#	Q1. Are you a Master or PhD student?	%	Count
1	PhD	69.26%	579
2	Master (Taught, e.g. MA or MBA)	10.89%	91
3	Master (Research, e.g. MPhil)	19.86%	166
	Total	100%	836
#	Q2. What year of your course are you in?	%	Count
1	One year only course	23.46%	198
2	1st year	23.58%	199
3	2nd year	22.87%	193
4	3rd year	16.00%	135
5	4th year or more	14.10%	119
	Total	100%	844
#	Q4. Do you identify as BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic)?	%	Count
1	Yes	23.12%	194
2	No	71.51%	600
3	Prefer not to say	5.36%	45
	Total	100%	839
#	Q5. Are you a carer or do you have caring responsibilities?	%	Count
1	Yes	12.47%	105
2	Not	82.07%	691
3	Prefer not to say	5.46%	46
	Total	100%	842
#	Q7. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?	%	Count
1	Yes	12.46%	105
2	No	82.68%	697
3	Prefer not to say	4.86%	41
	Total	100%	843

Table 2. Responses to Q9: How would you rate the response of the University to issues that have affected you during the COVID19 outbreak? Please rate from 0% to 100% satisfied using the slider.

#	Field	Minimum (%)	Maximum (%)	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Satisfaction	0.00	100.00	57.51	26.43	698.58	796

Notes:

[1] Source: Opinium. 1,006 people from ethnic minorities in the UK interviewed 22 February -14 March 2019. Also see Opinium 2019. Racism rising since Brexit vote, available at: <https://www.opinium.co.uk/racism-rising-since-brexit-vote/>

[2] Human Rights Watch, May 2020. Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>

[3]ILGA-Europe, the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, has made available their guidelines at: https://www.ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/COVID19%20_Impact%20LGBTI%20people.pdf

[4] Equality Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA is the University's mechanism for undertaking equality impact analysis of policies or functions relevant to the Public Equality Duties (Equality Act 2010). The Process involves the analysis of information and feedback from protected groups and others -info available at: <https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/equality-diversity-cambridge/equality-impact-assessment-eia>