

“AdvanceHE

+ Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey 2025

Sector report

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Executive summary

- + 86% of postgraduate taught (PGT) students were satisfied with the quality of their course. This is the highest level of overall satisfaction recorded since PTES began in 2014 and is up from 84% in 2024. This improvement is seen across most disciplines, student groups and modes of study.
- + PTES 2025 introduced updates to question wording, split the resources section into specific sections regarding on-campus resources and online learning resources, and added a new question set on end-point assessments for degree apprenticeships. These changes reflect sector feedback and aim to better capture the experiences of diverse student cohorts, especially distance learners and Level 7 degree apprentices.
- + There has been a steady rise in students feeling encouraged to contribute to how their course is run, with a three-percentage point increase this year. However, only 59% of part-time students feel encouraged to contribute in this way, compared to 77% of full-time students. This gap suggests that institutions need to find more effective ways to engage part-time learners in shaping their academic experience.
- + Patterns between institutions vary for different elements of the PGT student experience. Results for community and assessment show greater variation between institutions compared to themes such as teaching and resources. There are clear elements of high performance across the student experience. All themes, with the exception of community, see at least some institutions receiving scores of over 90%.
- + Despite small improvements, the community theme continues to score lowest of all themes in PTES. Students with declared disabilities and those studying part time report significantly lower levels of belonging and community. These gaps will require targeted, inclusive approaches to help all students feel part of their institution.
- + The proportion of students who have considered leaving remains unchanged from 2024, at 16%. Balancing studies with other commitments is now consistently the most common main reason why students have considered leaving.
- + Fewer students this year report that cost-of-living issues are affecting their studies “a lot” but over 60% still say these issues have had at least a little negative impact. Financial pressure continues to be associated with lower satisfaction, and institutions must remain mindful of how economic pressures can impact student engagement and wellbeing.

1 Methodology

1.1 Background

Advance HE's Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) is a key tool for the UK higher education sector to understand the current experiences of postgraduate taught (PGT) students. The survey has been running for 16 years.

PTES offers PGT students a chance to provide feedback to their institutions, while institutions gain important insight into their students' experiences, including comparisons with the wider sector and a wide selection of other benchmark groups within the sector (see section 1.3). PTES is recommended for students studying a programme of at least 60 credits, the greater part of which is at M level and taught. Within these parameters, individual institutions can make the final decision regarding which students are included in the sample.

1.2 Content

PTES comprises core question sets, based around themes, plus some additional questions including overall satisfaction with course quality, as well as whether students had considered leaving their course and the extent of their cost-of-living concerns. There is also a range of demographic questions to support analysis, both within institutions and at sector level.

After feedback from participating institutions, resulting in a working group focused on changes that would improve the survey's relevance to distance learners and degree apprentices, several changes were made to the content of PTES in 2025. Advance HE would like to thank all the institutions which participated in this consultation, and particularly the University of Bath, for their initial feedback and convening the working group to explore possible options. The resources question set has now been split into on-campus resources and online learning resources. This allows institutions to select which students should receive the questions about on-campus resources, providing greater customisability for distance learners. A new question set has also been added, specifically asking questions around end-point assessments for students undertaking Level 7 degree apprenticeships. This question set will also be included in PTES 2026 and we will monitor the degree apprenticeship environment to assess whether this question set provides useful benchmarking for institutions in the coming years.

Overall, PTES 2025 consisted of eight core and three optional main question sets. In the order they appear in the survey, these are:

- + Teaching and learning (core)
 - + Engagement (core)
 - + Community (core)
 - + Assessment and feedback (core)
 - + Dissertation or major project (optional)
-

- + End-point assessment (optional)
- + Organisation and management (core)
- + On-campus resources (optional)
- + Online learning resources (core)
- + Support (core)
- + Skills development (core)

Institutions can ask all respondents the same question sets, or tailor which optional question sets appear for specific respondents. This ensures that PTES is as relevant as possible to the students taking part. Institutions can also choose to add their own question sets, but these are not shared with Advance HE, and are used solely for the institution's own analysis.

For the main question sets, respondents see a range of statements and answer to what extent they agree or disagree with the statements. The available answer options are: 'Definitely agree', 'Mostly agree', 'Neither agree nor disagree', 'Mostly disagree', 'Definitely disagree' and 'Not applicable'. 'Not applicable' responses are removed from the data before analysis. Unless otherwise stated, satisfaction has been measured by the percentage of respondents who answered the question with 'Definitely agree' or 'Mostly agree' and will be rounded to the nearest whole percentage.

Each question set is followed by an open comment question for students to provide further feedback on that theme, with institutions having the ability to remove these questions for a shorter survey if required. There are also two open comment questions asked to all respondents: 'What has been the one most positive aspect of your course so far?' and 'What one thing would most improve your experience of your course?'

In addition to the overall benchmarking reports providing to institutions by Advance HE, institutions could also opt-in to receive tailored analysis on the two main open comment questions. This analysis was provided to institutions directly, on behalf of Advance HE by evasys¹ and Student Voice AI.²

1.3 Participation

Institutions which participate in PTES run the survey via the Jisc Online Surveys platform.³ Individual institutions are responsible for the distribution of the survey and can select which students to include in the sample, in line with guidance provided by Advance HE. Data was collected between 3 February 2025 and 13 June 2025. Within this window, individual institutions had the ability to decide when to run PTES and for how long, as long as the survey ran for a minimum of three weeks.

¹ <https://evasys.co.uk/>

² www.studentvoice.ai/

³ www.jisc.ac.uk/online-surveys

PTES is an annual survey and in 2025 received 90,156 responses from 102 institutions. Of these 102 institutions, 97 had participated in PTES 2024. Based on the most recent data available for the number of postgraduates in the sector,⁴ 12.4% of PGT students in the UK HE sector responded to PTES 2025.

Table 1. PTES 2018-2025: number of participating institutions and number of responses received

	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of institutions	106	85	69	88	91	101	108	102
Responses	85 880	71 098	41 185	69 076	79 591	83 807	98 311	90 156

Due to the large number of participating institutions, Advance HE can offer a range of benchmark groups in its reporting. Participating institutions receive benchmarking reports in Power BI showing their institution's results benchmarked against the sector and up to three further benchmark groups (see Table 2).

Table 2. Benchmark groups and number of participating institutions

Benchmark group	Number of participating institutions (2025)	Benchmark group type
Post 92	45	Institution type
Pre 92	43	
Small & Specialist	14	
Cathedrals Group	6	Mission group
GuildHE	11	
MillionPlus	8	
Russell Group	13	
University Alliance	13	
London	27	Geographic
Scottish	9	
Welsh	5	

While participation in PTES is optional, the large and diverse group of institutions participating in the survey in 2025 ensures that institutions can benefit from a wide choice of robust benchmark comparisons.

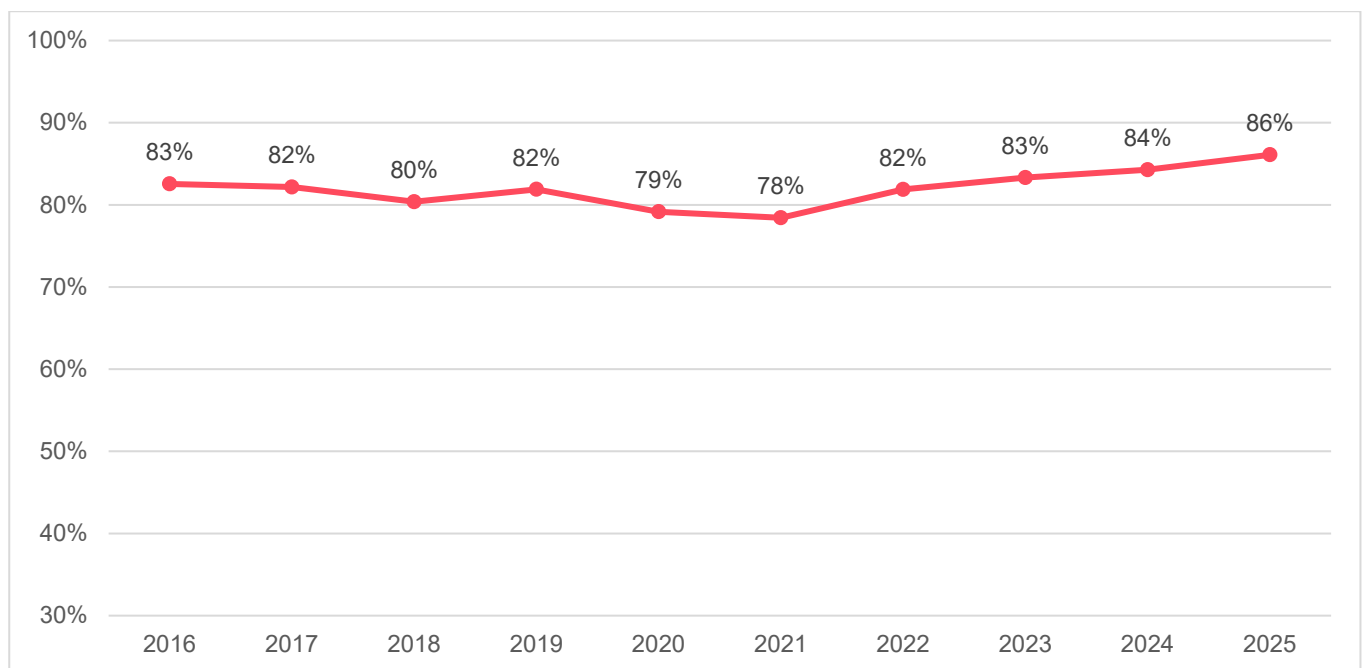
⁴ HESA (2025) *Who's studying in HE?* Cheltenham: HESA. Available at: www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he

2 Overall satisfaction

2.1 Overall satisfaction over time

In addition to questions on specific themes, respondents are also asked how much they agree that 'Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course'. In recent years, this measure has seen increased levels of satisfaction, and this trend has continued this year, with 86% of respondents now agreeing with this statement (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Overall satisfaction over time (2016-2025)

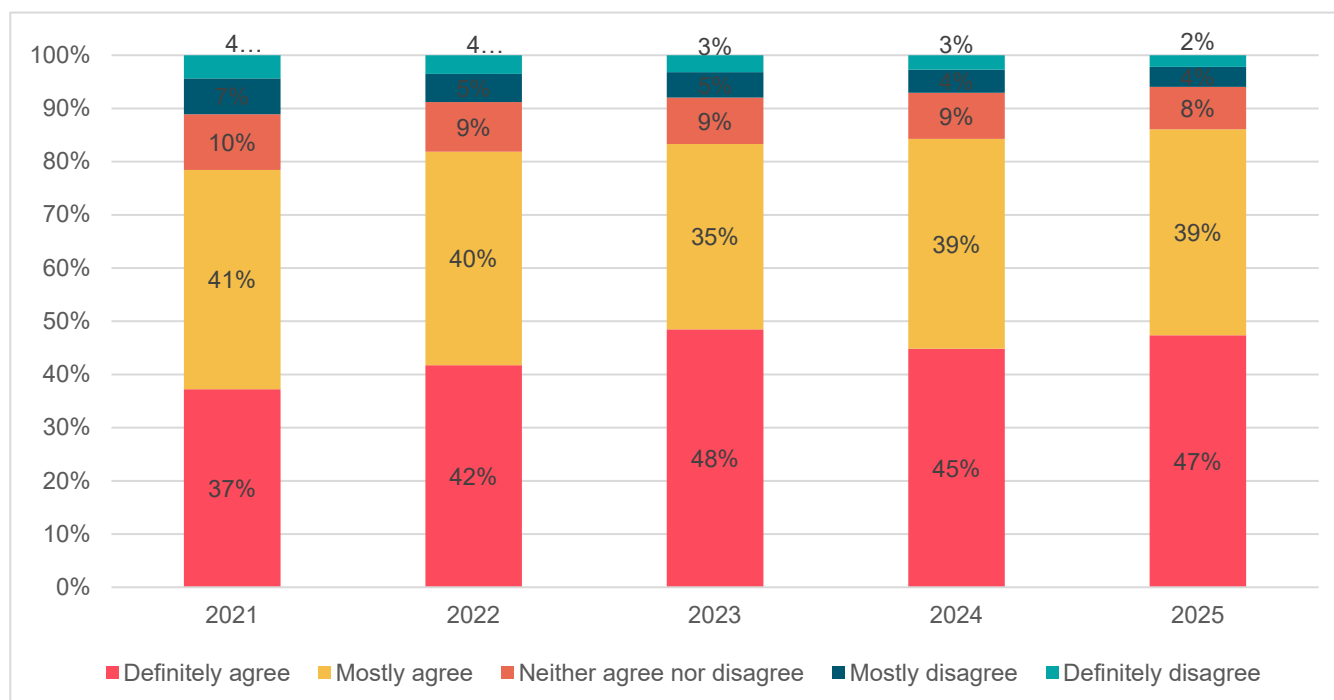


The overall satisfaction reported through PTES has not just rebounded from where it was prior to the pandemic but is now higher than the pre-2020 overall satisfaction scores, which were typically in the low-80% range.⁵

This year's increase in satisfaction is largely due to a higher proportion of respondents (47%) who 'definitely agree' that they are satisfied with their course quality (see Figure 2). This represents a two-percentage point rise from 2024 and continues the broad upward trend since 2021, when the figure was 37%. At the same time, only 6% of respondents expressed disagreement, down from 11% in 2021. While this decline is encouraging, it still means that roughly 1 in 17 PGT students responding to PTES remain actively dissatisfied with their course quality.

⁵ Quinn, S (2024) *Postgraduate taught experience survey 2024*. York: Advance HE. Available at: <https://advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/postgraduate-taught-experience-survey-2024>

Figure 2. Overall satisfaction (2021- 2025): proportion of different response options

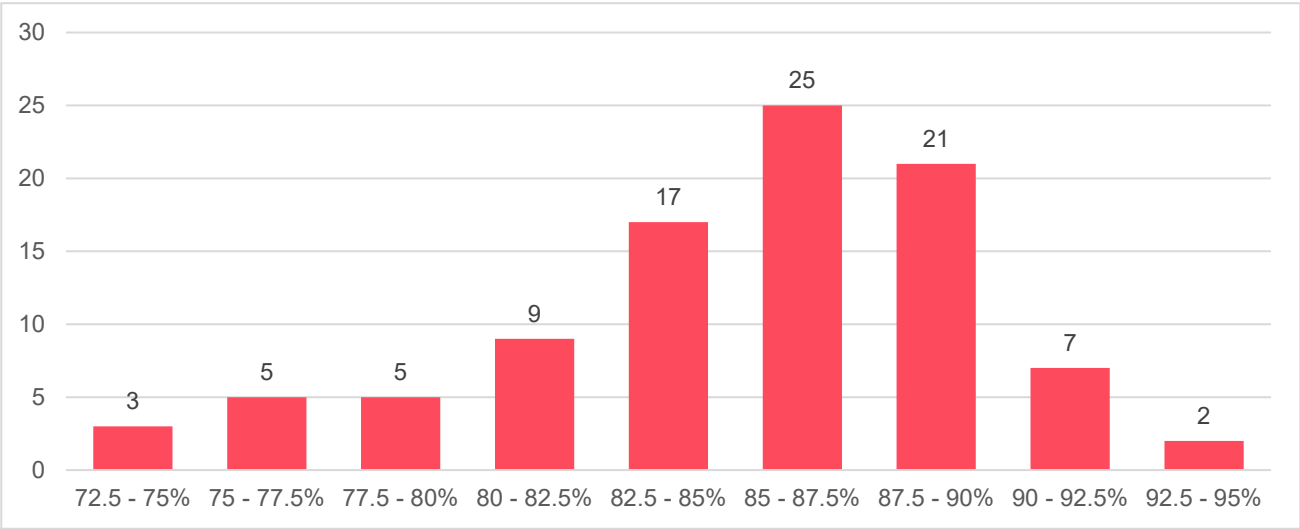


2.2 Across institutions

The overall satisfaction across all respondents is an important measure for tracking overall trends, but it is also vital to consider that this 'satisfaction' is not spread equally across the sector. It is very common for institutions to record overall satisfaction levels between 80% and 90% but there are exceptions to this, with around 14% of institutions recording satisfaction scores below 80% while around 10% of institutions record satisfaction above 90% (see Figure 3).⁶

⁶ Institutions with fewer than 100 responses have been excluded from this analysis.

Figure 3. Overall satisfaction scores reported in 2025 by number of institutions (with 100 respondents or more)



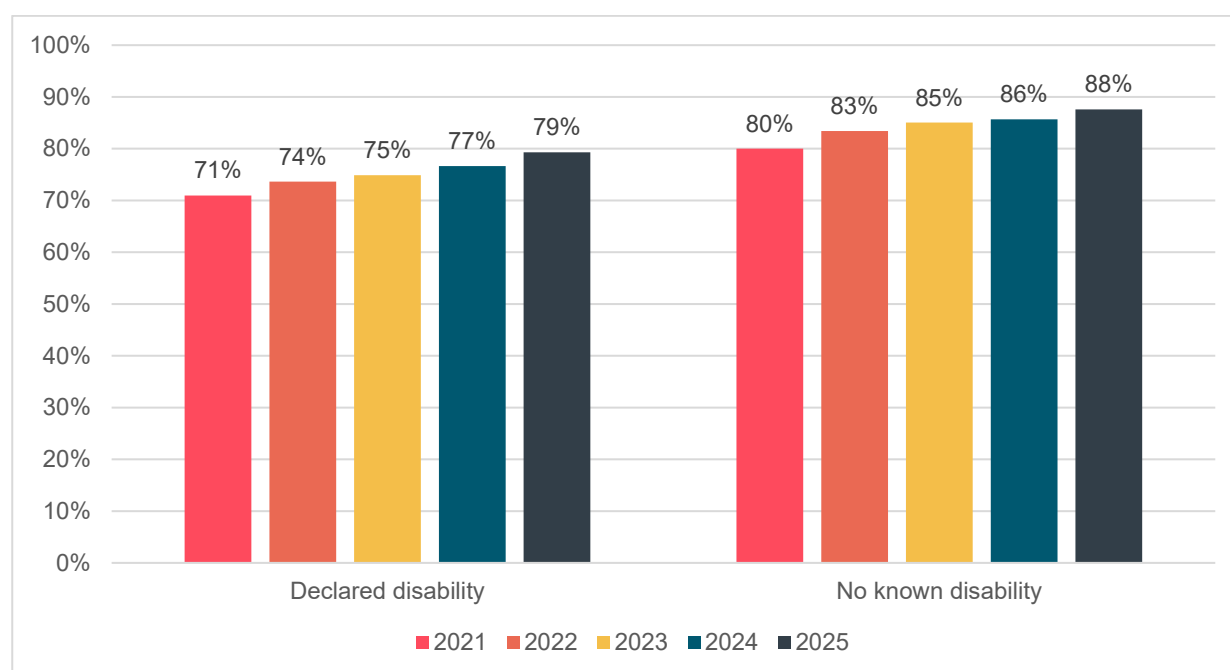
This represents a marked shift from 2024, when by the same metric 30% of institutions had satisfaction scores below 80% and 7% had scores above 90%. It is encouraging to see that improvements in satisfaction are not just the result of a small number of institutions with large cohorts performing extremely well but appears to be a wider improvement in students' views on the quality of their courses.

2.3 Overall satisfaction by demographics

It is very positive news that, overall, respondents are reporting higher satisfaction with course quality, although it is important to consider the experiences of different student groups. Fortunately, the trend towards higher satisfaction with course quality is not a phenomenon only experienced by small subsets of students but is reported across many demographic groups.

Despite a consistent nine-percentage point gap in overall satisfaction between students with a declared disability and those without (see Figure 4), satisfaction levels have risen for both groups, meaning the gap has not widened since 2024. However, the persistence of this gap highlights that efforts to change this have lacked the scale or impact needed to close the gap at sector-level. More targeted and inclusive approaches are needed, including ensuring agreed support is properly implemented so students can fully access their courses. The 2024 Access Insights Report⁷ found over half of students with agreed support had to chase its implementation, adding unnecessary pressure to these students, which may impact their satisfaction with their course. However, 13 institutions reported no satisfaction gap, or higher satisfaction among disabled students, so this gap is not consistent across the sector.

Figure 4. Overall satisfaction scores for UK students by disability status: 2024 and 2025

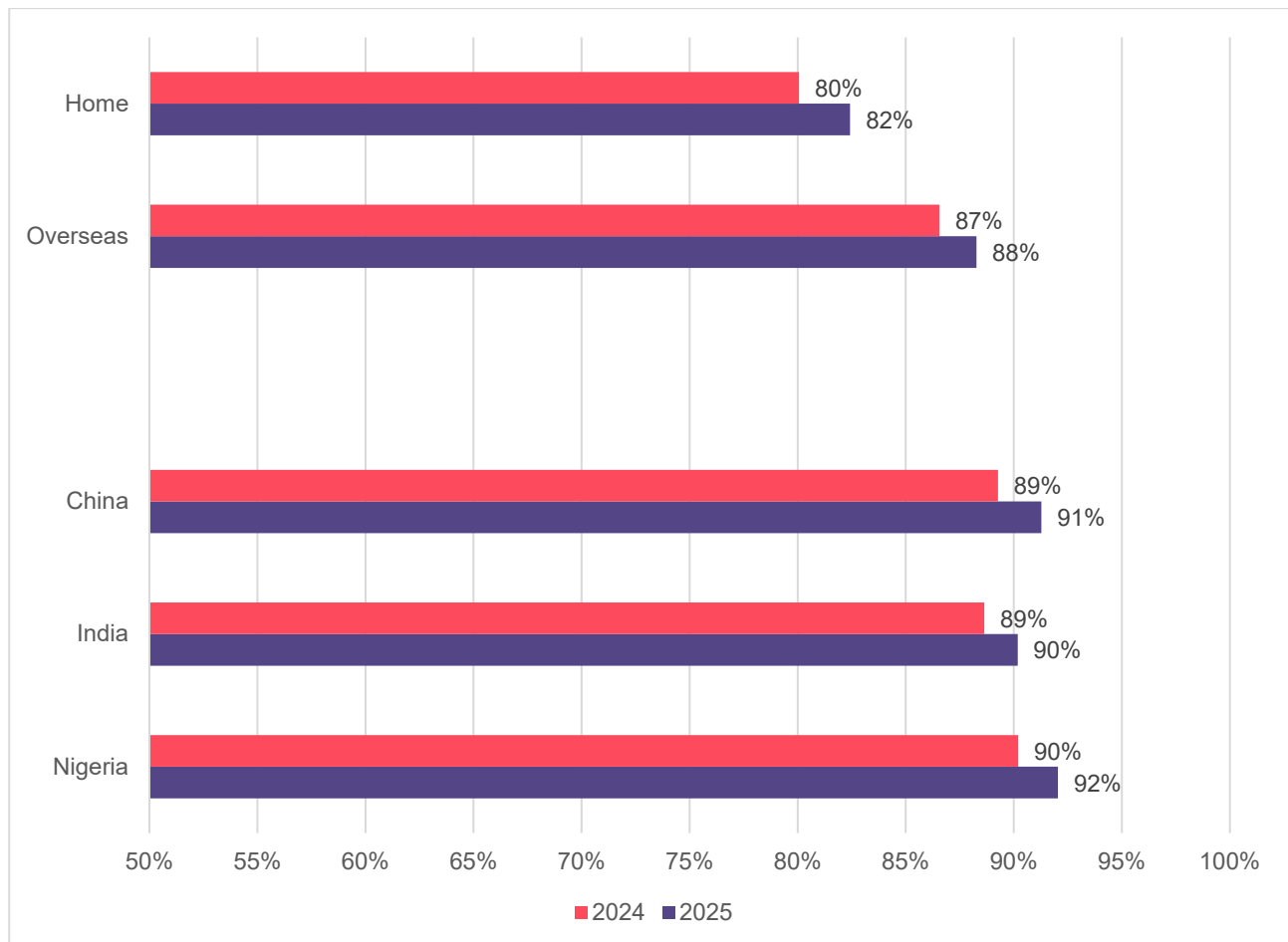


Similarly, there have been no major shifts in patterns of satisfaction with course quality among home and overseas students (Figure 5), where 82% of home students report satisfaction with course quality compared to 88% of overseas students, a gap of six percentage points compared to seven percentage points in 2024. Students from India,

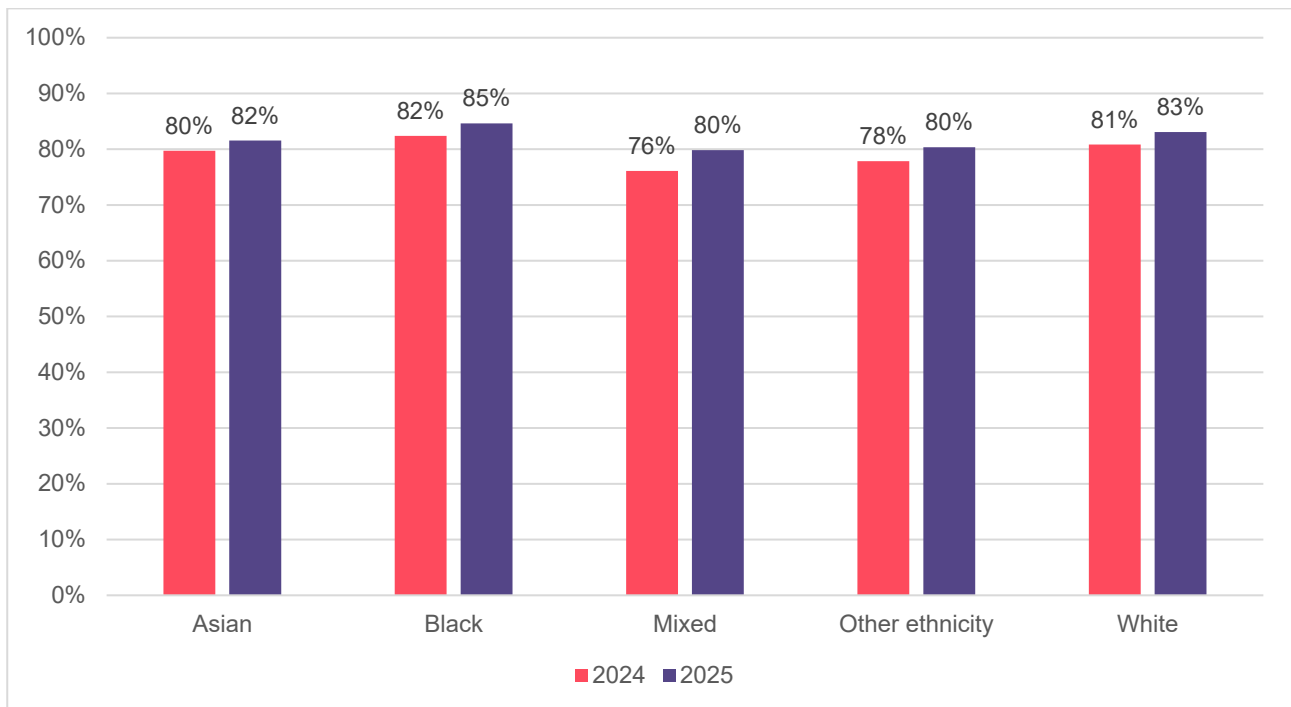
⁷ Disabled Students UK (2024) *The 2024 Access Insights Report*. Available at: <https://disabledstudents.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/2024-Access-Insights-Report.pdf>

China and Nigeria make up the three largest groups of international students among PTES 2025 respondents and overall satisfaction among these students shows a similar pattern to 2024, with Nigerian students showing the highest levels of satisfaction, followed by Indian and Chinese students.

Figure 5. Overall satisfaction scores for home and overseas students, and key international markets: 2024 and 2025

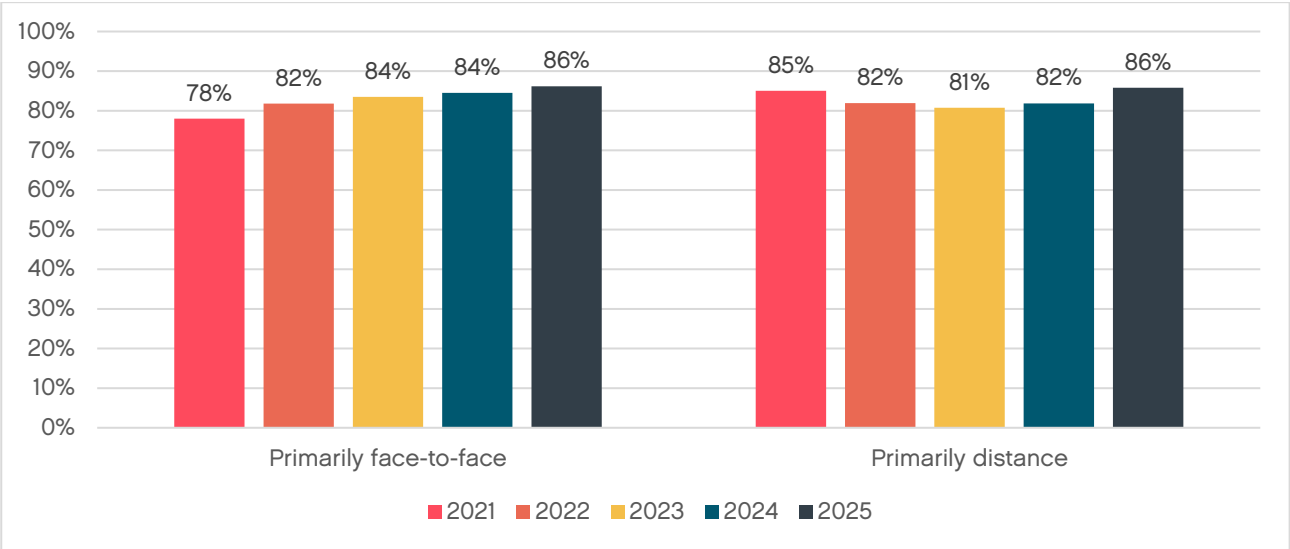


For UK-domiciled students from different ethnic backgrounds, it remains the case that Black students are most likely to report satisfaction with course quality, followed by White students and then Asian students (see Figure 6). Indeed, even when looking at individual parts of the student experience rather than only satisfaction with course quality, Black students also report higher satisfaction, with higher summary scores than other UK students across all themes of the student experience included in PTES, particularly in the community question set, where the summary score for Black students is ten percentage points higher than the average for UK students.

Figure 6. Overall satisfaction scores for UK students by ethnic group: 2024 and 2025

However, there are student groups where the reported patterns in the satisfaction with course quality have shifted in 2025. Over the last few years, satisfaction reported by students who were designated as on-campus students by their institutions has been steadily rising (see Figure 7). This was in contrast to distance learning students whose satisfaction with course quality had seen a more mixed trend and had been lower than on-campus students in 2023 and 2024. In 2025, this has changed once again and the two groups now both see satisfaction levels of 86% regarding course quality, due to an increase in satisfaction from distance learners that is greater than the sector average. This could be a sign of institutions better serving the needs of this group, where provision and student needs can be quite different to on-campus students, but the shift may be due to underlying changes in the PTES survey itself. One of the main aims of the survey changes in 2025 was to improve distance learners' experiences of the survey, by minimising the amount they were asked questions that were clearly not relevant. It is certainly possible that these changes could be influencing respondents' perceptions by the time they come to answer the question on overall course quality. It will be important to monitor distance learner satisfaction in future years.

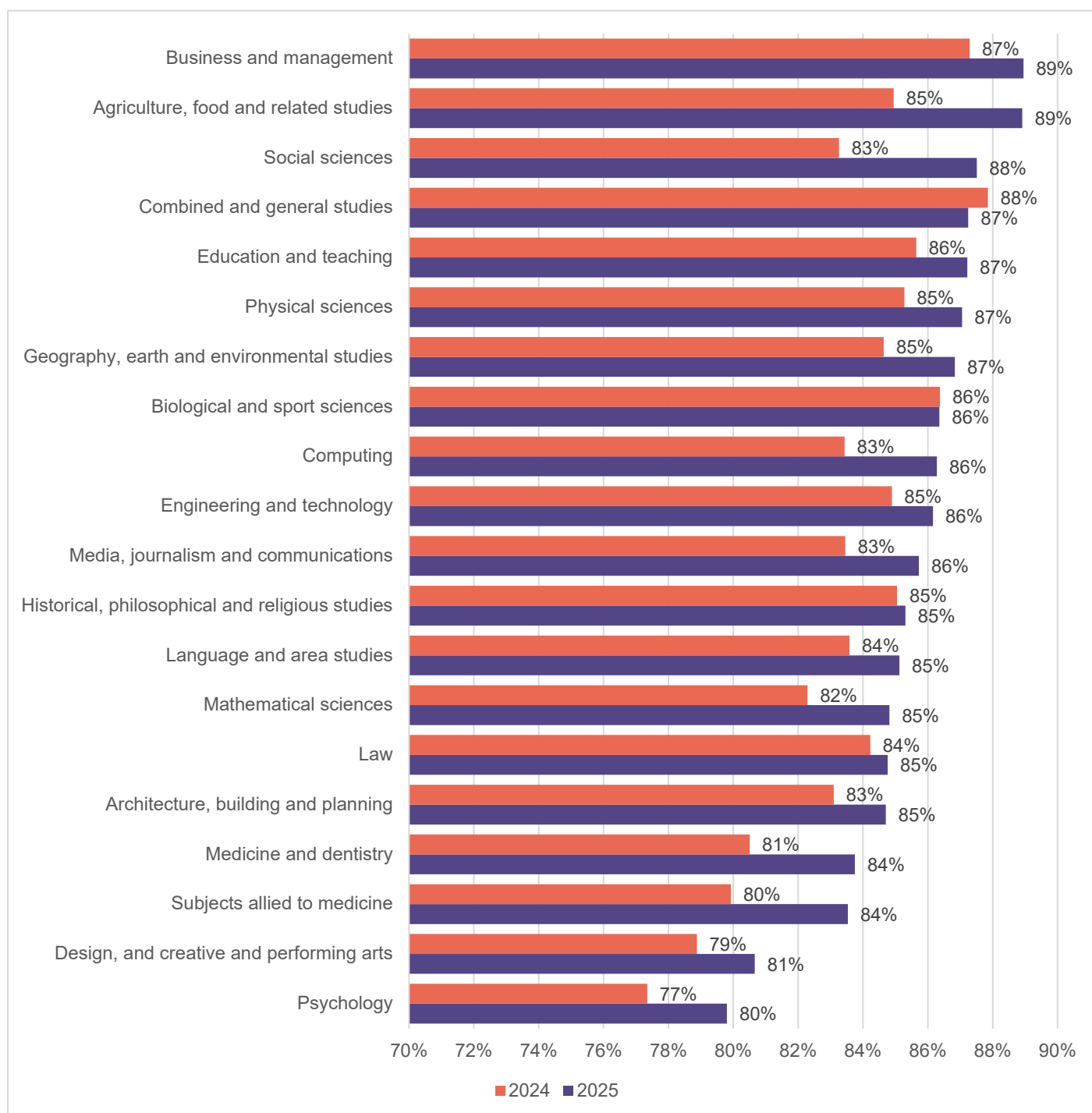
Figure 7. Overall satisfaction scores by intended mode of learning: 2021 to 2025



2.4 Overall satisfaction by discipline

In the context of the overall increase in reported satisfaction with course quality, it is important to consider how experiences are shaped by the disciplines PGT students are currently studying. It is striking that clear increases in satisfaction have been reported not just in a small number of disciplines but almost across the board (with the exception of Biological and sport sciences and Combined and general studies). The largest percentage point increase has been seen in the Social sciences (with a five-percentage point increase), while even Psychology, and Design and creative and performing arts, which had the lowest satisfaction levels in 2024 and 2025, have seen increased satisfaction with course quality.

Figure 8. Overall satisfaction scores by CAH1 discipline in 2024 and 2025

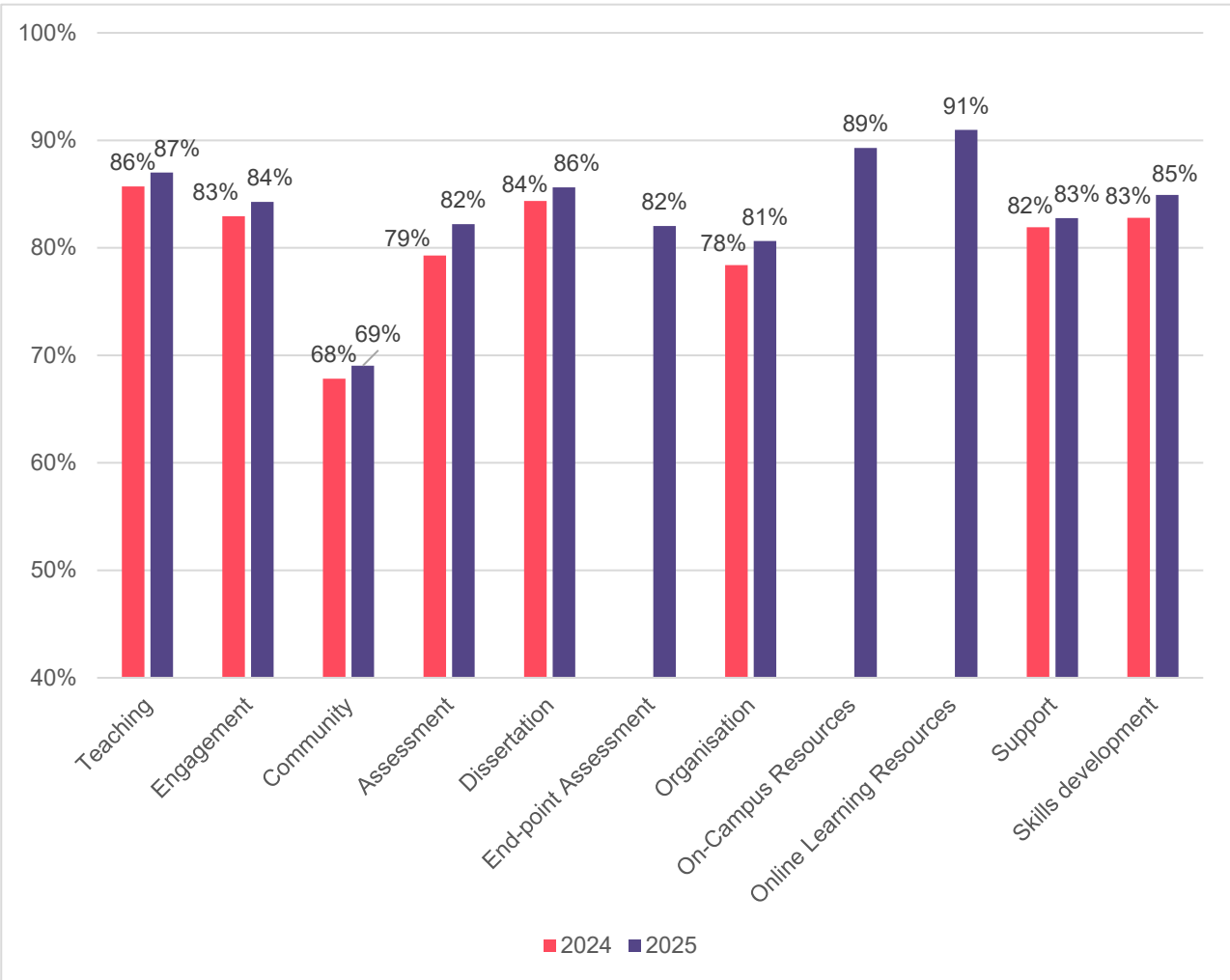


3 Dimensions of the student experience

3.1 Overview

PTES 2025 has seen increased summary scores for all areas of the student experience, with increases of between one and three percentage points across each theme (see Figure 9). This is consistent with the 2025 NSS findings at undergraduate level⁸ and indicates that students are experiencing improvements across both postgraduate and undergraduate levels. This may reflect the impact of sector-wide efforts to enhance teaching, support and the wider student experience. However, yet again, the questions around community see the lowest scores, while the teaching and resources related sections are most highly rated.

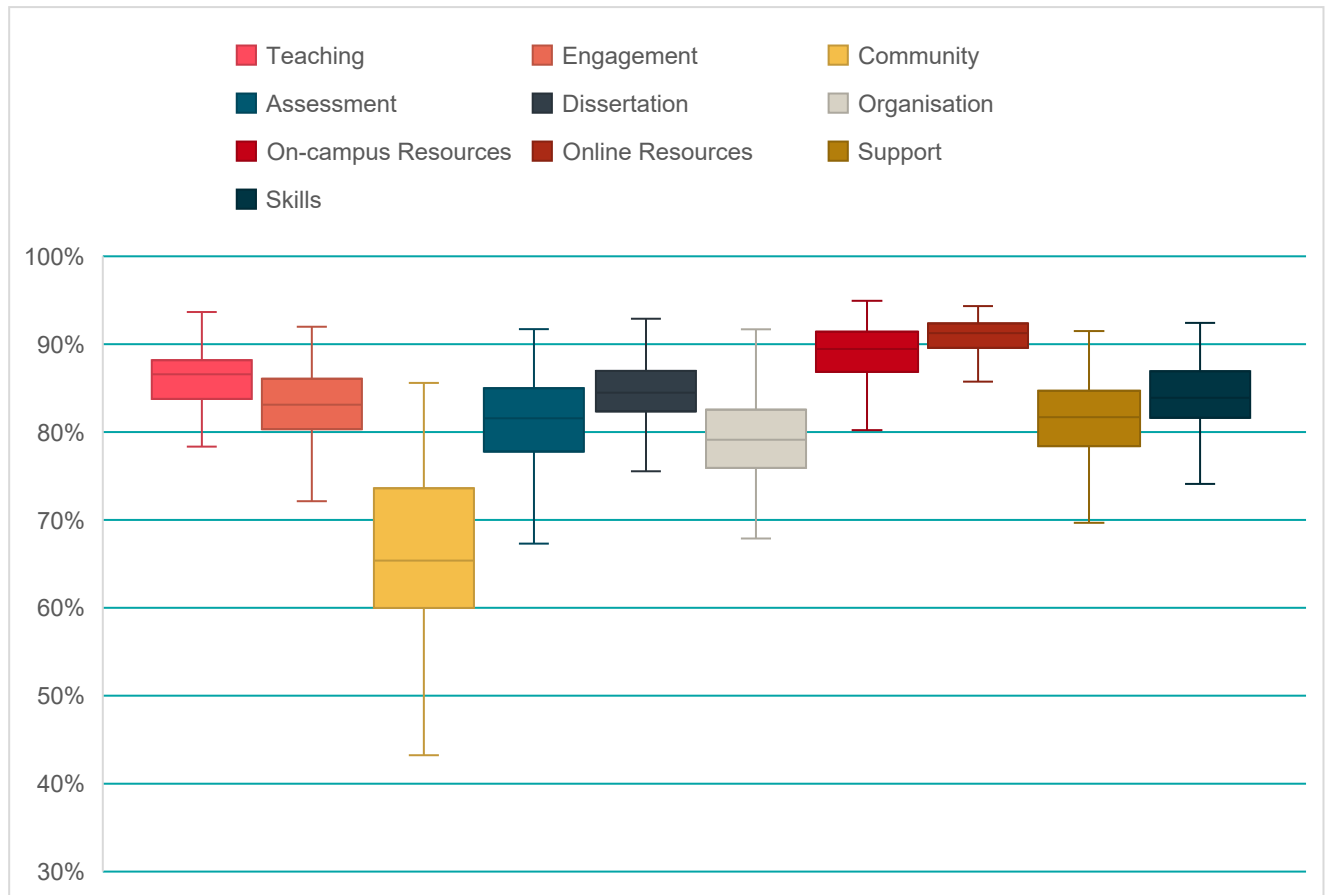
Figure 9. Theme summary scores in 2024 and 2025⁹



⁸ www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-students/understanding-students/national-student-survey/latest-nss-results/

⁹ Resources summary score in 2024 was 89%. The questions have now been split across online learning resources and on-campus resources, to allow more customisability for distance learners.

Figure 10. Box and whisker diagrams for institutional theme summary scores in 2025.¹⁰



Community is the lowest scoring theme but is also the theme with most variability between institutions, by a considerable margin (see Figure 10). Some institutions are achieving relatively high scores for this theme, but this is clearly not the norm. Institutional performance in areas such as assessment and dissertation is also quite varied. Although overall more positive than in 2024, there are still some institutions scoring below 70% for these themes.

In contrast, respondents across the range of participating institutions were happy with the resources that they had access to during their studies, both on-campus and online. After resources-related topics, teaching is the theme scoring the next highest among PTES respondents, with a summary score of 87%. In this context, it is encouraging to see that this score is not simply the product of a small number of high-performing institutions but seems to be reflective of positive experiences across most institutions, barring a small number where students are reporting lower satisfaction in this area.

¹⁰ Outliers have been excluded to protect commercial confidentiality. Results included where a minimum of 100 responses had been received. Numbers of outliers excluded were: four for teaching, two for assessment, one for dissertation, two for organisation, five for on-campus resources, one for support and two for skills.

In the open comment questions asked in PTES, teaching staff were mentioned in over 15% of responses to the question ‘What has been the one most positive aspect of your course so far?’ and comments demonstrate the difference that these staff make to PGT students.

“The most positive aspect of my course so far has been the incredible support from the teaching staff. Their approachability, clear explanations and willingness to guide us – both academically and personally – have made a huge difference in my learning journey. It’s created a comfortable environment where I feel encouraged to ask questions, stay motivated and give my best.”

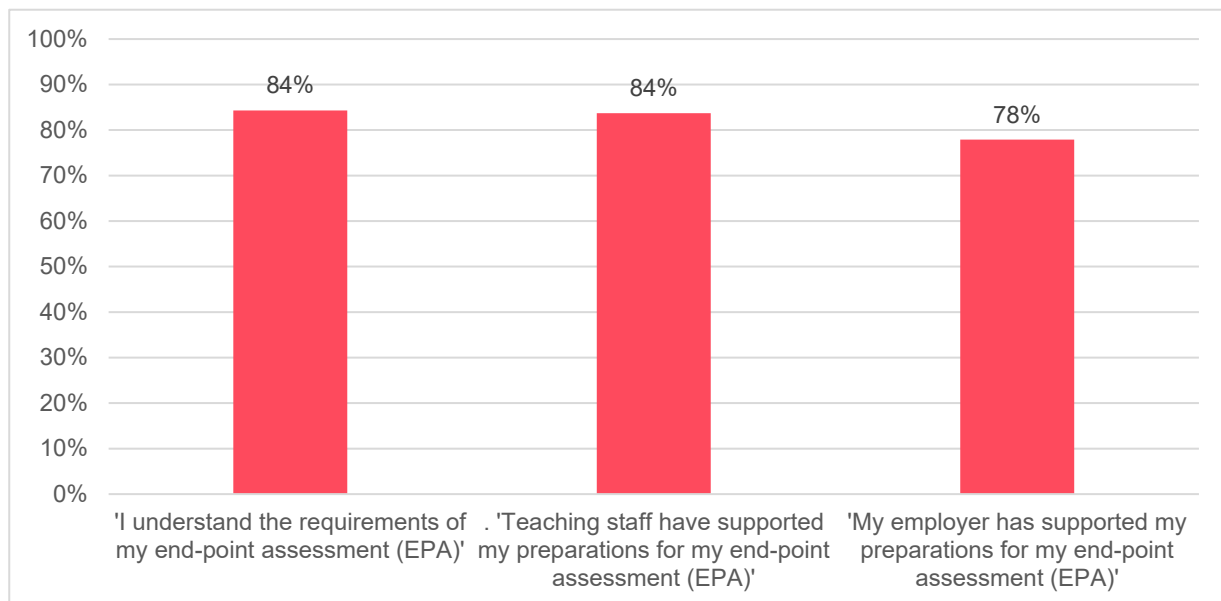
“The teaching staff working in the programme have been the most positive aspect of my course. Not only do they care about your effective academic learning as a student, but they also care about you as a person, and they will do all they can to support you and your mental health throughout the course of your studies, to ensure you can get the most out of your academic studies and university time.”

High performance among some institutions can be seen across the different themes, with almost all themes seeing some institutions scoring above 90%. At a time of high pressure for the sector, it is encouraging that there is best practice delivering positive student experiences across different areas of the student experience.

3.2 End-point assessment

The question set regarding the end-point assessment was introduced for 2025 after an approach from institutions delivering degree apprenticeships, where stakeholders felt that more specific feedback around end-point assessments would provide helpful data. Question wording was agreed in consultation with participating institutions. This was an optional question set but received responses from 46 institutions.

Figure 11. Question scores for end-point assessment questions



Respondents who completed the end-point assessment question set had either completed, or were working towards, their end-point assessment (EPA). 84% of students felt supported by teaching staff at institutions, six-percentage points more than the 78% who agreed their employers supported their preparations for their end-point assessment. It may be that the existing structures for supporting students in completing substantial projects, regardless of the outputs, put institutions in a stronger place to support this. However, for students completing dissertations, 87% felt they understood the requirements, compared to 84% for those completing an end-point assessment, suggesting that higher education institutions could still improve their support for these assessments.

Comments from respondents who answered questions related to the end-point assessment:

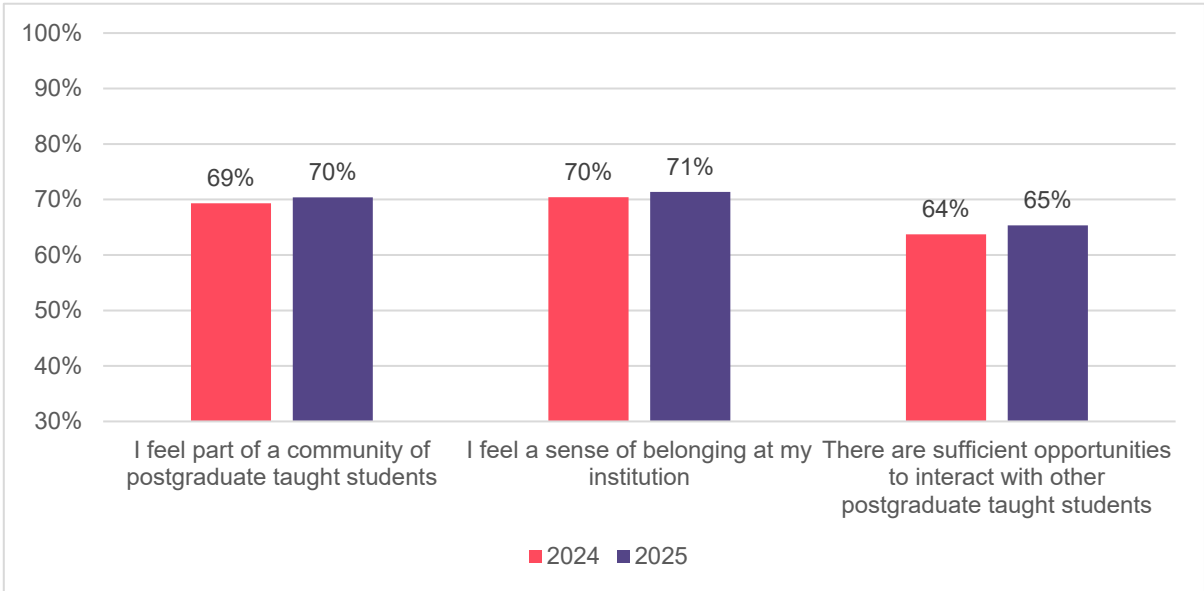
“My employer has allowed sufficient time away from work to be able to complete my EPA, my supervisor at work has always supported and it was very clear that I had two lecturers on hand for any additional support, I have always felt very supported and encouraged by all involved”

“I feel like there is a general lack of awareness about the apprenticeship side of things and my experience with tutors has been mixed around their understanding about the end-point assessment – some had no awareness at all. I think more can be done to support preparation and understanding – support sessions, examples, drop-in sessions etc.”

3.3 Community

As noted in section 3.1, community remains the lowest scoring theme included in PTES.

Figure 12. Community question scores in 2024 and 2025

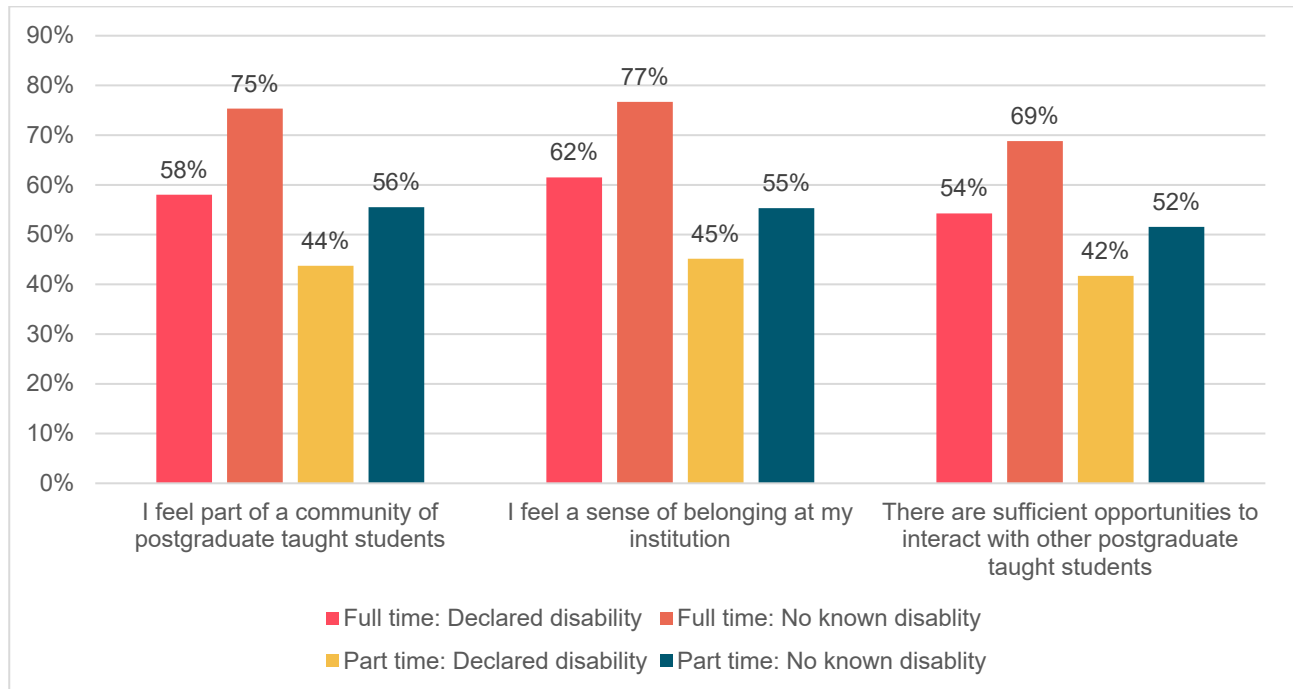


There has been a one-percentage point increase in the score for each question related to community, but this is lower than the increases seen in most other question sets. Even with these increases, it shows that 3 in 10 respondents in 2025 do not agree that they feel part of a community of postgraduate taught students.

The three community questions were also the three questions across the whole of PTES that saw the highest levels of active disagreement, with disagreement levels between 11% and 16% (compared to an average of 6% across all question items).

The lower levels of satisfaction with community are concerning, with notable differences between demographic groups. Similarly to 2024, students with a declared disability are significantly less likely than their peers with no known disabilities to report feeling satisfied with their experiences in this area. Respondents with a declared disability were disproportionately likely to be studying part-time than respondents with no known disability, which will have implications for their wider student experience, but there was a significant difference in reported community experiences for both full-time and part-time students with declared disabilities, when compared with their peers with no known disability.

Figure 13. Community question scores, by mode of study and disability status



The issues causing the lower results for students with a declared disability are not simply a by-product of different patterns of study but related to barriers facing students with a disability. Students with a disability are not a homogeneous cohort and will have a wide range of experiences while undertaking taught postgraduate study. However, this cohort of students are significantly less likely than their peers to feel a sense of belonging, which could have implications for their academic success in addition to their wider wellbeing. Efforts to cultivate a community and sense of belonging among PGT cohorts could make a huge difference to the students involved. It is vital that efforts are made to build these communities on campuses and virtually, but they must be inclusive and take into account the needs of the specific cohort. Particularly for students who are not engaged in full-time, on-campus study, this will require tailored strategies that consider both accessibility and the realities of part-time and/or distance study.

Comments from respondents with a declared disability who struggled with the lack of a community...

“The integration and involvement into the course and also with other peers [would improve the course experience]. It felt quite lonely to be studying this course and not interact with other persons and talk about everything involving the course.”

“I was lonely a lot, contributed to stress. There were plenty of places and times to interact with staff and students, but people would go on and do their own thing. And because of the workload, I struggled to find time to do the same.”

“[It would improve the course experience to have] Better support for students like myself who have had to take breaks and therefore are not with their original cohort. As a student who's also a parent, it's been impossible for me to find other students like me and connect with anyone, so the experience has been quite isolating.”

And from those who benefited from a stronger community...

“The general course support, both from the directors and the admins, has been great and comprehensive. They have made a great effort in creating a community and providing the support and nurturing to the students, which is reflected in the success and happiness of the students on the course.”

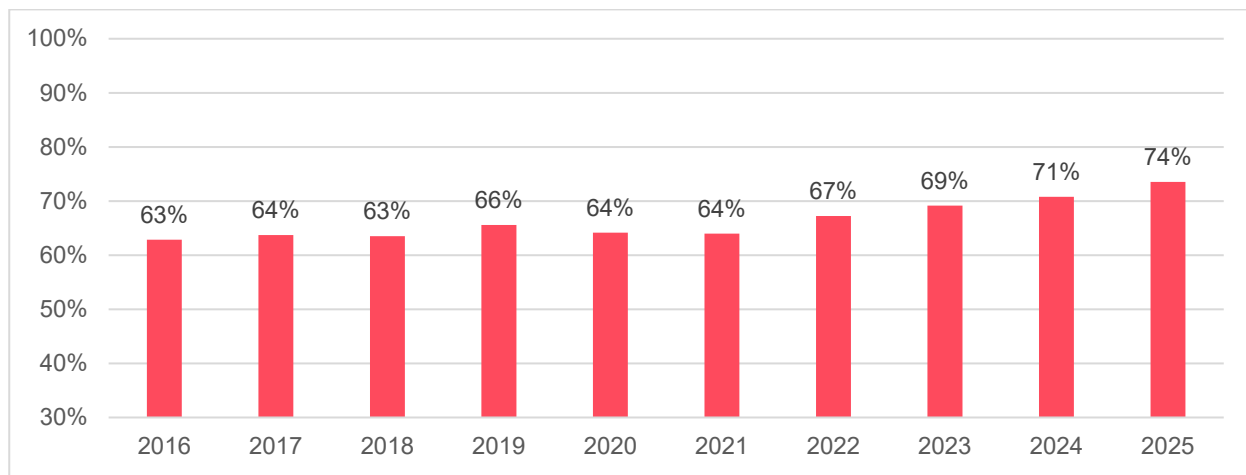
“I felt extremely supported throughout the course, particularly when it came to my learning disability as it was something I had always been uncomfortable with. The community that was created throughout this was very special and I thank the professors who nurtured this and supported us all.”

3.4 Involvement with decisions about how courses run

After the community questions, the question item with the highest amount of active disagreement asked whether students felt they were encouraged to feed into decisions on how courses run, with 10% of students actively disagreeing with the statement.

While this gives clear room for improvement, the wider picture of student involvement in how courses are run is more nuanced than this may suggest.

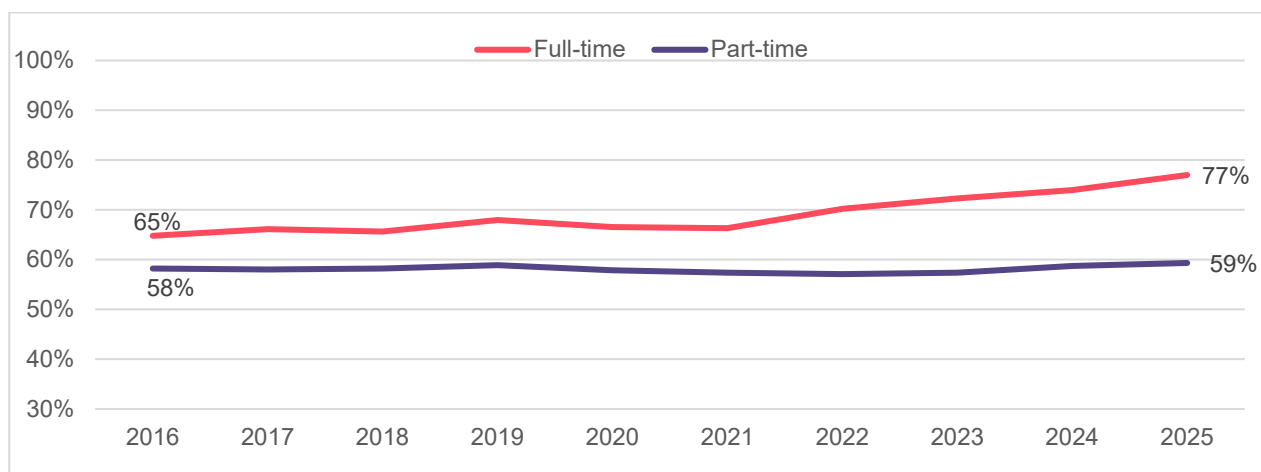
Figure 14. Percentage of students agreeing that they feel ‘encouraged to be involved in decisions about how [their] course is run’: 2016 to 2025



In the last few years, there has been a gradual trend for more respondents to agree that they are encouraged to be involved in decisions about how their course is run. Between 2024 and 2025, this question item saw the joint-highest level of positive change of any question in PTES, with a three-percentage point uplift in agreement.

However, not all groups feel equally encouraged to be involved in course-related decisions. 77% of full-time students agreed that they were encouraged to be involved, in comparison to just 59% of part-time students.

Figure 15. Percentage of students agreeing that they feel ‘encouraged to be involved in decisions about how [their] course is run’, by mode of study: 2016 to 2025



Across the last 10 years, there has been a clear increase in full-time students feeling they are encouraged to be involved in course decisions, whereas for part-time students, this measure has remained relatively static. It seems that the sector is gradually working out ways to improve student engagement in this way for full-time students but struggling to achieve the same improvements with part-time students. There will be more challenges with providing suitable opportunities for this cohort, who are more likely to be distance learners and may be more likely to be balancing their studies with other commitments. However, finding possible solutions to this is important and may also have a knock-on impact on helping part-time students feel like they belong to the institution, another area where part-time students show considerably lower levels of satisfaction than full-time students.

4 Student experience measures and overall satisfaction

There are 46 individual question measures in PTES, in addition to the question on overall satisfaction with course quality. While correlation analysis cannot tell us for certain whether any of the individual measures have a causal impact on overall satisfaction, it is useful to see which questions, and themes, are regularly appearing as those most highly correlated with overall satisfaction.

Table 3. Top 10 strongest correlations between individual measures and overall satisfaction.

Measure	Theme	Correlation ¹¹	PTES 2025 score
I was given appropriate guidance and support throughout my course	Organisation	0.667	84%
The course is well organised and is running smoothly	Organisation	0.656	82%
As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career	Skills	0.637	82%
I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course	Teaching	0.635	84%
My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course	Skills	0.615	83%
As a result of the course, I have developed my skills as an independent learner	Skills	0.6	90%
Teaching staff are good at explaining things	Teaching	0.598	91%
The course has enhanced my academic ability	Teaching	0.594	88%
The learning materials provided on my course are useful	Teaching	0.588	87%
My ability to communicate information effectively to diverse audiences has developed during my course	Skills	0.588	84%

¹¹ Results provided are Spearman's correlation coefficients. All correlations are significant at 99% and use the correlation guidelines where 0.501+ is strong, 0.30 to 0.50 is moderate and 0.10 to 0.30 is weak.

Of the question items with the top 10 strongest correlation with overall satisfaction for all respondents, the top nine items also featured in the same list for 2024. The same factors continue to show strong associations with overall satisfaction, in particular measures related to organisation, skills and teaching. This reinforces the importance of the fundamentals of good organisation and supportive teaching in shaping positive student experiences.

Table 4. Top 10 strongest correlations between individual measure and overall satisfaction for home students

Measure	Theme	Correlation	PTES score for home students
I was given appropriate guidance and support throughout my course	Organisation	0.722	79%
The course is well organised and is running smoothly	Organisation	0.701	74%
I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course	Teaching	0.699	78%
My course has challenged me to produce my best work	Engagement	0.659	82%
The course is intellectually stimulating	Teaching	0.649	87%

Table 5. Top 10 strongest correlations between individual measures and overall satisfaction for overseas students

Measure	Theme	Correlation	PTES score for overseas students
As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career	Skills	0.670	84%
The course is well organised and is running smoothly	Organisation	0.654	86%
I was given appropriate guidance and support throughout my course	Organisation	0.651	87%
My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course	Skills	0.640	87%
The course has enhanced my academic ability	Teaching	0.632	90%

Looking at the correlations with overall satisfaction for home students (Table 4), the top three strongest correlations for home students were also the top three correlations in 2024 – albeit one measure having been slightly reworded based on sector feedback. Satisfaction for these three measures has increased by between two and four percentage points and the

correlations with overall satisfaction are also stronger this year. Similarly for overseas students, the measures with the top four strongest correlations also had the top four strongest correlations in 2024. As in 2024, one of the most notable differences is how certain skills measures rank in terms of their strength of association with overall satisfaction among home students compared to overseas students. Yet again, for overseas students, overall satisfaction is most strongly correlated with feeling better prepared for a future career, a measure that is ranked 14th by strongest correlation for home students.

Given the consistency across years, it is also interesting to consider consistency between institutions (see Table 6), particularly regarding which items have the strongest correlation with overall satisfaction.

Table 6. Top five strongest correlations with overall satisfaction across all PTES responses, and how many times each measure appeared in top five correlations with overall satisfaction by institution

Measure	Theme	Number of institutions where this measure appeared in top five correlations with overall satisfaction
I was given appropriate guidance and support throughout my course	Organisation	96
The course is well organised and is running smoothly	Organisation	89
As a result of the course I feel better prepared for my future career	Skills	60
I am happy with the support for my learning I receive from staff on my course	Teaching	71
My confidence to be innovative or creative has developed during my course	Skills	36

A course running smoothly and being given appropriate guidance and support were among the most correlated with overall satisfaction across a large proportion of the 102 participating institutions, suggesting that these are fundamental to the student experience across different institutions, which will have diverse student bodies and course offerings. Not all institutions are scoring well on these measures; 24 institutions are seeing fewer than three in four students agree that their course is well organised and running smoothly. Although this analysis is not intended to prove a causal link, institutions scoring lower in these areas

may wish to look at whether there are obvious ways that improvements could be made in these areas, as this may have wider impact.

5 Retention and cost of living

5.1 Retention

The percentage of PTES respondents who have considered leaving their course has remained at 16%, with no change from 2024. While this figure is much lower than it was immediately after the pandemic, it still represents a significant proportion of respondents and highlights that efforts to ensure PGT student retention remain very important.

Figure 16. Percentage of respondents saying that they had considered leaving their course

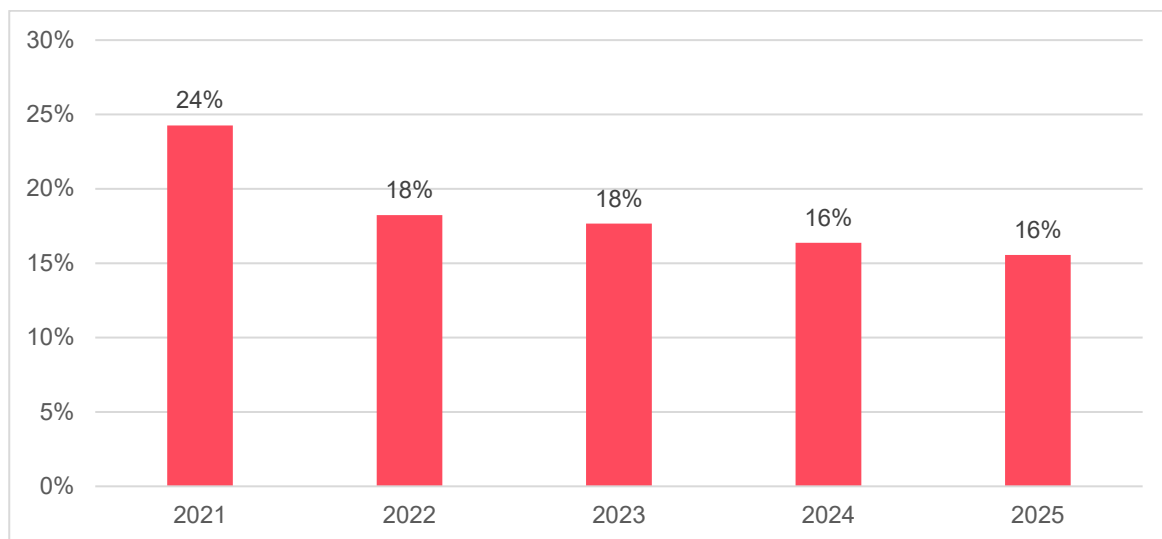
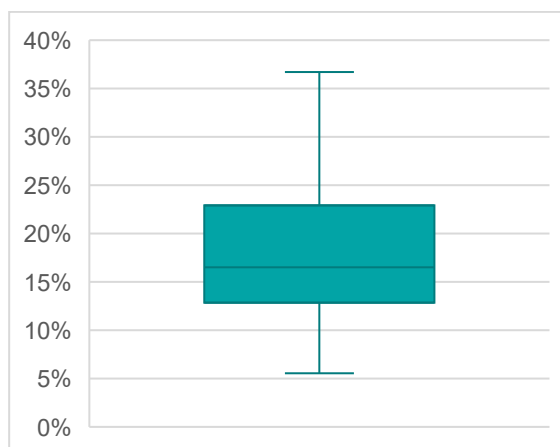


Figure 17. Percentage of respondents who considered leaving their course: box plot showing the distribution of results across institutions ¹²



Although the percentage of those considering withdrawing from their course has stabilised, there is considerable variation between institutions (see Figure 17), with over a third of students at some institutions having considered leaving, while at other institutions fewer than

¹² Results only included where a minimum of 100 responses were received.

1 in 10 students report having thought of leaving their course. For institutions, understanding their local context and specific challenges faced by different student groups in their student population will be key to developing effective retention strategies.

Table 7. Top five reasons for considering leaving, as percentage of those who had considered leaving

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Difficulty balancing study and other commitments	15%	19%	18%	19%	20%
Financial difficulties	7%	8%	11%	13%	13%
Mental/emotional health problems	15%	14%	14%	13%	12%
Other reasons for thinking about leaving	11%	10%	11%	9%	11%
Felt the way the course is delivered was not as expected	13%	10%	10%	9%	8%

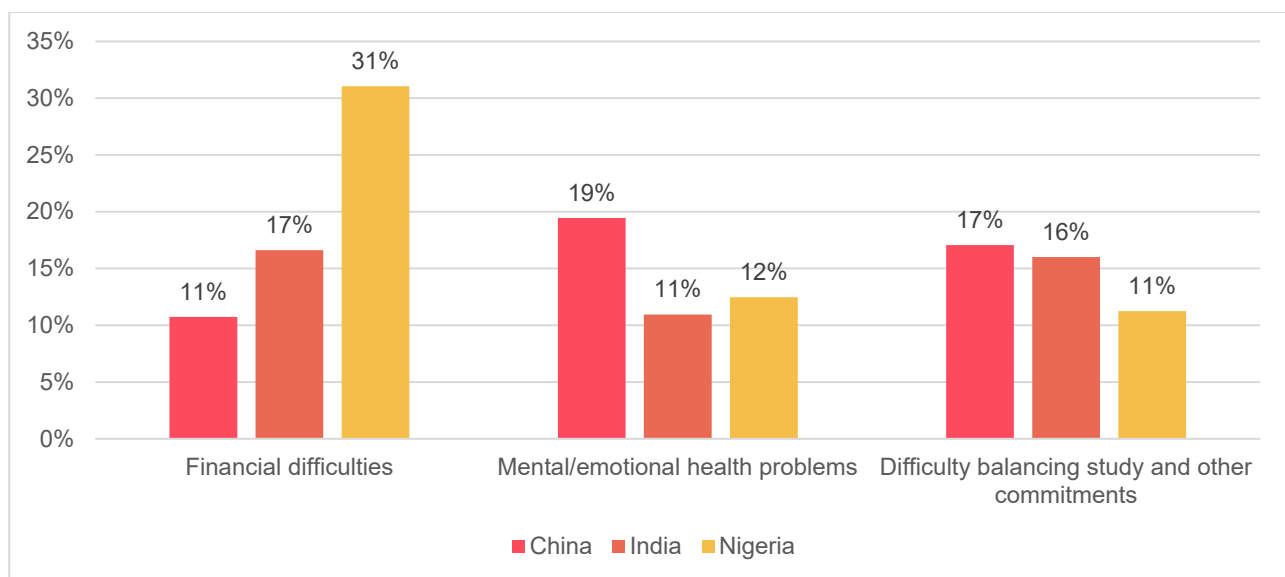
The most common reason given for considering leaving was difficulty balancing study with other commitments, reported by 20% of those who had considered leaving (23% of home students who had considered leaving and 15% of overseas students). Compared to the results of a very similar question asked in the undergraduate-focused Student Academic Experience Survey (SAES),¹³ a far greater proportion of PGT students who consider leaving have done so due to difficulties balancing study with other commitments. This was the main reason given by just 6% of SAES respondents who had considered leaving, compared to 20% in PTES. Financial difficulties and mental/emotional health concerns are also still the main factor for many students, with 13% and 12% of respondents respectively identifying these as their main reason for considering leaving. Financial difficulties also remain the most common reason for overseas students to consider leaving and this was the main reason given by 17% of overseas respondents who have considered leaving their course. Approaches and initiatives to help students balance their studies with other commitments will be of particular benefit to PGT students as this is consistently the most common reason given for considering leaving, but as this is less of a concern for undergraduate students, it

¹³ Neves, J, Freeman, J, Stephenson, R and Rowan, A (2025) *The Student Academic Experience Survey 2025*. York: Advance HE. Available at: www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/student-academic-experience-survey-2025

may not feature so heavily in planning at institutions where interventions may be designed more frequently with full-time undergraduates in mind.

Among the students from the largest three overseas domiciles in PTES 2025, the three most common reasons for considering leaving were the same as they were across the sector, although the relative frequency differed between countries (see Figure 18). Almost one-third of Nigerian students who had considered leaving had done so for financial reasons, whereas among Chinese students who had considered leaving, they were more likely to have done so for mental/emotional health reasons.

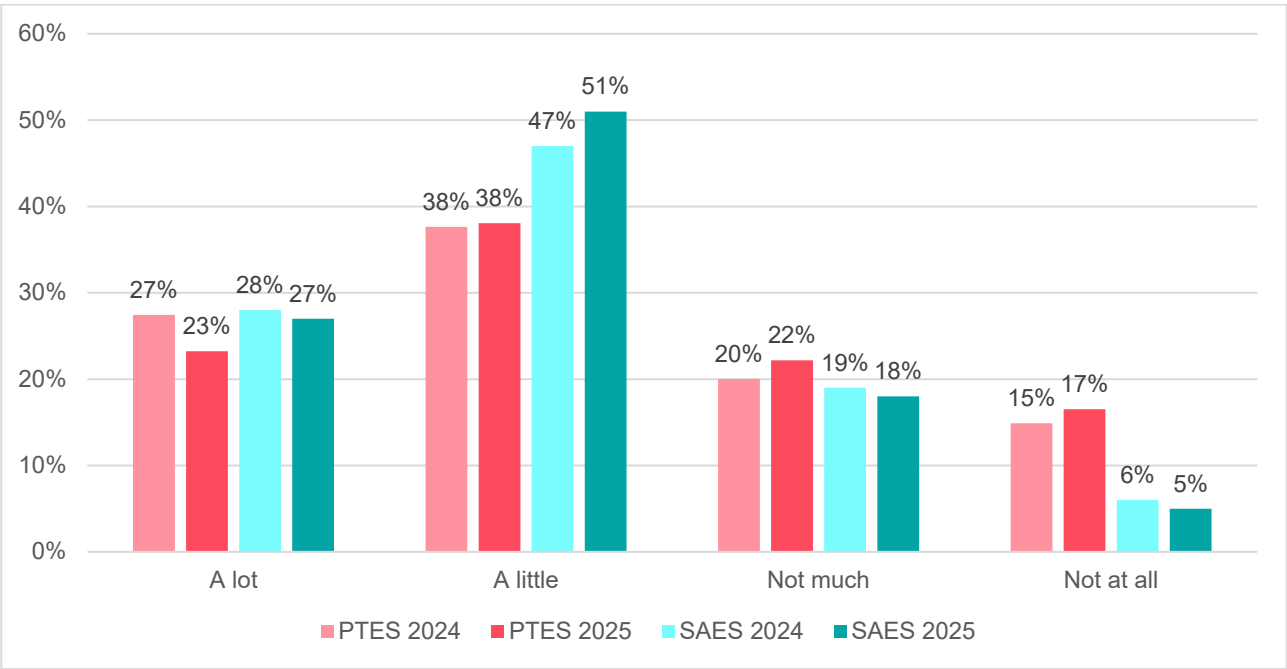
Figure 18. Most common three reasons given by Chinese, Indian and Nigerian students who had considered leaving their courses.



5.2 Cost of living

Cost of living remains a significant concern for many PGT students, although there are signs that the impact may be easing slightly. In PTES 2025, fewer students reported that cost-of-living issues were affecting their studies “a lot” compared to 2024. However, over 60% of respondents still said that financial pressures had negatively impacted their studies either ‘a little’ or ‘a lot’, including more than one in five PGT respondents saying it has impacted their studies ‘a lot’. These concerns are still impacting a substantial section of the cohort.

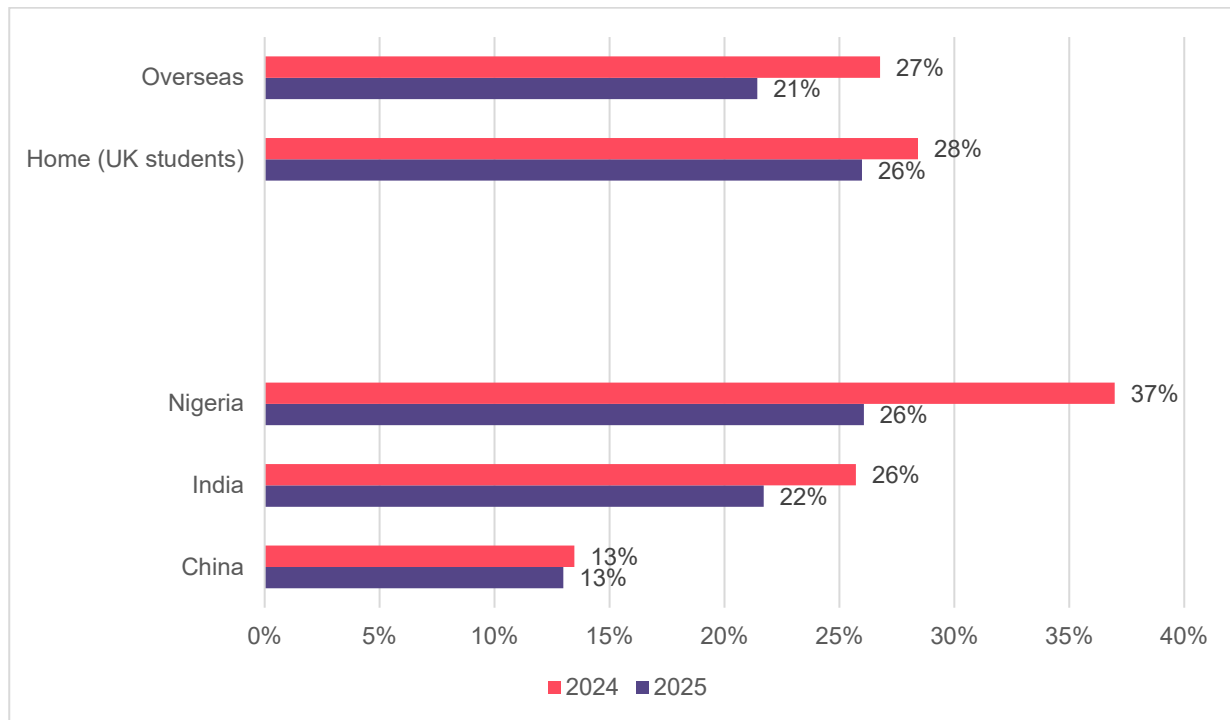
Figure 19. Responses to the question ‘To what extent have cost of living concerns negatively impacted your studies?’ in 2024 and 2025: PTES and SAES¹⁴



This represents a slight departure from the trends observed via the Student Academic Experience Survey, at undergraduate level (see Figure 19). Similarly to 2024, a considerably higher proportion of PGT respondents (17%) reported that cost-of-living concerns did not impact on their studies at all, compared to just 5% of undergraduates. However, whereas in SAES there has been just a one percentage point fall in the percentage of students who report that cost-of-living concerns have impacted on studies ‘a lot’, to 27%, PTES saw a four-percentage point fall to 23%. This may be reflecting changing experiences among the PGT population although the shorter nature of full-time PGT programmes means that year-on-year changes may be more likely for this cohort as students could be reflecting on their experiences over a shorter period of time.

¹⁴ The question wording in SAES differs slightly. SAES respondents are asked ‘To what extent, if at all, have concerns or challenges around the cost of living negatively impacted your studies?’ compared to ‘To what extent have cost-of-living concerns negatively impacted your studies?’

Figure 20. Percentage of respondents who said that cost-of-living concerns had negatively impacted their studies ‘a lot’: 2024 and 2025



Both the extent of cost-of-living concerns affecting PGT students and the degree of change since 2024 do vary across different demographic groups. The proportion of home students reporting the greatest impact from cost-of-living concerns has declined by two percentage points (see Figure 20). Among students from outside the UK, the decrease is even more marked, with a six-percentage point drop in those reporting that cost-of-living concerns have impacted their studies ‘a lot’. At a domicile level, there has been a four-percentage point decline in the proportion of Indian students reporting the greatest impact from cost-of-living concerns. Among Nigerian students, the decline is even greater at 11 percentage points, although retention data shows that for Nigerian students who have considered leaving their course, financial difficulties remain the most common reason given.

Unfortunately, students who report that cost-of-living concerns impact their studies a lot also tend to have a less positive perception of course quality. Only 78% of these students are satisfied with their course, compared to 88% among those reporting little, not much or no impact. Financial pressure also appears linked to retention and workload challenges. 28% of students most affected by cost-of-living concerns have considered leaving their course, and only 67% find their workload manageable, compared to 12% and 80% respectively among their peers. As a result of the challenges they face, the students most impacted by cost-of-living concerns may require greater support to ensure they are able to successfully complete their studies.

6 Conclusions

The results of PTES 2025 show an increase in overall satisfaction with course quality among PGT students. This increase appears to be across student groups, disciplines and modes of study, which must be recognised as a positive at a time when delivery of PGT programmes and the wider student experience is taking place in a sector under considerable pressure. There is clearly a tremendous amount of good work taking place across the sector to deliver these positive experiences.

“The teaching staff have been absolutely amazing in supporting me. I feel like I've learnt so much, achieved so much, and I feel so much more confident in myself and my abilities.”

“Having access to a wide range of staff and professionals who love what they do and have such deep knowledge of their fields has been amazing and a deep positive to my course so far. They have been so supportive and helpful.”

“I was really reluctant to do an MSc due to worries about the workload, but I have to say that it has been one of the most inspiring years of education for me. I felt like I was surrounded by incredible lecturers who inspired me and were not patronising (often something that can be the case at other institutions). I have learnt more than I expected and has really inspired me to continue working in psychology. It was also a well organised course with different lecturers each the best in their own fields.”

However, there remain some clear areas of consideration for the sector.

- + Gaps in satisfaction between student groups persist and, in many cases, little or no progress has been made in closing these gaps. While increased satisfaction for students with a disability, for example, is extremely important, the fact that it remains nine percentage points lower than satisfaction for students without a disability should remain a cause for concern in the sector.
- + Feeling of community, or a lack thereof, is a clear issue for many PGT students. Taught postgraduate student bodies can be extremely diverse, both in terms of student backgrounds, but also the contexts in which they are learning. This inevitably provides a challenge for institutions to support these students to build community, as the meaning of that will vary considerably. Initiatives and support that may be excellent for a full-time postgraduate student living near campus, helping them feel at home in a new city or country and supporting them to feel like they belong, will look different to the approach that is required on a part-time distance learning programme.

-
- + Measures related to course organisation and support continue to show the strongest associations with overall satisfaction across institutions and years, with preparation for a career consistently showing the strongest association for overseas students. While these are correlational findings, their consistency across institutions and years provides a useful indication of areas that may be influential in shaping the student experience.
 - + PGT students are increasingly likely to feel empowered to be involved in decisions about their course, but this measure has clear room for improvement, particularly among part-time students. Finding effective approaches to proactively encourage students to get involved in course decisions is a clear opportunity to benefit from the knowledge and experience that students as course participants can bring to the table, in order to improve the course offer for future cohorts.
 - + Difficulties in balancing studies with other commitments are consistently the most common reason given for PGT students considering leaving their programme. Designing programmes with flexibility in mind may help some students manage these difficulties, but in many cases it may also be that wider support for students needs to recognise that many PGT students are not able to solely focus their lives on their studies. Consulting with students may help institutions to identify particular pinch points, so solutions can be identified.
 - + Cost-of-living pressures have decreased slightly, in the sense that fewer students report feeling that the cost of living has negatively impacted their studies 'a lot'. However, it remains the case that more than one in five students report that their studies are significantly negatively impacted by the cost of living and these students report significantly lower satisfaction with their course quality. While there is no easy answer for supporting students under financial pressure, it is vital that institutions are mindful of the pressure that many students are under, and the implications this may have for their engagement with their courses.

Appendix 1. List of participating institutions

Aberystwyth University	London South Bank University	University of Edinburgh
Anglia Ruskin University	Loughborough University	University of Exeter
Arden University	Middlesex University	University of Gloucestershire
Aston University	Newcastle University	University of Greenwich
Birkbeck, University of London	Northeastern University London	University of Hertfordshire
Birmingham City University	Norwich University of the Arts	University of Kent
Bournemouth University	Oxford Brookes University	University of Leeds
BPP University	Plymouth Marjon University	University of Leicester
Buckinghamshire New University	Bangor University	University of Lincoln
Canterbury Christ Church University	Queen Mary University of London	University of London (School of Advanced Study)
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Ravensbourne University London	University of Northampton
City St George's, University of London	Royal College of Art	University of Nottingham
Courtauld Institute of Art	Royal Veterinary College	University of Plymouth
Coventry University	Sheffield Hallam University	University of Portsmouth
Cranfield University	SOAS University of London	University of Reading
De Montfort University	Teesside University	University of Roehampton
Durham University	The Open University	University of Salford
Edge Hill University	The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama	University of St Andrews
Edinburgh Napier University	Ulster University	University of Staffordshire
Goldsmiths, University of London	University College Birmingham	University of Stirling
Guildhall School of Music & Drama	University for the Creative Arts	University of Strathclyde
Harper Adams University	University of Aberdeen	University of Suffolk
Hartpury University	University of Bath	University of Surrey
Heriot-Watt University	University of Bedfordshire	University of Sussex

Imperial College London	University of Birmingham	University of the Arts London
Institute of Cancer Research	University of Bradford	University of the Highlands and Islands
Keele University	University of Brighton	University of the West of England
King's College London	University of Bristol	University of Wales Trinity Saint David
Lancaster University	University of Cambridge	University of Warwick
Leeds Beckett University	University of Cumbria	University of West London
Liverpool John Moores University	University of Derby	University of Westminster
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	University of Dundee	University of Worcester
London Metropolitan University	University of East Anglia	Wrexham University
London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine	University of East London	York St John University

Appendix 2. Respondent profile

	2025	2024	2023	Sector (HESA 2023/24 ¹⁵)
All respondents	90,156	98,311	83,807	728,350
Age				
30 or younger	71%	67%	66%	29 or younger: 64%
31 or older	29%	33%	34%	30 or older: 36%
TOTAL	89,776	96,503	82,226	728,220
Disability				
Declared disability	10%	9%	10%	11%
No known disability	90%	91%	90%	89%
TOTAL	83,273	91,114	79,542	728,350
Ethnicity (UK domicile only)				
Asian	11%	11%	13%	13%
Black	8%	7%	10%	9%
Mixed	5%	5%	4%	4%
Other ethnicity	2%	2%	2%	2%
White	74%	76%	71%	72%
TOTAL	27,952	27,258	28,540	339,600
Domicile				
UK	34%	31%	36%	47%
EU	3%	3%	4%	2%
Non-EU	63%	65%	61%	51%
TOTAL	84,268	89,831	82,208	727,225
Mode of study				

¹⁵ HESA (2024) *Who's studying in HE?* Cheltenham: HESA. Available at: www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/whos-in-he

Full-time	80%	79%	79%	67%
Part-time	20%	21%	21%	33%
TOTAL	90,050	98,203	83,719	728,350
Qualification type				
Masters	88%	89%	88%	81%
Other	12%	11%	12%	19%
TOTAL	90,067	98,194	83,702	728,350
Family HE background				
First in family	45%	45%	43%	--
Parents in HE	55%	55%	57%	--
TOTAL	86,158	94,470	80,138	--

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