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## Faculty of Social Sciences Student Attendance Survey 2025: Final Report

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# Faculty of Social Sciences Student Attendance Survey 2025 Final Report

Dr Jenny Chanfreau and Dr Estelle Marks

May 2026

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## Key Findings

Attendance declines steadily over the course of each term across the Faculty of Social Sciences, with particularly marked reductions in Global Studies and in the School of Law, Politics and Sociology. By contrast, Education and Social Work shows consistently higher average attendance. Tracking individual students over time reveals that, while a small minority attend all classes consistently, most students miss sessions intermittently rather than disengaging entirely.

Students report a complex and cumulative set of barriers to attendance. The most frequently cited university-related barriers are seminar anxiety, a preference for online study, difficulty keeping up with reading, and timetabling issues, particularly early-morning and late-evening classes.

Personal circumstances are equally salient: around a third of students report that paid work and the cost of travel often or always affect their ability to attend. Mental and physical health difficulties, including undiagnosed mental health issues, disability, and neurodivergence, are also commonly reported and frequently intersect with timetabling and teaching practices.

Patterns of disadvantage are evident. Women, Black students, mature students, first-generation students, and those with learning support plans report a higher number of barriers on average. These findings point to issues of inclusion rather than motivation.

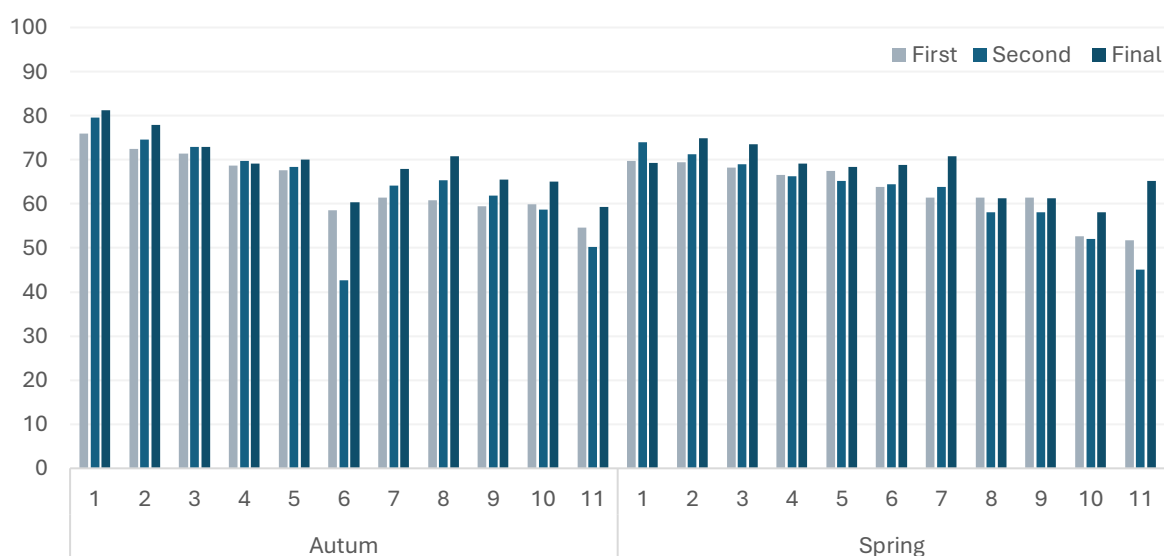
There is no single demographic profile that predicts low attendance. Instead, students in the lowest attendance quartile are characterised by experiencing multiple, overlapping barriers, particularly seminar anxiety, financial pressures, difficult travel, disability-related challenges, and a preference for online learning.

Crucially, attendance is not a reliable proxy for engagement. Reported study time does not differ meaningfully between attendance groups, and many low-attending students describe themselves as highly engaged through independent or online study. While awareness of the mandatory attendance policy has increased compared with the pilot survey undertaken in the previous year, understanding of requirements and consistency of attendance recording remain uneven, and tensions persist between mandatory in-person attendance and the availability of online recordings.

## Introduction

It is well recognised that the perennial challenges of student attendance and engagement have deepened in recent years, in the Faculty of Social Sciences, within the wider Sussex student community and across higher education.<sup>1</sup> Attendance data for the Faculty shows that attendance at timetabled undergraduate teaching declines over the course of each term, from an average of 81% of classes attended in week 1 of autumn term, to 56% by week 11 and in spring term from 72% in week 1 to 52% in week 11 (see Figure 1). The Faculty of Social Sciences is comprised of three schools: Education and Social Work (ESW), Global Studies (Global), and The School of Law, Politics and Sociology (LPS), and the declining pattern of attendance is more prominently in Global Studies and LPS (see Appendix 1 Figure A1.1).

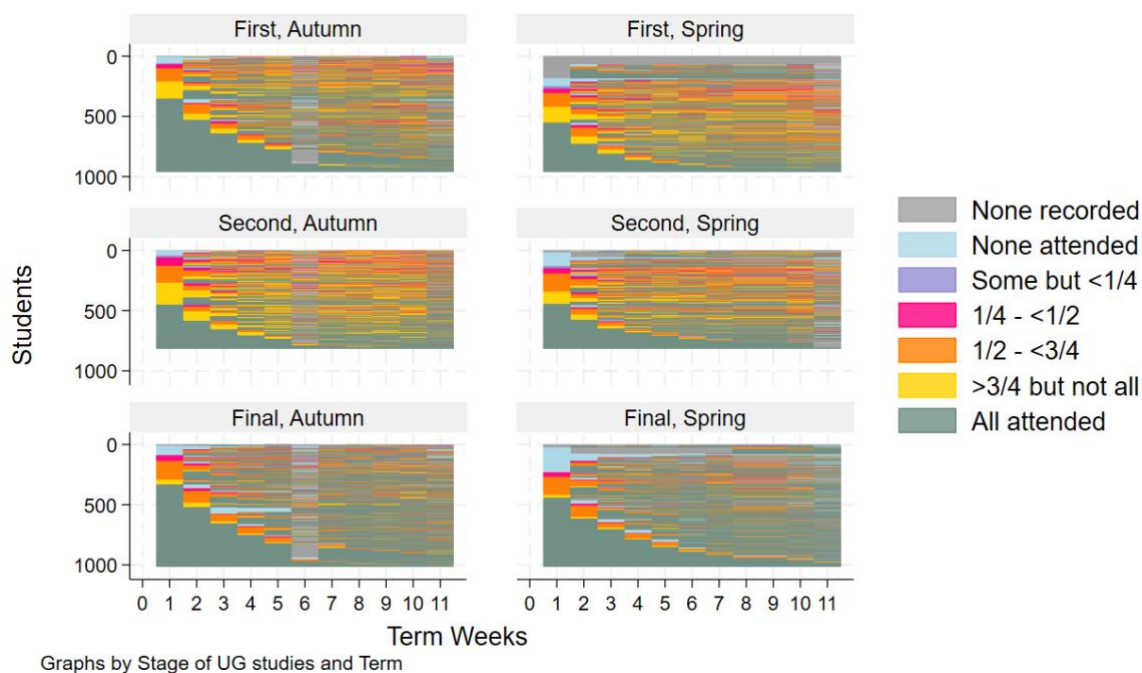
Figure 1 Weekly percentage of classes attended, by year of degree



Tracing the attendance trajectory of individual students over the academic year reveals a more complex picture. The sequence plots in Figure 2 below show the fraction of classes each student attended in each week of term, colour-coded by the fraction of total timetabled classes attended. This illustrates that although the number of students in each year group that attended *all* their timetabled classes in a given week (shown in teal) declines over time, some students who missed a few classes one week, or even attended none of their classes for a week or more (light blue), sometimes return to a higher level of attendance in subsequent weeks. As can be seen from the amount of orange, yellow and to a lesser extent pink, Figure 2 also illustrates at a glance how common less-than-full attendance is for most weeks of term. This is especially the case among first- and second-year students. Taken together, although a very small minority of students have consistently full attendance across the whole term (the few lines entirely in teal at the bottom of each panel), most students miss some classes at least some weeks in the term.

<sup>1</sup> Menendez Alvarez-Hevia, D., Lord, J., & Naylor, S. (2021). Why don't they attend? Factors that influence the attendance of HE students of education. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 45(8), 1061–1075. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1851664>  
 Oldfield, J., Rodwell, J., Curry, L., & Marks, G. (2018). Psychological and demographic predictors of undergraduate non-attendance at university lectures and seminars. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, 42(4), 509–523. [https://doi-org.sussex.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1301404](https://doi.org/sussex.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/0309877X.2017.1301404)

Figure 2 Individual student trajectories of weekly fraction of classes attended during 2024/25, by year of degree and term



Note: Grouped fraction of timetabled class time attended each week shown for each individual student. Each horizontal line of a panel represents the week-by-week proportion of timetabled class time attended by a student. Grey signifies that attendance was not recorded for a student in any class that week, most noticeably seen as a column in the middle of autumn term when many departments have reading week.

The existing literature recognises that students' decisions to attend (or not) are multifaceted and influenced by a range of factors, some within the control of HE institutions and some less so. This research project aims to move beyond anecdotal explanations for these issues at Sussex and better understand students' perspectives on the challenges they face. All undergraduate students in the Faculty of Social Sciences were invited to take part at the end of the 2025 Spring Semester.

The survey presented a series of barriers to attendance which participants ranked from 'Never' impacting attendance to 'Always' impacting it. The barriers were presented in four groups: those related to the University or the course, those related to physical and mental wellbeing, those related to care responsibilities and living circumstances, and those related to work, finances or visa status. In this report the last two groupings are sometimes combined and referred to as 'personal circumstances'. The survey also included questions about students living arrangements, modes of transport to campus, and personal characteristics. The survey included several open-ended questions allowing students to elaborate on their answers or describe their experiences in detail.

Attendance is highest in ESW (79.2%) and lower in Global (71.7%) and LPS (67.0%), on average. Because of these differences, for the purposes of analysis we grouped students into school-specific attendance quartiles, rather than absolute thresholds to signify 'low' or 'high' attendance. The lowest attendance group (Q1) is made up of (approximately) the bottom 25% of the attendance distribution of their school. As might be expected, survey participation differed across attendance groups, with the highest response rate (29%) in the highest attendance quartile and lowest for the group with the lowest attendance (26%). The analyses presented in this report have been weighted for non-response. We present descriptive bivariate analysis of the quantitative data. Where

differences are highlighted and discussed, these are statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ , unless otherwise stated).

The qualitative text answers were auto-coded in Nvivo and common themes explored on a question-by-question basis. All comments were read in full. The qualitative data makes it clear that common issues identified in the quantitative data are often interlinked in the student experience. The quotes chosen for inclusion in this report were identified as clear representations of common themes that reflect and elaborate the quantitative findings. The qualitative data makes the intersection of different issues clearer, especially the relationship between timetabling, travel time, travel costs and the need to work, which were the most common issues raised in written answers across student groups.

The report is structured as follows, the first section provides a descriptive overview of the profile of undergraduate students in the Faculty and across schools, followed by three overarching themes that emerged from the findings. The first theme presents the most frequently identified barriers to attendance, with seminar anxiety, paid work, travel and timetabling standing out. The second theme discusses inclusion of students with diverse backgrounds and with additional support needs, and the third theme focuses on the group with the lowest attendance (relative to other students in their School). The concluding section makes some preliminary recommendations and suggests potential actions. Detailed data tables are included in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 provides technical details on the survey and the analysis approach.

## Profile of survey respondents

Almost a quarter of undergraduate students (24%) live on campus and a further 40% usually have less than half an hour to travel to campus (see Table A1.1 for profile of students by School). Living in campus accommodation is most common among first year students (65% live on campus). Overall, 9% of students commute for at least an hour to campus, and this proportion is somewhat higher among ESW students (15%). The most common mode of travel to classes is by bus (48%), followed by walking (35%) and train (28%). Unsurprisingly, walking is much more common among first-year students (70%), as most live on campus. Among second and final year students, 58% and 62% respectively travel to campus by bus, and a third take the train (34% of each year group). Travel mode was similar across schools with the exception of cycling which was significantly lower in LPS (2% compared with 6% in ESW and 8% in Global) and driving to campus which was significantly higher among ESW students (24%, compared with 10% and 14% among Global and LPS students, respectively). The higher proportion of ESW students who live further away and/or drive to campus likely reflects their somewhat older age profile, with 15% aged 26 or older, compared to approximately 2% of undergraduates in Global and in LPS.

The majority of social science undergraduate students are women (68%), 26% are men, about 1% non-binary or another gender and approximately 5% did not state a gender. The gender composition of the student body differs across Schools, with 87% of ESW students being women. Similarly, while the majority of students are white (64% across the whole Faculty), ESW has the highest proportion of white students (75%). The proportion of Asian students (including both South Asian and East Asian) is relatively similar across schools ranging from 11% (LPS) to 13% in ESW and Global, while Black students are relatively more common in LPS (9%) than the other two schools (both 4%), and students identifying as mixed ethnicity relatively more common in Global studies (11%) and LPS (7%) compared with 2% in ESW.

Global Studies has the highest proportion of undergraduate students with a Learning Support Plan (21%), followed by ESW (19%) and 15% in LPS. The proportion of students with a learning support

plan did not differ statistically significantly across attendance groups. Overall, two-fifths of students (41%) report that neither of their parents attended university, which varied across schools (45% in LPS, 43% in ESW and 32% in Global).

Awareness of how the undergraduate student body varies across schools is relevant for interpreting some of the patterns of barriers reported below, and also when considering potential actions to mitigate barriers to attendance and engagement in class.

## Barriers to attendance

Students were asked about a range of barriers to their attendance, with the survey grouping these according to whether the barriers related to university, to individual factors such as a health or learning differences, to personal circumstances such as caring responsibilities, or to work and finances.

### University-related barriers

Almost a third of students (32%) reported three or more university-related barriers affecting their attendance 'often' or 'always'. This proportion was substantially lower in ESW (19%) than the other two Schools. Overall, the most commonly reported reasons 'often' or 'always' affecting attendance were being anxious in seminars (37%), a preference for online study (33%), inability to keep up with the assigned reading (31%) and the timetabling of seminars and lectures (25%).

Among students who reported that anxiety related to seminars is a barrier to attendance, the most frequently identified reason was anxiety about being called on to speak (71%), followed by anxiety about speaking in front of others (65%). Over a quarter (29%) reported not knowing what is expected of them as a reason for their anxiety, and 17% reported other reasons. Being anxious about being called on to speak varied by school (LPS 76%, ESW 66%, Global studies 58%).

*I get anxiety going to seminars a lot of the time. The nerves make me shaky. (Law 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*I will always check the PowerPoint before attending a lecture / workshop and if it says anything about having to discuss in groups I will not go in because I am anxious about speaking to people I don't know. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*Sometimes the readings are so overwhelming because of the volume that I panic and do not finish them all which makes me anxious to go to the seminar as I feel like I will be unprepared if I am called on. (Law 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q2)*

Timetabling was reported as 'often' or 'always' impacting attendance more frequently by second-year students (34%) than first-years or finalists (20% and 21%, respectively).

*My classes are spread out across the week, so I am often forced to buy day pass tickets when I only have 1 class in a 24 hour period, which adds up very quickly. (Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q3)*

*Having classes at 9am is not an excuse to miss class however having consistent classes at 9 each day of the week makes attending 100% of 9am classes in a week very hard - furthermore many students don't find themselves actually learning at early morning lectures - I often find myself needing to rewatch these lectures as I often miss content in early morning sessions. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*Late night lectures (5-7pm) and early morning (9am) I often struggle to attend, especially the evening as 7pm should not be a time where I'm expected to be at a class. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*Classes late in the day make it difficult to attend for working students or students who have classes back-to-back. (Sociology & Criminology 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

## The cost of living

Financial circumstances were also reported to affect attendance 'often' or 'always' by about a third of students overall: working to support their studies and home life (33%) and the cost of travel to campus being too expensive (32%). It is clear that many contemporary Sussex students have much to contend with in their lives beyond preparing for and attending university, they lead complex and busy lives with significant responsibilities and challenges outside of their degree programmes. Many students must work to afford basic necessities and travel. The current structure of full-time undergraduate degree training, even with reasonable adjustments, is insufficiently flexible and too unpredictable to support many student's consistent attendance. Scores of student comments centred on the need to work and many expressed outrage at the 'extortionate' cost of student travel in Brighton, noting that these issues presented a frequent barrier to their attendance. These are just a handful of many similar comments:

*By far the biggest barrier to attendance for my generation of students is the Cost of Living Crisis paired with the necessity to work part-time. I personally worked about 15-20 hours to make ends meet, and I have friends that did similar. All other free time you have for studying becomes dedicated solely to assignments, as you simply do not have the time nor the energy to keep up with anything not related to the assignment you choose to do. (Global Q3 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)*

*Brighton and Hove Buses are a horrible transport system, main issue with Sussex uni is the buses. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*Brighton Council is such a scam! Considering how much money we pay to attend uni there should at least be some sort of subsidised or free bus service for students, many cities that are predominantly student based have this service available. I just don't believe that there isn't the funding because where on earth is our money going? I think that's a barrier for a lot of people and for me, a student bus ticket is almost £5!!! (Sociology & Criminology Q2 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)*

*Travel to campus is ridiculously expensive. I spend around 20 pounds a week on getting the bus to and from university which means when I can't afford it I cannot attend. the buses to uni should be free really considering the amount of students who live in Brighton central and have to get a bus or train to get there. (Law Q3 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)*

*There have been many instances where I have been unable to afford bus fare to university. Working alongside my degree also makes going to uni more difficult, as I am often lacking energy. (Sociology & Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Q1)*

*Working at the same time as being in university is hard. Maintenance loan only just covers rent, doesn't touch living expenses or bus fare. (Politics 3<sup>rd</sup> Year Q3)*

*The cost of travelling back and forth is the greatest barrier of all. (Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Q1)*

## Mental and physical health

Disability, physical and mental health issues and neurodivergence were reported by between a tenth and up to a fifth of undergraduate students in the Faculty as affecting their attendance 'often' or 'always'. The most commonly reported barrier in this group was 'undiagnosed mental health issue', which 20% of students felt affected their attendance at least 'often' (Table A1.2). This quote makes it clear that these barriers intersect with university barriers such as timetabling:

*Classes scheduled geographically too far apart for me to get there on time. I can't walk from one side of campus to the other in 10 minutes; I'm disabled. Asked the uni for help but nothing was done at all. Also late evening classes or 4hrs+ timetable gaps actively detrimental to health. (Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

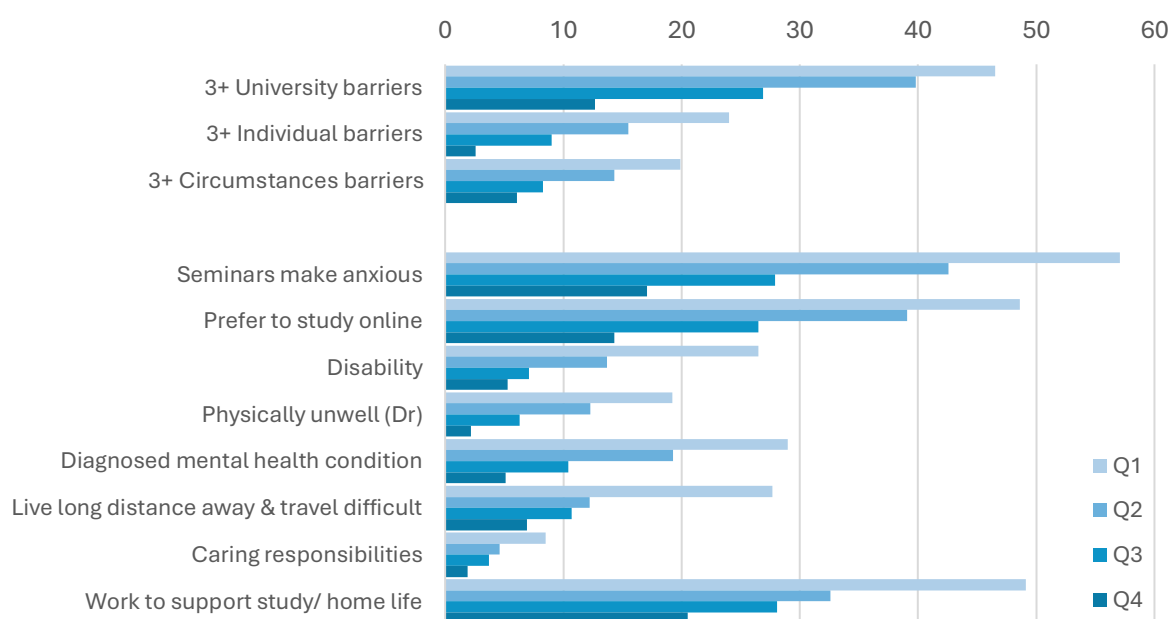
## Barriers by attendance group

As a measure of the complexity of barriers faced by students, we also looked at the number of different barrier types (University barriers; Individual barriers, including disability, mental health and neurodivergence; and Personal circumstances barriers, including caring, financial issues and paid work) reported as affecting attendance 'often' or 'always'.

Unsurprisingly, the number of reported barriers differed by attendance group, with almost half of students in the lowest quartile (Q1) reporting three or more university barriers, almost a quarter reporting three or more individual barriers and a fifth reporting three or more personal circumstances barriers affecting attendance 'often' or 'always'. Among the highest attending (Q4) group the percentages reporting three or more barriers affecting attendance 'often' or 'always' were: 13% for university barriers, 3% for individual barriers and 6% for personal circumstances.

Notable difference across specific barriers between attendance groups include seminars making students anxious, preferring to study online, disability, physical illness (with doctor's involvement), diagnosed mental health conditions, living a long distance away from campus, having caring responsibilities and paid work (see Figure 3).

*Figure 3 Percentage for students in reporting barriers to attendance 'often' / 'always', by attendance quartile*



Taken together, the patterns of reported barriers to attendance suggest issues of inclusion, rather than motivation, may explain variation in student attendance. In the next section, we look at potential inclusion issues in more detail by exploring barriers to attendance by student

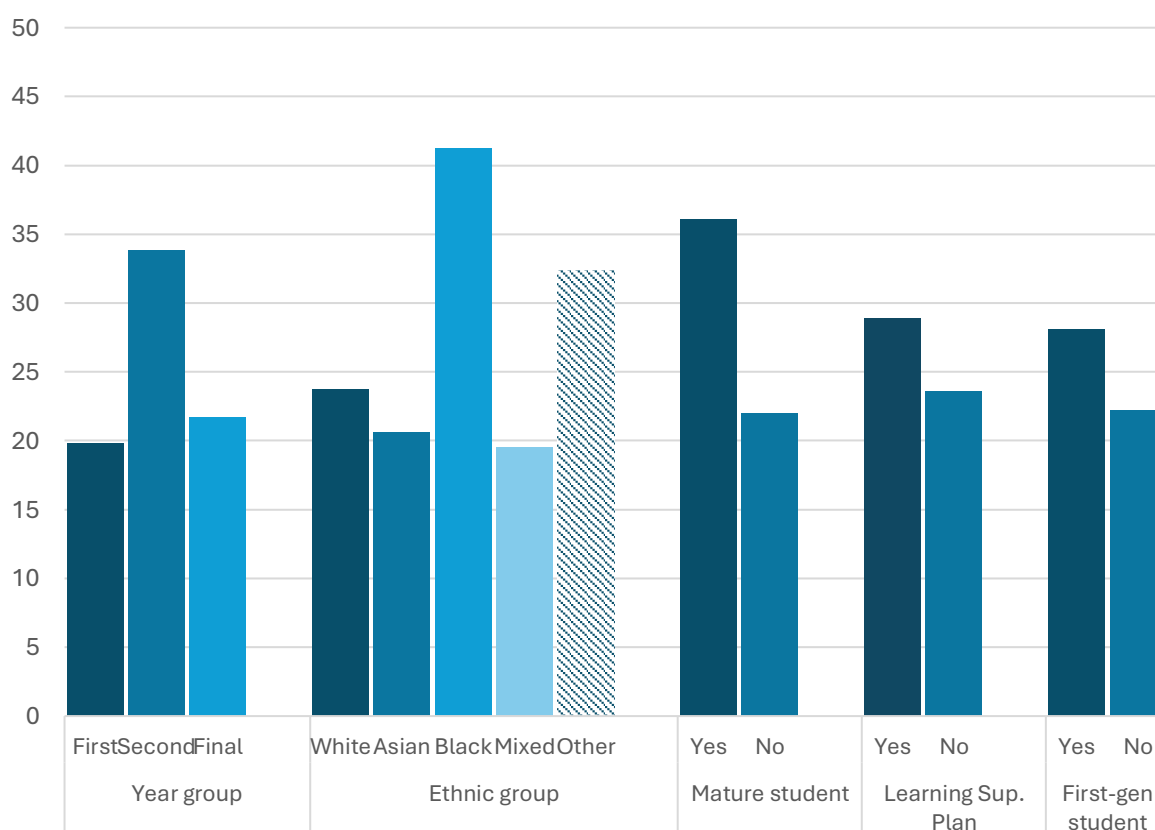
characteristics such as gender, ethnic group, learning plan, mature student status<sup>2</sup> and whether the respondent is a first-generation student.

## Inclusion

In this section, we look at reported barriers to attendance by student characteristics and discuss reports of classroom anxiety and student mental health, as well as disabled and neurodivergent students' experiences of the practical implementation of their inclusion plans. The results from the descriptive analysis are shown in Appendix Tables A1.3 and A1.4. However because some of these characteristics may overlap (for example, having a learning inclusion plan is slightly more common among mature students), in the text below we highlight only those characteristics that are significantly associated with a barrier when adjusting for the other student characteristics (gender, ethnic group, mature student status, first generation, and having an inclusion plan) as well as controlling for department and year of study in a regression model.

Over a third of mature students (36%) reported seminars and lecture times as a barrier to attendance 'often' or 'always' affecting attendance, as did two-fifths of Black students (41%) and 28% of first-generation students (compared with 25% overall). 'Other timetabling issues' were also identified as a barrier for 37% of Black students, 19% of Asian students and 16% of mature students (compared with 12% among all students).

*Figure 4 Percentage for students reporting 'Lecture and Seminar times' as a barrier to attendance 'often'/'always', by student characteristic*



*Note: Diagonally striped bars based on fewer than 50 respondents.*

<sup>2</sup> The survey did not include a direct question about exact age when enrolling for first year, so we infer mature student status based on a combination of current age group and year of study. As a result our indicator of mature student status approximates but does not perfectly capture the typical definition of mature students as over 21 at enrolment.

Students with a learning support plan were more likely to report not being able to keep up with reading as a barrier to attendance 'often' or 'always' (43%, compared with 31% overall), and that seminars make them anxious (45%, compared with 37% overall). Of those with a learning support plan, 13% also reported that their plan not being honoured is 'often' or 'always' a barrier to attendance. Higher proportions of female students than male also reported feeling anxious in seminars (41%) and support plans not being honoured (7%). Although not statistically significant when controlling for other variables, possibly due to the small size of the category, we note the similarly high proportion of non-binary students also reporting these barriers. The qualitative data elaborate on the ways in which having a plan can fail to deliver learning inclusion.

*I feel as though my tutors aren't made aware/ don't care/ unsure how to support me. (Global 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q1)*

*My learning disability support plan involves being able to eat in class, and if I have classes that go over lunchtime I need to eat then, but sometimes tutors have had a strict ban against eating in class. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q3)*

*I have been picked on in seminars when my plan requests to not single me out for questioning (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*I am not sure what my plan is. I have assistive software but struggle to use it. I see a study tutor once a week, which is helpful but it does not overcome all hurdles to a normal life of study. (Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

The number of different university barriers reported as affecting attendance 'often' or 'always', differed between student characteristics: women, Black students and those with a learning inclusion plan reported more university barriers on average. As summed up by a Black student with caring responsibilities, the way lecturers and seminar tutors interact with students in class can play a key role in whether those facing complex challenges do or do not overcome them in order to attend.

*Picking on a student in seminar and harshly critiquing without academic correction can genuinely damage student's morale, teachers should be kind to all students as they do not know who has learning difficulties and how hard to may be for some students to attend and prepare the work. (Law 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q2)*

Being anxious about being called on to speak varied by student gender (women 75% and 55% men) and ethnic group (77% among Asian students, 49% among students of mixed heritage;  $p < 0.1$ ). Not knowing what is expected of them was a less commonly reported reason among mature students (22%, compared with 31% among younger students;  $p < 0.1$ ), who instead were more likely to report 'other' reasons for seminars making them anxious as a barrier to attendance (25%, compared with 15% among younger students). 'Other' reasons were also more commonly reported by students with a learning support plan (28%) compared to those without (14%).

*I have anxiety and autism. Seminars are a struggle as it's a small group where I will often be expected to speak and I feel like everyone is judging me if I get something wrong or appear less educated on the topic. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

The qualitative data also highlights the multifaceted nature of seminar anxiety, a complex interplay between student mental health challenges or circumstances, timing, duration and atmosphere of classrooms, as well as the role of the lecturer or tutor.

*Sometimes my self-esteem on a certain day will impact whether I feel confident enough to go to uni, as well as family issues being a major source of my anxiety so depending on if things are good with my family, it affects whether I would attend uni. I think attendance is also massively linked to the teacher you have, if they create a safe environment where you don't*

*feel judged for not doing the reading or not turning up every week, I'm more likely to turn up. But if teachers take a hard-core approach that makes me anxious and less likely to attend. (Sociology & Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q2)*

*Too many lectures in one day with no break. E.g. 10-3. Seminars at 9am that nobody goes to and then when you're there it's really awkward and nobody wants to speak and then it makes you feel super anxious. Then if the seminar lecturer goes on tangents/isn't really helpful. Might as well do it online. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q3)*

*3 hour workshops are really difficult to attend especially at 9am as you have the anxiety of getting to uni on time, then the anxiety of knowing you've got to stay in the class for 3 hours which is a lot harder to attend when anxious than a shorter class. (Sociology & Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q1)*

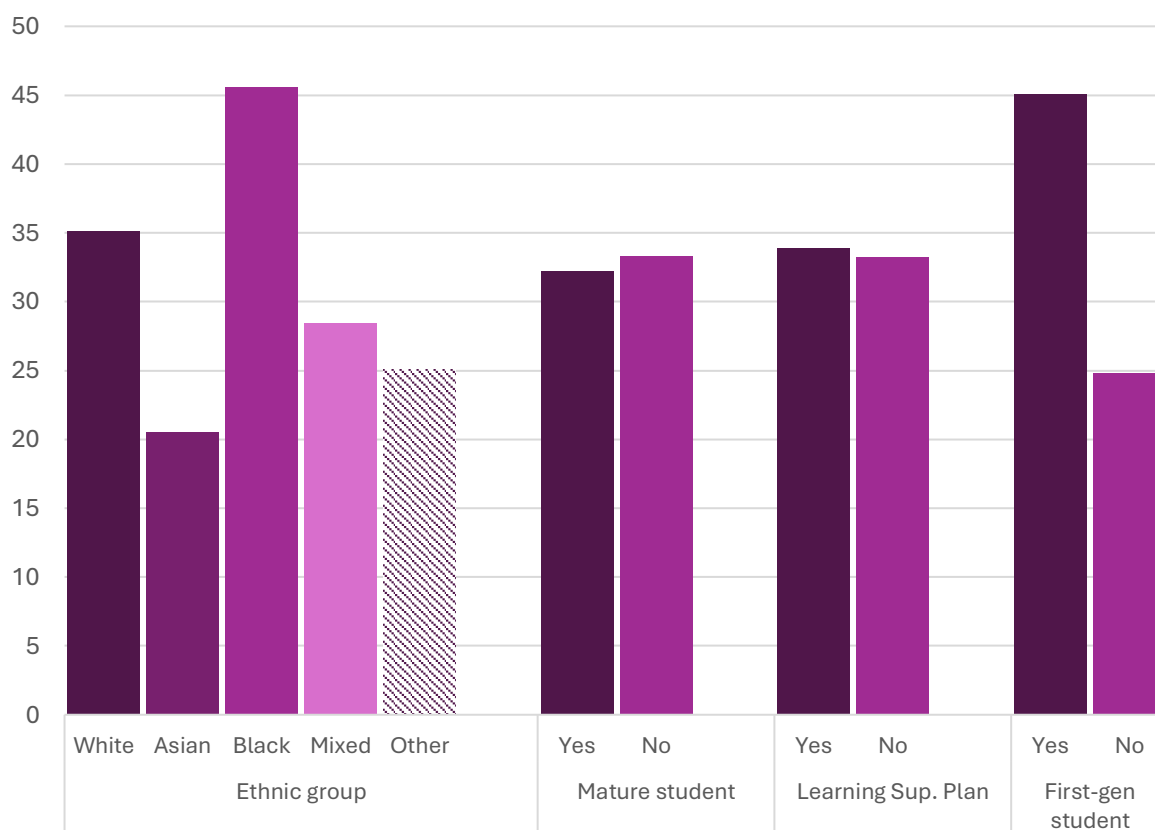
*Discussion is not effectively facilitated and opinions that do not agree with the course status quo are neglected and not supported. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*Sometimes the course content is challenging, and I don't understand the work which makes me anxious to go, especially if a tutor is rude about it. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q3)*

Turning to personal circumstances, living a long distance from campus and travel being difficult, caring responsibilities and/or not being able to prepare at home are disproportionately reported as barriers by Black students, mature students and first-generation students.

- Distance is reported as a barrier by 29% of Black students, and 22% of both mature and first-generation students, compared with 15% overall.
- Caring responsibilities are reported as 'often' or 'always' posing a barrier by 10% of mature students and 7% of first-generation students, compared with 5% overall.
- 18% of Black students and 10% of first-generation students report being unable to prepare at home as a frequent barrier, compared to 7% overall.
- Working to support studies and home life presents an attendance barrier 'often' or 'always' to 33% of students overall, but for 45% of first-generation students and 46% of Black students (difference relative to white students significant only at  $p < 0.1$ ).

Figure 5 Percentage for students reporting needing to 'Work to Support Study/ Home life' as a barrier to attendance 'often' or 'always', by student characteristic



Note: Diagonally striped bars based on fewer than 50 respondents.

The following quotes highlight some of the pressures that working students and carers face and how these issues intersect with financial pressures and timetabling:

*Lectures early in the morning such as 9ams and sometimes 10am were impossible to get to as a second- and third-year student who lived on Lewes Road, the 25 was always full before it arrived at Lewes Road bus garage, so it was impossible to reach campus for these times. Furthermore, in third year, I have found the expense of the bus detrimental to my learning as it has only gone up and up during my time here. As a working-class student who has no support from their parents and has worked the whole way through university the price of transport to university after leaving campus has caused me a lot of financial anxiety and impacted my learning. (Politics 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q2, First Generation Student)*

*As a student parent sometimes it is pretty difficult to come to the earlier seminars if my baby has kept me up the night before. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q2 - First Generation Student, Mature Student)*

*The bus to and from uni is £6 just on student finance I get £10 a day to live so £4 left to live on with bus tickets. Of course I have to work to afford to live. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1 - Working student)*

*My work takes priority over University as it is more important for me to pay rent but I feel there is no recognition of that and that the University is blind to student's extra responsibilities. (ESW 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1 - Working student, Mature Student)*

*I am a single parent, when my child is sick I have to take time off. (Law 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1 – Mature Student)*

Among students with a learning inclusion plan, 41% report disability, 19% report being physically unwell (with doctor involvement), 40% report a diagnosed mental health issue and 38% report their neurodivergence 'often' or 'always' being a barrier to attendance. Disability and neurodivergence presenting barriers to attendance 'often' or 'always' were disproportionately reported by women, non-binary, mature, and first-generation students, as well as those with a learning inclusion plan (see Figure 6). In particular, the high proportion of mature students with diagnosed mental health issues (26%) and neurodivergence (20%) is notable (compared with 16% and 13% overall, respectively).

The following quotes from students with diagnosed mental health conditions, physical disability or neurodivergence give just a flavour of the experiences of these groups and indicate how their conditions interact with the academic environment:

*My mental health took a massive decline during the beginning of term 2 so I was unable to motivate myself to go to my seminars due to an overwhelming sense of anxiety. I was also really struggling with the early morning lectures as I struggle with insomnia so the lack of sufficient sleep made it almost impossible for me to attend them. (Law 1<sup>st</sup> year Q2)*

*If I miss a seminar I find it harder and harder to attend the following ones. This puts me in a spiral of non attendance. (Politics 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*A lot of the seminars I attend are not set up to cater to people who are neurodivergent and a lot of the seminars I attend feel the same as lectures (some of them are often spent with the tutor lecturing for the majority of the seminar and not actually doing engaging activities that mean we all participate OR allow for people to shout out the answers to their questions meaning the same people are always speaking) I also think it would really help if seminar tutors wrote their question prompts on the board as I struggle to remember what is being asked of me in a seminar which means I am not always engaging and able to answer a question that I do know the answer to but just couldn't remember or didn't hear them ask it. (Law 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q3)*

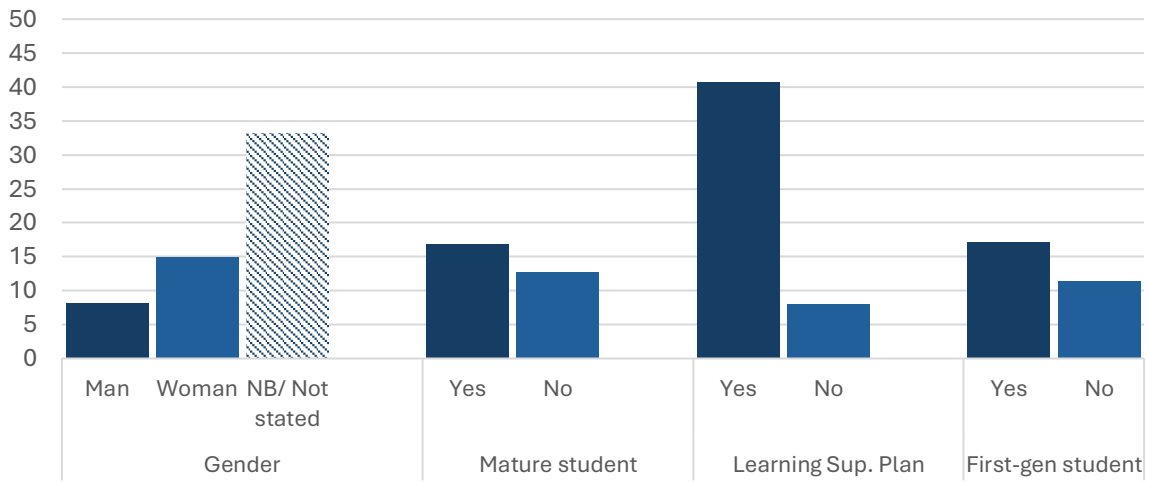
*I am a disabled student [...] and live about an hour away from campus towards Hove. A significant amount of my lessons take place in the early morning (9 to 11 am start), so I do not go because I would have to wake up 7.30am which is not feasible for me with my condition. (ESW 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*Anxiety from neurodivergence especially with seminars, I understand everything I do all the readings and really enjoy learning but I'm not good at speaking or getting my words out at times and can find groups of people overstimulating when I'm expected to speak or participate or talk to other people. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

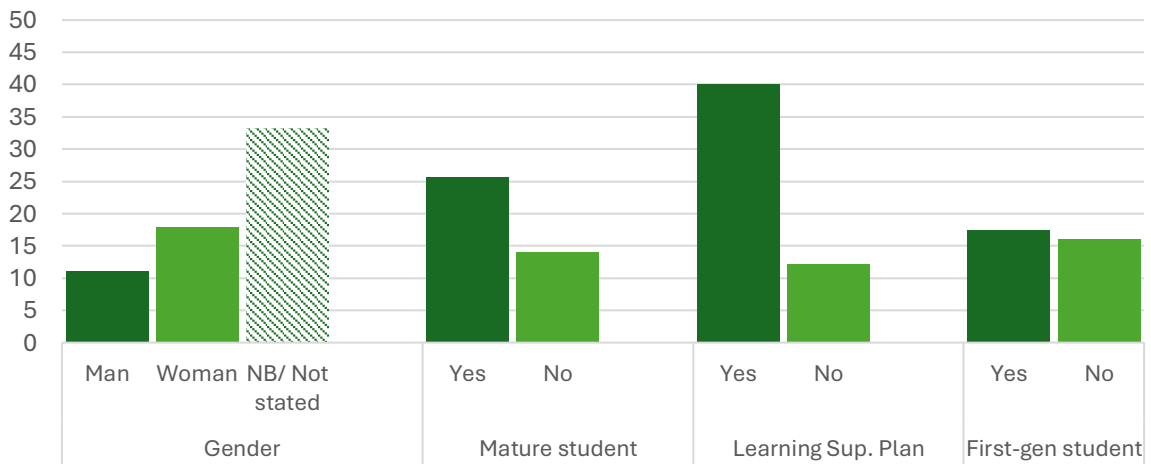
*Some lectures and seminars are not recorded so it does not always comply with my plan, also sometimes adequate breaks are not provided. (ESW 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

Figure 6 Percentage for students reporting as their Disability, Mental health or Neurodivergence barrier to attendance 'often'/'always', by student characteristics

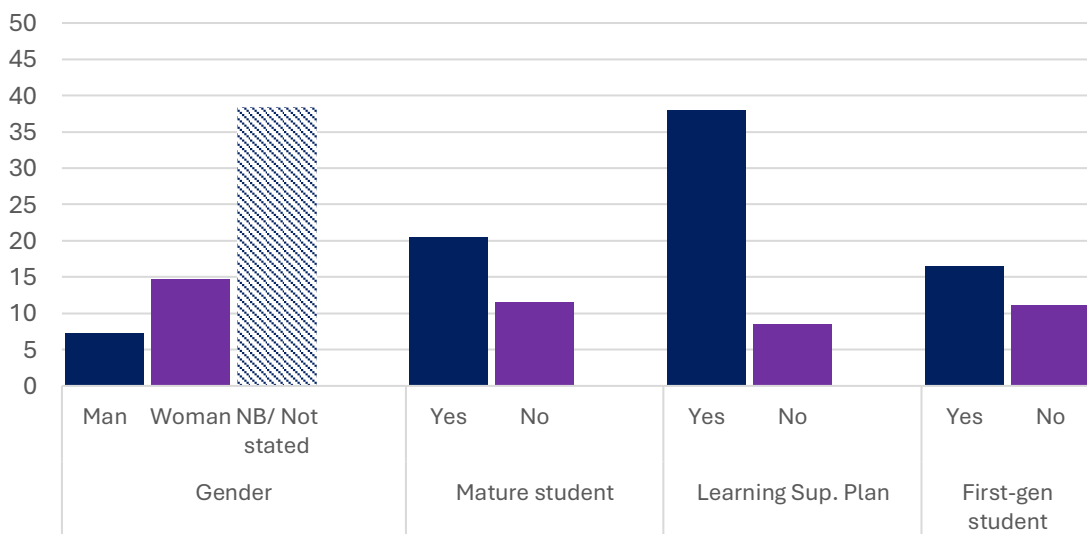
**Disability**



**Diagnosed mental health condition**



**Neurodivergence**



Note: Diagonally striped bars based on fewer than 50 respondents.

By way of capturing complex barriers to attendance, we again looked at the characteristics associated with variation in the number of different barriers to attendance. On average, female students, Black students and students with a learning support plan reported a higher number of university barriers affecting their attendance 'often' or 'always' (compared with male students, white students and those without a plan, respectively, when adjusting for other characteristics).

A higher number of personal barriers, on average, were reported by female and non-binary students (compared with male students), mature students, first generation students and those with a learning support plan (when adjusting for other characteristics). First generation students also reported slightly more personal circumstances barriers to attendance, compared to students with at least one parent that has attended university.

Overall, these patterns demonstrate that although learning support plans and reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment form important and necessary processes for supporting many students in their studies, they are insufficient. Many students face exclusionary processes and structures that are not covered by the learning support plan and processes, and some student's reasonable adjustments are not consistently honoured in practice.

## **Low attenders and engagement**

The final theme of the analysis explores whether it is possible to identify a profile of low attending students (with attendance in the bottom 25% of their school), that may help us target support, and to understand how attendance and engagement with studies relate.

The first key finding is that none of the following personal or 'observable' characteristics are statistically related to low attendance: gender, ethnicity, mature student, having a learning support plan or year of study. There is some evidence that being a first-generation student is associated with low attendance (statistically significant at the 10% level). However, this is explained by travel time to campus and the association between first generation status and low attendance is no longer statistically significant when controlling for travel time. Instead, when controlling for personal characteristics and year of study, it is students who live an hour's travel or further away from campus that are more likely to be in the lowest attending quartile. It should be noted that, although the two factors overlap, the majority of first-generation students have less than an hour's commute to campus. Nonetheless, among first-generation students, approximately 12% travel for an hour or more to campus, compared with 7% among students with at least one parent who attended university. Furthermore, travel time to campus was no longer significant when also controlling for reported barriers. In other words, it is not the commute time per se that explains (non-)attendance, but rather whether it is experienced as long and difficult or whether it interacts with other university, individual or personal circumstances to pose a barrier.

Thus, instead of specific groups of students being more likely to be in the lowest attending group it seems that those in the lowest attending group are more likely to face particular barriers to their attendance. The following university, personal and circumstance barriers were all associated with higher propensity to be in the lowest attending quartile (all significant at 5% level): preferring to study online; seminars making the student anxious; mention of 'other' university barriers; having a disability that poses a barrier to attendance; reporting that they live a long distance from campus and travel being difficult; 'other' issues with housing; and working to support study and home life.

Although it is unsurprising that these reported barriers to attendance would be significantly associated with increased risk of low attendance, this indicates that there are no easily identifiable groups of students that additional support with attendance might be preventatively targeted to. As

an example, although students who report having a disability that poses a barrier to attendance are more likely to be in the lowest attending quartile, having a learning support plan is not associated with attendance. This is similar to the point on travel time; it is the student's experience of their specific disability, health issue or learning difference and the challenge that this presents, rather than the fact of having a diagnosis or disability, that determines the impact on attendance (although the two measures of disability are clearly associated with each other).

The qualitative data highlight the complex interplay between different types of barriers for students in the lowest attendance quartile, with travel costs and work commitments featuring frequently alongside personal barriers:

*They schedule enormous gaps between classes, some classes are at SEVEN PM at night, which is absolutely insane if you have any job or obligations. The bus system on campus is also very poor, in Northfield you need the 23 to go anywhere, but the 23 arrives once an hour most times. Why the regularly arriving 25 doesn't drive an extra 5 minutes to Northfield I don't know. (Politics 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*I often simply couldn't afford the bus fare to uni, there was an increase in price a few months ago which made me less able to go to uni. (ESW 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q1)*

*I have trouble with speaking in public and sometimes I feel compelled to speak in seminars. I struggle with ADHD and not only does this affect my speech and being able to say my point in lessons but makes it extremely difficult to get the readings done on time. (Sociology & Criminology Q1 3<sup>rd</sup> Year)*

*When I have a 9am the cost of the train is double that of a train later in the day. It makes it so expensive to go in for only 50 minutes. (Sociology & Criminology 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q1)*

*Lectures late at night- not only is it hard to concentrate with ADHD but at 6-8pm even harder. I also work evenings so 3 evening shifts plus a late lecture followed by 9am start means I am exhausted. This increases the frequency of my migraines. Also lecturers having online office hours can make booking them and reaching out more difficult, I've even had lecturers miss appointments completely despite multiple emails confirming and then no apology etc. so this can make attending in person and asking for help again daunting. (Global 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q1)*

*Travelling home and supporting family members etc. Work and medical conditions all impact people's attendance and the university seem oblivious to this. (Global Q1 2<sup>nd</sup> Year)*

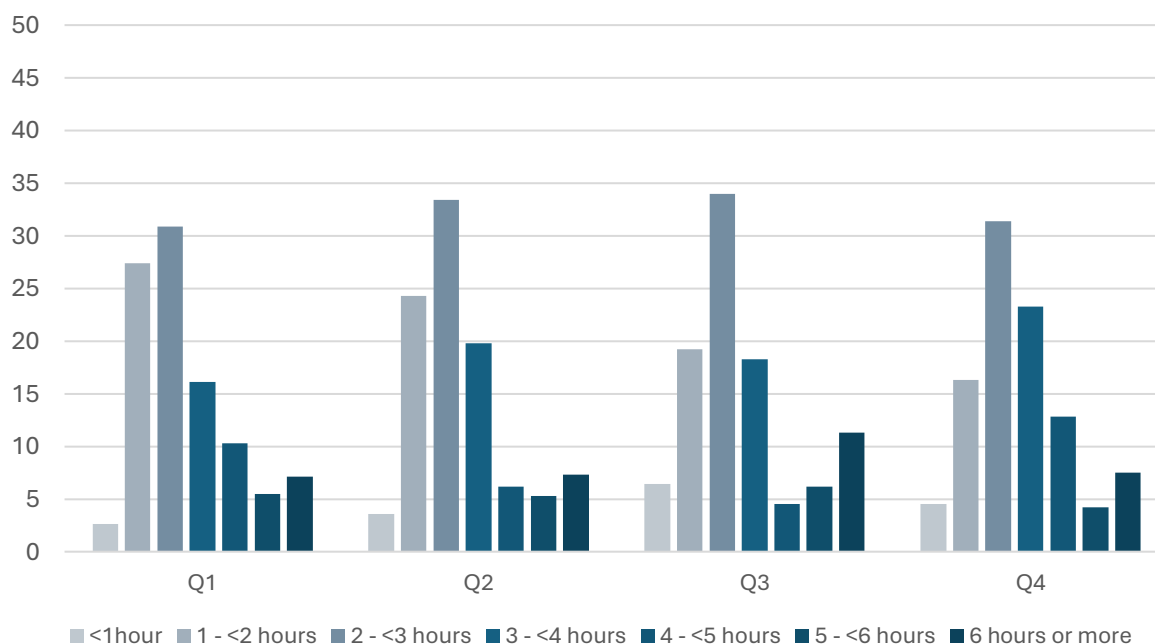
*I have to work to pay [for accommodation] and this is made harder by my timetable (Law 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

*The distance between home and university, traffic congestion, and my weak immunity make it difficult for me to attend, as I get sick very often. (Law 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Q1)*

The second key finding under the heading of low attendance and engagement is that study time did not differ significantly across the attendance quartiles. The survey asked students to estimate the time they spend reading and preparing for each class or seminar. The range in the mean study time per class reported across attendance quartiles was only half an hour, with the lowest study time reported being 2.9 hours (Q2) and the highest 3.4 hours (Q1). The lack of statistical association between study time and attendance suggests that attendance should not be interpreted as indicative of the student's level of engagement and interest in their studies, a point also made by one of the students who responded to the survey:

*I am incredibly self-sufficient and proactive about my learning journey. I prefer doing the work online as it means I can structure my own way of studying. I find the mandatory attendance discouraging [sic] when I am receiving emails about my attendance even though my work ethic and grades are top tier. It is frustrating to feel that attendance is prioritised over academic achievement, since I live over an hour's drive away and can sometimes be hard to attend. (Law 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

Figure 7 Study time: Approximate time spent reading/ preparing for each seminar (%), by attendance quartile



The majority of students in all attendance groups reported that they do attend seminars even if they have not managed to do the reading, although agreement with this statement was linearly associated with attendance group (78% for Q1 and 96% for Q4). From an inclusion perspective, encouraging anxious students to attend even if they have not managed to complete the reading or feel fully prepared is important, but these efforts need to also be mindful of how the attendance and engagement of others influences and shapes the collective learning experience. Some students noted that low attendance among other students impacts on their own experience:

*The issue I have is the attendance of others and the impact it has on the learning process. On a course where 80% attendance is mandatory and some peers have not achieved this and constantly turn up late to lectures by over an hour or ask questions requiring an explanation and repetition of content because their attendance is low, impacts the group as a whole and undermines the commitment of others when attendance is not followed up by academic advisors. (ESW 2<sup>nd</sup> year Q3)*

Another student highlighted how the lack of collective participation by peers in class discussions, heightens their seminar anxiety:

*The physical setting of classrooms is challenging for me. Classes are often silent, which when paired with the fact it's a professional setting, amplifies any anxiety I may feel. On top of that, there is little opportunity to get to know those around you within class. This further*

*amplifies anxiety as trying to feel comfortable in an icy room is difficult. Furthermore, the structure of lessons very rarely allows for extended periods of independent discussion. This stutters the flow of my learning and further decreases my ability to feel comfortable with my classmates. (Politics 3<sup>rd</sup> year Q1)*

Further, we looked at attendance and frequency of checking Sussex emails and Canvas, all of which broadly support a conceptual distinction between attendance and learning engagement. The majority of students in all attendance groups also reported checking their Sussex email daily, although this again differed across attendance groups (57% in Q1 and 79% in Q4) and similarly that they log in to Canvas daily (65% Q1; 85% Q4).

The mandatory attendance policy appears to have had some impact on student knowledge of the attendance requirements for their degree. Comparing the responses from students in the Sociology and Criminology department with results from the pilot study the previous year (61% of students were aware, compared with 53% in 2024). Overall, approximately two thirds of students (64%) reported keeping track of their own attendance on Sussex Direct. Among those who did not keep track, more than half in all attendance groups reported knowing how to do so. Similarly, the majority of students reported knowing who to contact if they are unable to attend class, although this awareness was associated with attendance (72% in Q1 and 87% in Q3) and there were substantial differences across attendance groups in how frequently students reportedly did contact staff about absences (with only 7% of Q1 students reportedly always doing so, compared with 38% of Q4 students).

As one student summed up, the lack of autonomy and flexibility over their study scheduling can affect attendance.

*I wish we all had access to the time of every class in the same module and to be able to go to any it's not like they are all full ever and it would make attendance easier. (Global 1<sup>st</sup> year Q1)*

## Recommendations and actions

In this section, we draw out some of the implications from the research. The list of recommendations is not definitive and we hope that this report and its recommendations will generate discussion across the Faculty and within its constituent schools and departments, as well as feed into ongoing conversations, projects and campaigns at the University level and with the Student Union and community.

### *1. Mitigate barriers relating to timetabling*

There are clear implications from this research for the ongoing Timetabling project. Apparent contradictions or conflicts of interest in timetabling preferences suggest a need for increased predictability, flexibility and level of autonomy/responsibility for students in managing their schedules in a context of competing demands on their time and finances.

- The timetabling project may need to seriously look at block timetabling for students, especially those living off campus, including possibility of students selecting seminar groups.
- Predictability may be increased by reserving specific days for department core teaching year on year.

The obvious preference for reductions to 9am and late-night teaching is a strong and recurring theme in the findings that the University should take seriously, recognising that 76% of undergraduate students live off campus. For the 28% of students who commute by train, costs are significantly reduced when *starting* their journey after 9.30am.

### *2. Mitigate barriers relating to commuting*

Given the financial realities of our students, the University should think creatively about ways to ease students' costs of travel to campus and consult with student body on what would help.

- Can the university engage with bus and train companies or local and national government?
- Can more be done to encourage cycling among students who live locally off-campus, to help with both travel cost and flexibility?
- What can be done to improve willingness of students to study on campus between and after classes?

### *3. Support inclusive pedagogy*

The Faculty should make time and space for reviewing current seminar teaching practice and for sharing good practice in active learning, and in inclusive pedagogies including seminar planning and facilitation techniques. This may include encouraging departments and staff members to diversify the ways in which their students are able to demonstrate participation and engagement, beyond a reliance on speaking, and in some contexts it may be appropriate to consider avoiding the Socratic method or cold calling questioning in seminars.

Taking students' anxiety seriously also implies taking steps to ensure that students understand and notice the benefits of attending seminars, even if they have been unable to complete the reading. More should be done to demonstrate to students the benefits of individually and collectively preparing for and engaging in classes.

### *4. Acknowledge tensions relating to mandatory attendance policy*

Despite the mandatory attendance policy appearing to have increased awareness among students between 2024 and 2025, awareness remains far from universal. If attendance is mandatory, the

policy needs to be conveyed to all students at the start of each year and each module. Recording of attendance by staff is also not universally and consistently applied. Furthermore only 20% of students in the Faculty always contact tutors if they are unable to attend.

There is also a tension between mandatory attendance at lectures and the recommendation that recordings be immediately available online. The Faculty should acknowledge this tension and consider ways to resolve it.

### *5. Investigate the association between attendance, engagement and attainment*

The University/Faculty should commit to undertaking further research to better understand how learning engagement relates to attendance, and how they are associated with student attainment. Having a better understanding of the distinctions as well as the overlap between attendance, engagement and attainment, will help clarify how and why we record and track attendance and/or engagement and provide clear justification of our chosen approaches to students.

It should also help inform the setting and communication of clear and explicit expectations about preparation for timetabled teaching, attendance and in-class participation expectations in ways that focus on building inclusive classroom environments that maintain standards and encourage students to meet them and access support where needed. This will also involve setting and communicating clear and explicit expectations about the independent study time commitment at the start of each module.

## Appendix 1 – Attendance Figures and Survey Results tables

Figure A1.1 – Weekly percentage of classes attended, by school

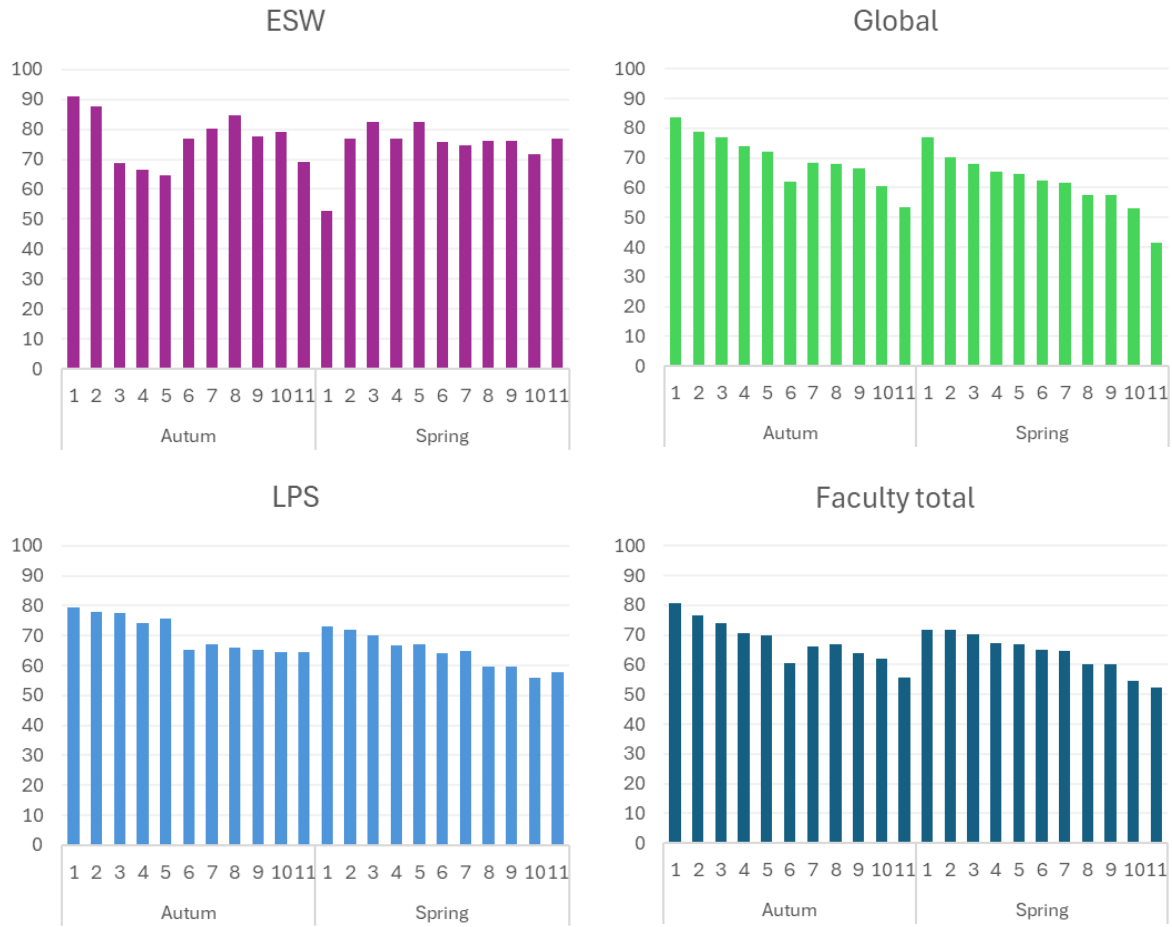


Table A1.1 – Student profile

	ESW %	Global %	LPS %	Faculty total %
<b>Travel time to campus</b>				
Live on campus	18.3	26.2	23.2	23.6
<30 mins	32.0	44.0	38.1	39.1
30 mins - <1 hour	34.6	23.4	29.5	28.3
1+ hour	15.1	6.4	9.2	9.0
<b>Mode of travel to campus</b>				
Walk	32.5	35.7	35.4	35.2
Bike	6.3	7.7	2.0	3.9
Bus	48.6	47.9	48.3	48.2
Train	29.2	28.5	28.2	28.4
A car you drive	23.6	10.2	13.9	13.8
Lift with friends or family	6.3	4.3	7.2	6.4
Taxi	1.1	4.9	2.9	3.3
<b>Age</b>				
Under 21	42.8	53.4	50.2	50.4
21-25	42.0	44.4	47.9	46.4
26-30	5.3	0.9	1.3	1.5
31 and over	9.9	1.4	0.7	1.7
<b>Gender</b>				
Man/Male	11.0	27.5	27.0	25.8
Woman/Female	86.5	63.2	68.1	68.4
Non-binary/third/another gender	1.3	1.9	1.0	1.3
Prefer not to say/Missing	1.3	7.4	3.8	4.5
<b>Ethnic group</b>				
White	75.1	61.1	63.8	64.0
Asian	13.0	12.6	10.7	11.4
Black	3.9	3.7	9.0	7.1
Mixed	1.7	11.2	7.3	7.8
Other, including Arab	1.5	4.2	4.7	4.3
Not reported	4.8	7.3	4.6	5.3
Has Learning support plan (% yes)	19.4	21.1	14.8	16.9
First-generation student (% yes)	42.6	31.7	44.7	41.1
<i>Obs</i>	70	208	468	746

Notes: Multiple travel modes possible, percentages add up to more than 100. Percentages are weighted for non-response, number of observations/respondents (Obs) is unweighted. Number of respondents differ across questions, lowest obs shown. Variables highlighted in light grey indicates statistically significant difference across groups at  $p < 0.1$ ; darker grey indicates statistically significant difference across groups at  $p < 0.05$ .

Table A1.2 – Barriers by attendance group and by School (% Often/ Always)

	Attendance				School			Faculty Total %
	Q1 %	Q2 %	Q3 %	Q4 %	ESW %	Global %	LPS %	
<b>University barriers</b>								
Seminar & Lecture times	32.6	31.7	21.3	12.6	13.2	30.5	24.1	24.8
Other timetabling issues	12.5	12.7	11.6	9.2	2.8	11.2	12.8	11.6
Course content not as expected	12.7	10.7	10.7	6.7	14.4	10.5	9.6	10.3
Course content too challenging	8.8	8.8	5.5	3.2	1.3	6.8	7.2	6.6
Can't keep up with reading	32.1	35.1	34.5	21.1	19.6	37.1	29.7	30.8
Course content not interesting	10.7	11.7	12.1	7.6	9.0	11.8	10.2	10.5
I would rather study online	48.6	39.1	26.5	14.3	19.7	26.0	37.1	32.7
Lack of ethnic diversity in classes	9.4	6.7	7.4	3.9	7.7	6.0	7.2	6.9
Lack of gender diversity in classes	3.9	4.9	3.4	4.1	8.8	2.2	4.2	4.1
My learning support plan is not being honoured	6.4	4.2	6.4	4.5	4.5	7.1	4.9	5.4
Seminars make me anxious	57.1	42.6	27.9	17.1	23.1	38.0	38.2	36.8
Language barriers	4.0	2.0	2.2	3.3	1.3	6.0	1.9	2.9
Other	25.6	14.1	9.8	4.6	8.1	19.0	13.0	14.0
Number university barriers mentioned Often/ Always								
None	8.6	17.0	30.1	48.1	52.0	24.1	22.5	25.4
1	21.7	25.1	22.3	20.5	16.0	19.3	24.4	22.4
2	23.1	18.2	20.7	18.6	13.4	21.5	20.7	20.2
3+	46.5	39.8	26.9	12.7	18.7	35.2	32.4	31.8
<i>Obs</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>213</i>	<i>481</i>	<i>766</i>
<b>Individual barriers</b>								
Disability	26.5	13.7	7.1	5.3	11.4	17.8	12.1	13.6
Physically unwell (Dr involvement)	19.2	12.3	6.3	2.2	9.1	10.8	10.2	10.2
Physically unwell (no Dr involvement)	23.5	14.5	14.6	6.5	4.8	19.9	14.5	15.0
Diagnosed mental health condition	29.0	19.3	10.4	5.1	14.7	23.5	13.8	16.3
Undiagnosed mental health issues (incl. anxiety)	32.7	20.5	16.2	6.9	10.0	19.5	20.7	19.5
Neurodivergent	21.0	14.7	9.9	6.6	10.9	16.5	12.3	13.3
Other	6.1	0.8	2.5	1.4	0.0	6.7	1.6	2.8
Number mentioned Often/ Always:								
None	33.5	54.8	67.0	79.8	74.8	53.6	57.6	58.0
1	24.7	20.9	14.8	12.1	8.1	15.8	20.7	18.3
2	17.7	8.7	9.2	5.6	9.5	12.7	9.8	10.5
3+	24.0	15.5	9.0	2.6	7.6	17.9	11.8	13.1
<i>Obs</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>183</i>	<i>187</i>	<i>211</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>481</i>	<i>765</i>

	Attendance				School			Faculty Total %
	Q1 %	Q2 %	Q3 %	Q4 %	ESW %	Global %	LPS %	
<b><i>Personal circumstances</i></b>								
Long distance from campus & travel difficult	27.7	12.2	10.7	6.9	21.4	14.7	13.8	14.8
Caring responsibilities	8.5	4.6	3.7	1.9	11.4	4.9	3.8	4.8
Cannot prepare at home	12.0	8.1	4.3	3.7	6.4	9.4	6.4	7.2
Other issues with housing	16.1	7.5	4.7	2.3	4.3	8.8	8	7.9
Work to support study / home life	49.1	32.6	28.1	20.5	33.2	30.8	34	33.1
Travel to campus is too expensive	38.3	33.1	32.8	24.2	27.7	27.1	35	32.3
Student visa difficulties	1.6	1.8	1.8	2.1	1.3	1.1	2.3	1.9
Number mentioned Often/ Always:								
None	20.0	30.0	25.7	33.6	29.5	26.7	26.9	27.1
1	32.4	36.4	34.1	39.8	27.2	35.4	36.8	35.6
2	27.8	19.2	32.0	20.5	29.5	24	24.7	24.9
3+	19.9	14.3	8.3	6.1	13.8	13.9	11.6	12.4
<i>Obs</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>179</i>	<i>184</i>	<i>210</i>	<i>72</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>473</i>	<i>757</i>

Table A1.3 – Barriers by student characteristics: Year group, Gender, Mature\* student

	Year group			Gender			Mature student	
	First %	Second %	Final %	Man/ Male %	Woman/ Female %	Non-binary/ Not stated %	No %	Yes %
<b>University barriers</b>								
Seminar & Lecture times	19.8	33.8	21.7	27.0	23.7	[25.6]	22.0	36.1
Other timetabling issues	9.1	14.7	11.1	13.7	10.9	[4.3]	10.5	15.8
Course content not as expected	10.2	10.5	10.1	9.0	10.2	[19.1]	9.5	13.6
Course content too challenging	6.5	9.1	4.6	3.8	7.7	[0.0]	7.2	4.5
Can't keep up with reading	29.0	29.4	33.6	23.3	33.8	[20.3]	31.4	28.3
Course content not interesting	8.5	12.7	10.5	11.7	9.5	[28.6]	10.2	11.5
Would rather study online	28.8	35.3	33.9	31.7	33.7	[10.3]	32.4	33.6
Lack of ethnic diversity in classes	5.6	8.8	6.6	4.1	7.8	[10.8]	6.7	8.1
Lack of gender diversity in classes	2.9	5.3	4.2	3.4	4.4	[4.4]	3.8	5.5
My learning support plan is not being honoured	4.9	5.4	5.9	2.0	6.6	[10.7]	5.4	5.4
Seminars make me anxious	36.7	36.5	37.2	26.7	40.5	[37.2]	36.8	36.9
Language barriers	2.2	5.2	1.6	1.6	3.5	[0.0]	2.2	5.6
Other	8.8	17.1	16.4	16.3	12.6	[35.5]	12.5	20.0
Number university barriers mentioned Often/ Always								
None	28.4	23.2	24.7	28.3	24.4	[24.6]	25.8	24.1
1	23.6	22.0	21.7	25.9	21.2	[24.7]	22.9	20.4
2	21.2	16.8	22.3	19.0	21.4	[14.0]	20.9	17.7
3+	26.8	38.0	31.4	27.0	33.1	[36.6]	30.5	37.8
Obs	284	250	232	199	535	20	604	162
<b>Individual barriers</b>								
Disability	12.9	10.6	16.6	8.2	15.0	[33.2]	12.7	16.9
Physically unwell (Dr involvement)	8.0	10.6	12.1	8.4	10.8	[21.6]	10.1	11.0
Physically unwell (no Dr involvement)	16.7	15.6	13.1	17.9	13.8	[11.2]	15.5	13.2
Diagnosed mental health condition	13.4	15.6	19.5	11.1	17.9	[33.2]	14.1	25.6
Undiagnosed mental health issues (incl. anxiety)	22.9	15.8	19.5	12.6	21.6	[29.2]	19.6	19.1
Neurodivergent	14.1	10.2	15.1	7.2	14.7	[38.3]	11.5	20.4
Other	3.9	3.5	0.7	2.4	2.7	[7.7]	2.0	5.5
Number mentioned Often/ Always:								
None	57.9	59.7	56.8	64.6	55.8	[51.1]	59.7	51.3
1	17.4	17.6	19.8	18.6	18.6	[10.7]	18.0	19.6

	Year group			Gender			Mature student	
	First	Second	Final	Man/ Male	Woman/ Female	Non-binary/ Not stated	No	Yes
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
2	11.2	13.7	7.3	8.5	11.3	[5.0]	9.7	13.8
3+	13.6	9.0	16.2	8.2	14.4	[33.2]	12.5	15.3
<i>Obs</i>	<i>284</i>	<i>249</i>	<i>232</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>535</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>603</i>	<i>162</i>
<b><i>Personal circumstances</i></b>								
Long distance from campus & travel difficult	8.8	19.4	16.2	11.4	15.9	[15.4]	13.0	21.9
Caring responsibilities	1.8	6.8	5.7	5.7	4.4	[6.2]	3.3	10.4
Cannot prepare at home	2.8	6.0	12.0	4.3	7.9	[16.9]	7.2	7.2
Other issues with housing	5.5	10.2	8.2	8.6	7.6	[6.2]	7.6	9.1
Work to support study / home life	25.3	32.6	40.4	25.7	35.9	[33.9]	33.3	32.2
Travel to campus is too expensive	16.8	35.6	43.2	24.8	34.7	[45.1]	32.2	32.9
Student visa difficulties	0.8	2.2	2.5	1.3	2.0	[4.4]	1.8	1.9
Number mentioned Often/ Always:								
None	45.2	22.0	15.3	30.7	25.2	[40.9]	26.7	28.6
1	33.4	35.1	38.0	35.6	36.1	[17.0]	37.0	30.1
2	15.8	28.9	29.7	20.6	26.5	[31.0]	25.1	24.1
3+	5.6	14.0	16.9	13.2	12.2	[11.1]	11.2	17.2
<i>Obs</i>	<i>282</i>	<i>244</i>	<i>231</i>	<i>199</i>	<i>535</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>595</i>	<i>162</i>

Table A1.4 – Barriers by student characteristics: Ethnic group, learning support plan and First-generation student

	Ethnic Group					Learning Sup. Plan		First-gen student	
	White %	Asian %	Black %	Mixed %	Other %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
<b>University barriers</b>									
Seminar & Lecture times	23.7	20.6	41.2	19.5	[32.4]	28.9	23.6	28.1	22.2
Other timetabling issues	7.6	18.9	36.5	7.9	[17.0]	16.5	10.7	11.2	11.9
Course content not as expected	8.8	14.1	11.6	12.3	[5.4]	9.9	10.4	11.7	9.0
Course content too challenging	4.4	10.9	18.0	9.7	[2.6]	10.0	6.0	7.3	5.8
Can't keep up with reading	33.1	24.2	32.7	27.1	[21.6]	43.0	28.7	29.9	31.1
Course content not interesting	10.8	8.5	16.2	8.2	[6.1]	13.5	10.2	10.0	11.2
I would rather study online	31.8	37.7	29.6	35.2	[36.0]	29.0	33.2	36.6	29.9
Lack of ethnic diversity in classes	1.8	11.0	44.1	7.6	[11.0]	6.6	7.2	7.6	6.4
Lack of gender diversity in classes	2.9	6.0	9.2	3.9	[8.6]	5.3	4.0	4.4	3.9
My learning support plan is not being honoured	4.8	5.1	15.2	7.5	[0.0]	13.5	4.0	4.4	6.3
Seminars make me anxious	36.7	38.8	44.5	30.3	[28.6]	44.5	35.3	42.6	32.5
Language barriers	0.9	14.2	4.0	0.0	[7.2]	3.6	2.8	1.6	3.9
Other	15.8	6.0	16.0	7.7	[21.5]	19.5	12.5	14.1	14.1
Number university barriers mentioned Often/ Always									
None	26.2	22.2	17.6	33.7	[19.7]	23.4	26.0	21.0	28.6
1	23.8	21.6	8.7	24.5	[27.0]	18.5	23.1	24.8	20.7
2	19.6	28.2	18.6	13.2	[24.9]	17.7	20.6	19.4	21.4
3+	30.4	28.1	55.1	28.6	[28.5]	40.4	30.4	34.6	29.3
Obs	507	86	53	62	31	130	616	301	453
<b>Individual barriers</b>									
Disability	13.1	8.1	21.0	19.4	[14.4]	40.8	8.1	17.1	11.4
Physically unwell (Dr involvement)	9.9	9.3	12.4	13.5	[14.6]	18.8	8.6	11.2	9.9
Physically unwell (no Dr involvement)	13.1	15.3	30.0	16.2	[18.7]	17.7	14.3	18.2	12.8
Diagnosed mental health condition	18.1	5.4	19.2	19.8	[9.4]	40.1	12.1	17.4	16.0
Undiagnosed mental health issues (incl. anxiety)	18.6	10.0	32.3	26.4	[15.5]	21.7	18.8	21.4	18.0
Neurodivergent	13.9	6.8	15.1	18.4	[10.8]	37.9	8.5	16.5	11.1
Other	2.7	0.0	3.3	2.0	[13.4]	9.5	1.7	2.0	3.3
Number mentioned Often/ Always:									

	Ethnic Group					Learning Sup. Plan		First-gen student	
	White %	Asian %	Black %	Mixed %	Other %	Yes %	No %	Yes %	No %
None	59.0	67.8	44.8	50.1	[56.1]	36.0	62.7	57.0	58.6
1	17.8	20.5	21.8	16.7	[14.0]	16.9	18.1	15.9	20.1
2	9.5	5.8	14.3	15.1	[22.1]	14.6	9.8	9.2	11.2
3+	13.6	5.9	19.2	18.1	[7.8]	32.6	9.3	17.8	10.1
<i>Obs</i>	<i>507</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>616</i>	<i>301</i>	<i>453</i>
<b><i>Personal circumstances</i></b>									
Long distance from campus & travel difficult	12.8	14.3	28.5	15.1	[22.5]	15.8	14.8	21.7	9.7
Caring responsibilities	5.0	1.0	6.3	4.6	[5.3]	5.2	4.5	7.4	2.9
Cannot prepare at home	6.3	4.0	18.0	12.0	[6.2]	15.4	5.7	10.1	5.2
Other issues with housing	6.0	6.3	15.9	14.2	[11.2]	13.8	6.8	8.4	7.6
Work to support study / home life	35.1	20.5	45.6	28.4	[25.1]	33.9	33.2	45.1	24.8
Travel to campus is too expensive	32.5	19.1	47.1	35.6	[34.0]	30.8	32.8	38.8	27.8
Student visa difficulties	0.7	1.1	5.2	2.7	[2.5]	3.3	1.6	2.1	1.7
Number mentioned									
Often/ Always:									
None	25.8	35.0	26.4	26.7	[25.7]	28.6	26.8	22.4	30.2
1	38.7	24.2	23.3	34.5	[40.7]	36.8	35.0	33.9	36.8
2	24.8	28.2	32.6	21.2	[16.6]	19.7	26.0	25.4	24.7
3+	10.8	12.6	17.8	17.6	[17.0]	11.0	9.9	18.4	8.2
<i>Obs</i>	<i>507</i>	<i>86</i>	<i>53</i>	<i>62</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>130</i>	<i>610</i>	<i>301</i>	<i>453</i>

Table A1.5 – Reasons seminars make student anxious, among those who reported seminar anxiety as a barrier to attendance “sometimes”, “often”, or “always”

	Attendance				ESW	Global	School	Faculty
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4			LPS	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	
I do not know what is expected of me	26.9	31.2	28.1	30.2	24.4	29.3	29.2	28.9
I am anxious about being called on to speak	68.2	79.1	70.6	62.8	66.3	58.2	76.0	70.6
I am anxious about speaking in front of others	66.6	64.5	64.7	62.9	59.6	70.8	63.1	64.9
Other	23.0	15.7	15.9	10.4	16.9	22.8	15	17.2
Obs	152	132	118	111	37	146	330	513

	Year group			Gender			Mature student	
	First	Second	Final	Man/ Male	Woman/ Female	Non-binary/ Not stated	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I do not know what is expected of me	33.3	24.4	28.8	25.8	31.4	*	21.5	30.7
I am anxious about being called on to speak	69.4	71.6	70.9	54.6	74.5	*	64.1	72.2
I am anxious about speaking in front of others	64.3	64.6	65.9	57.9	67	*	59.7	66.2
Other	16.3	17.8	17.4	19.9	16.5	*	25.1	15.3
Obs	195	170	148	109	380	14	104	409

	Ethnic Group					Learning Sup. Plan		First-gen student	
	White	Asian	Black	Mixed	Other	Yes	No	Yes	No
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
I do not know what is expected of me	28.7	34.2	26.5	38.3	*	27.9	29.4	28.3	31.1
I am anxious about being called on to speak	71.7	77.3	69.0	49.1	*	76.1	69.5	69.4	71.3
I am anxious about speaking in front of others	67.7	62.8	64.7	58.5	*	63.4	65.6	64.0	66.4
Other	19.1	4.8	15.3	22.8	*	28.4	14.0	18.5	15.8
Obs	342	60	37	39	19	93	406	293	210

Note: Reason seminars make anxious was only asked of the students who reported seminar anxiety ever being a barrier to attendance. Multiple reasons possible; percentages add up to more than 100. Estimates in [ ] should be interpreted with some caution as these are based fewer than 50 respondents. \* Estimates based on fewer than 20 respondents have been suppressed.

Table A1.6 Engagement with studies by attendance quartile and school

	Attendance				School			Faculty
	Q1 %	Q2 %	Q3 %	Q4 %	ESW %	Global %	LPS %	Total %
Track own attendance on Sussex Direct (Yes)	63.5	62.4	64	65.3	61.4	60.7	65.4	63.8
If does not keep track, whether knows how (Yes)	60.1	76.2	56.6	58.9	63.8	58.2	65.2	63.1
Aware of attendance requirements (Yes)*	67.4	57.9	57.8	59.7	[86.7]	51.7	61.2	60.9
Attend seminars if not managed reading (Yes)	77.7	81.7	91.9	95.9	100	81.5	86.7	86.5
Know who to contact if cannot attend (Yes)	72.2	80.9	87.3	84.6	98.6	77.5	80	81
Contact staff when you cannot attend								
Yes - always	6.8	15.1	22.8	38.3	57.8	7.7	20.4	20.3
Yes - sometimes	53.4	48	55.7	40.5	30.3	53.6	50.3	49.4
Rarely	26.1	28.3	17	11.7	10	25.5	20.6	21
Never	13.7	8.6	4.5	9.5	1.9	13.3	8.7	9.3
How often checks Sussex emails								
Daily	56.8	61.8	67.4	79.4	79.7	64.5	64.9	66.1
Weekly	36	36.6	31.6	16.8	20.3	32.9	30.7	30.4
Monthly	5.7	1	0.4	3.3	0	2.2	3.3	2.7
Never	1.5	0.6	0.6	0.4	0	0.4	1.1	0.8
How often logs in to canvas								
Daily	65.4	74.3	80.1	84.8	65.9	77.3	76.5	75.8
Weekly	33.6	25.3	19.9	15.2	34.1	21.8	23.2	23.8
Monthly	0.4	0.5	0	0	0	0.9	0	0.2
Never	0.6	0	0	0	0	0	0.3	0.2
Study time: Approximate time reading/ preparing for each seminar								
<1hour	2.6	3.6	6.4	4.5	6.1	6.3	3.1	4.2
1 - <2 hours	27.4	24.3	19.2	16.3	41.1	24.5	18.4	22
2 - <3 hours	30.9	33.4	34	31.4	28.1	33.1	32.7	32.4
3 - <4 hours	16.1	19.8	18.3	23.3	16.4	16	21	19.3
4 - <5 hours	10.3	6.2	4.5	12.8	1.1	9.6	9.1	8.6
5 - <6 hours	5.5	5.3	6.2	4.2	0	5.5	5.9	5.3
6 hours or more	7.1	7.3	11.3	7.5	7.2	5	9.7	8.3
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Mean hours of study time	3.4	2.9	3.2	3.3	2.3	2.8	3.5	3.2
Obs	177	176	196	202	72	211	468	751

Note: Smallest observation bases shown. Whether student knows how to keep track of own attendance on Sussex Direct was only asked of the 266 students who answered no to the previous question (whether they keep track of own attendance). Estimates in [ ] should be interpreted with some caution as these are based fewer than 50 respondents.

## Appendix 2 – Technical details on methodology and analysis approach

The survey of barriers to attendance among undergraduate students at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Spring 2025, followed the initial design and piloting of the questionnaire with undergraduate students in the Sociology and Criminology department in May 2024. Very few changes were made from the 2024 pilot study, although two questions about time spent preparing for seminars and canvas engagement were added.

Following research ethics approval (ER/EMM58/4 25/3/25) to undertake the survey, student attendance data and email addresses were provided by the Social Sciences Student Experience team for the purposes of this survey. The attendance rate was calculated based on seminar and workshop attendance from week 1 of the 2024 Autumn Semester to the end of Week 6 of the 2025 Spring Semester. These sessions were covered by the University’s mandatory attendance policy in the 2024/25 academic year.

The attendance quartiles used in the analysis in this report were calculated for the whole student population by the research team prior to data collection. Because of differences in attendance across schools, the attendance quartiles were derived separately for each school (see Table 2.1).

The survey was carried out using Qualtrics and the attendance quartile for each student was included in the sample information uploaded to Qualtrics in order to ensure this was available for analysis in the final data file. All 2,871 students registered on undergraduate courses in the Faculty were sent the survey by email. The survey was open from 31 March 2025 to 10 May, with automated weekly reminder emails sent out to those who had not yet completed the survey (unless they had opted out of further reminders). We received 779 completed responses, a response rate of 27%.

**Table 2.1 Attendance and survey participation by School**

	<b>ESW</b>	<b>Global</b>	<b>LPS</b>	<b>Faculty total</b>
Mean % attendance	79.2	71.7	67.0	69.3
Attendance quartile range:				
Q1	12.8 - 70.9	0 - 59.4	0 - 51.0	0 - 55.8
Q2	71.0 - 80.6	59.4 - 75.0	51.0 - 70.6	55.8 - 73.5
Q3	80.6 - 91.7	75.0 - 87.5	70.6 - 86.0	73.5 - 87.1
Q4	91.7 - 100	87.5 - 100	86.0 - 100	87.1 - 100
Student population	245	767	1,859	2,871
Survey response rate %	30.0	29.0	26.2	27.1

Note: Faculty total also includes V&E students.

Given that both the attendance rate and the survey response rate differed between the schools, along with an expected association between attendance and survey participation, we derived inverse probability weights adjusting for the student’s department, year of study and attendance percentage. The weighted distribution of attendance quartiles by school among survey respondents is shown in Table 2.2 below. All quantitative analysis of the survey responses discussed in this report have been weighted for non-response.

Table 2.2 Attendance distribution among survey respondents, by School

School	Attendance				Total
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
	%	%	%	%	%
ESW	25.0	23.4	33.9	17.7	100
Global	29.8	28.2	19.9	22.0	100
LPS	25.9	24.4	24.1	25.6	100
Total	26.9	25.3	23.9	24.0	100
<i>Obs</i>	<i>186</i>	<i>191</i>	<i>190</i>	<i>212</i>	<i>779</i>

Note: Weighted row %

The quantitative analyses in this report present breakdowns by attendance quartiles for the whole Faculty or by School. Where differences are highlighted in the text based on the quantitative analysis, these are statistically significant at the 5% level, unless otherwise indicated. In light of the sample size we also discuss some substantive differences that are statistically significant only at the 10% level. We advise some caution in interpreting estimates that are based on fewer than 50 respondents, and these instances are marked in the figures and tables. We have suppressed estimates based on fewer than 20 respondents for robustness reasons. Given the sample size, and the small number of respondents in some of the Schools, we are not able to present further disaggregated analysis for individual departments or reported barriers by attendance quartiles separately for each school.

The survey included several open-ended questions for students to elaborate on their experiences or circumstances. All comments were read in full and these qualitative text answers were auto-coded in Nvivo and common themes explored on a question-by-question basis. The quotes chosen for inclusion in this report were identified as clear representations of common themes that reflect and elaborate the quantitative findings. To provide as much context as possible, while preserving anonymity, the source of each quote is attributed to the School (ESW or Global) or department (for LPS), year of study and attendance quartile of the respondent. In a few instances, we have also included some description of the personal characteristics of the respondent where this is relevant for the interpretation of the quote, but only where we deemed the combination of information about the respondent would not be disclosive.