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Undergraduates' Personal Circumstances, Expectations and Reasons for Attending University

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Undergraduates' Personal Circumstances, Expectations and Reasons for Attending University

Undergraduate students are likely to have a range of reasons for attending university and expectations about their education. The current study aimed to determine the most prevalent reasons and expectations among students, and how these differed based on their personal circumstances. First-year undergraduate psychology students completed a questionnaire on reasons for attending university and expectations of university regarding assessment, teaching, learning and organisational resources. Improving career prospects was found to be the most important reason for attending university. The most important aspect of assessment was receiving feedback clarifying things they did not understand. Being good at explaining things was the most important teaching quality. Reasons and expectations were also found to differ depending on students' gender, age group, caring responsibilities, application route, fee status and whether English is their first language. Implications for educators are discussed in terms of bringing student experiences more in-line with their expectations.

Keywords: personal circumstances, expectations of university, reasons for attending university, transition, feedback, teaching quality

Introduction

Students' reasons for going to university and what they expect from their chosen institution are likely to impact on their experience once enrolled (Nadelson et al. 2013). Commencing students may have a multitude of reasons for choosing to continue studying beyond secondary education, and they will have certain expectations of the specific institution they have chosen (Briggs 2006). Côté and Levine (1997) developed a typology of student motivations for going to university, which included five anticipated reasons: to gain money and a career, for personal growth, to be able to help others, due to expectations from family and friends, and finally, that they do not really know why they are going, just that it is better than the alternative. They noted that most students would endorse more than one reason to varying degrees. Phinney, Dennis and

Osorio (2006) found that students from Western cultures tended to go to university for career and personal growth reasons.

Students' expectations of university have been found to concern various aspects about their education. Surgenor (2013) considered student expectations of assessment and found that nearly all students expected either written or face-to-face feedback, as they deemed this to be an essential part of the assessment process. Brinkworth et al. (2009) found that despite expecting university to be different to high school, students still anticipated prompt return of work, access to tutors when needed and feedback on drafts of work. Students also have certain expectations about the personal qualities of the teaching staff, such as how approachable, knowledgeable and enthusiastic they are (Pithers and Holland 2006; Sander et al. 2000; Voss, Gruber and Szmigin 2007). Levine (1993) claimed that to some students, university is the equivalent of a bank or supermarket where they are the consumer and all they expect is good quality without all of the extras that usually come with university life (i.e. social opportunities, campus activities, etc.). The reasons why a student chooses to attend university may affect their academic engagement and learning outcomes (Phinney et al. 2006), while their expectations may affect their performance, attendance, likelihood to drop out and overall satisfaction (Lobo and Gurney 2014). In the United Kingdom (UK), student satisfaction has important implications for the National Student Survey (NSS) (Richardson, Slater and Wilson 2007), which is a census that collects final year undergraduate students' opinions of their learning experience and overall satisfaction (The National Student Survey website http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php). Collated responses to the NSS are made available to prospective students.

It is also likely that reasons for attending university may differ depending on individual students' personal circumstances. It has been claimed that older students are

more motivated to study out of cognitive interest and intellectual curiosity (Kim and Merriam 2004) than to meet new people (Villar et al. 2010). Villar et al. also found that for some students with caring responsibilities, university acted as some kind of respite from day-to-day life. West et al. (2000) found that students from the European Union (EU) chose to study in the UK to broaden their horizons/experience of other cultures and improve their job prospects. However, they made no comparison with UK students, so it is not clear whether these reasons for going to university are also shared by students from the UK. In an older study, Dole (1970) found that males tended to endorse advancement in their careers as a reason for attending university, whereas females endorsed economic security, self-improvement and independence, which were argued to most likely be due to perceived gender role differences in Western cultures at the time. More than 40 years later, it is not clear whether these same gendered differences still exist, but more recent studies have shown that males may choose their university based on social life nearby more than females do (Briggs 2006) and that females choose to study at university to learn more about things that interest them than males do (Nadelson et al. 2013). Therefore, gender may still play a role in determining reasons.

Sander et al. (2000) highlight how expectations are also likely to be dependent on personal factors. Levine (1993) noted that traditional students aged 18-22 and living on campus make up only a quarter of students in universities in the USA, so older students with other responsibilities may have different expectations. Nadelson et al. also considered the impact of a range of personal characteristics (i.e. age, gender, ethnicity, location of home community and parental degree completion) on student expectations. However, their study mainly focused on experiences early on in university, rather than actual expectations held prior to commencement. Since evidence

shows that students' expectations about their education can diverge from the learning experience that university educators intend to provide (Brinkworth et al. 2009; Crisp, Palmer and Turnbull 2009), student experiences may be impacted on negatively by unrealistic or unattainable expectations. Therefore, it is important to understand what these expectations are.

The first aim of the current study was to determine whether some reasons for going to university are more important to students than other reasons, and whether some expectations are more dominant among students than other expectations. The second aim was to determine whether students' personal circumstances appear to have an effect on their reasons for going to university and what they expect from university in regard to assessment, teaching, learning and what the organisation can provide. The research questions were as follows:

(1) Are students' reasons for attending university relatively homogenous or are some reasons more endorsed across the student body, and are these dependent on personal circumstances (e.g. age, carer responsibilities, etc.)?

(2) Do students' expectations of university differ across the student body or are they all generally endorsed in the same way, and are these dependent on personal circumstances (e.g. age, carer responsibilities, etc.)?

Method

Design and Participants

A self-report questionnaire design was adopted in the current study where a number of expectations of university and reasons for going to university were measured alongside details of participants' personal circumstances. All first year undergraduate psychology students from a London-based post-1992 university were invited to participate during

their induction week or shortly afterwards and an opportunity sample of 258 students (43.80% of invited students) took part in the study across two cohorts (M_{age} = 20.46 years, SD_{age} = 5.20 years, age range: 17-67 years). Table 1 displays the breakdown of demographics and personal circumstances across the sample, which appear to be broadly representative of the demographics of all invited students.

[Table 1 near here]

Materials and Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire consisting of details on their demographics, personal circumstances, their impressions of the application process and the university, followed by scales covering reasons for going to university, expectations of assessment and teaching, and finally their expectations about the organisation, resources and support provided. Items were developed based on questions from the NSS (Richardson et al. 2007) (i.e. importance ratings of NSS items) and conversations with students about their reasons for, and expectations about, studying (i.e. reasons for wanting to study, long term goals, expectations and preferences in teaching, learning and assessment). The rationale for this was that expectations, and whether they are met or not, are instrumental in shaping subsequent satisfaction (as measured by the NSS), and reasons for studying at university shape what students expect. The items were initially written by the second author and checked by another expert (the third author) for completeness.

Seven items covered various reasons that students might choose to study at university (e.g. personal development), six items covered examples of good practice in assessment and teaching (e.g. I receive feedback on my work promptly), six items covered examples of good teaching qualities (e.g. approachable, good at explaining

things) and 15 items covered various organisational, support and resource issues (e.g. availability of advice and support with my studies). Participants responded to all items on a Likert scale from 1 (extremely unimportant to me) to 5 (extremely important to me) or selected N/A if it was not relevant to them. Each of these sections also included an other-response option where participants could specify their own category. Items were piloted on an earlier cohort which resulted in the inclusion of additional rating items based on frequent responses in the other-response option. Participants were informed that completion of the questionnaire was completely optional, but that participation would be valuable for the department. Participants completed the questionnaire online or as a hardcopy in their own time following written instructions on the questionnaire.

Results

Average scores for each of the items of the questionnaire were calculated for the whole sample and also split on the basis of differences in personal circumstances. As each item of the questionnaire was treated as a separate issue, they were not combined to form a composite score. This meant that scores ranged from 1 to 5 for each item (not applicable responses were treated as missing data as the item was not relevant to that participant) and were therefore measured at an ordinal level. Accordingly, all statistical tests used were non-parametric. Following the lead of Nadelson et al. (2013), despite the large number of statistical tests conducted in the current study, to avoid potential type II errors, no Bonferroni adjustments were applied since they have been claimed to be unnecessary and problematic (Perneger 1998).

Reasons for Going to University

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics for students' responses to the reasons for attending university items.

[Table 2 near here]

A Friedman's test showed a significant difference between the mean ranks of reasons for attending university responses, χ^2 (6, $n = 239$) = 305.89, $p < .001$. Students claimed that their main reason for attending university was to improve their career prospects, followed by enhancing their quality of life and personal development. Making friends was the least endorsed reason across the sample. Some students also specified their own additional categories of reasons for attending university using the other-response option. Many of these reasons were subsumed into the broad categories already provided, but additional reasons endorsed by some participants included interest in the subject, to be a role model, to find out more about themselves and to gain independence. For each of the reasons for attending university, Mann-Whitney U tests were performed to determine whether there were differences in these responses based on participants' personal circumstances. Reasons that significantly differed can be found in Table 3.

[Table 3 near here]

Carers significantly endorsed personal development, studying for the enjoyment of learning and studying to improve future earnings as reasons for attending university over non-carers, whereas non-carers significantly endorsed making friends as a reason over carers. Under 21s significantly endorsed making friends as a reason over mature students, whereas mature students significantly endorsed changing direction in their lives as a reason over the under 21s. English as first language (EFL) students significantly endorsed making friends, and studying to improve future earnings, as

reasons over English as second language (ESL) students. Home students significantly endorsed studying to improve future earnings as a reason over international students.

Expectations about Assessment

Table 4 shows the descriptive statistics for the aspects relating to students' assessment that were important to them.

[Table 4 near here]

There was a significant difference between the mean ranks of assessment importance responses, χ^2 (5, $n = 229$) = 98.97, $p < .001$, with feedback helping to clarify things being seen to be most important and receiving feedback promptly as least important. No additional categories of assessment importance were specified by participants using the other-response option. Table 5 shows the aspects relating to students' assessment that significantly differed based on their personal circumstances.

[Table 5 near here]

Under 21s and students who applied to university through clearing ranked fair assessment arrangements and marks, detailed feedback, prompt feedback and clear criteria used in assessment as of significantly higher importance than mature students and students who applied to university through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)/direct, respectively.

Expectations about Teaching and Learning

Table 6 displays the descriptive statistics for the qualities students valued in teaching staff items.

[Table 6 near here]

A significant difference between the mean ranks of qualities in teaching staff responses was found, χ^2 (5, $n = 252$) = 25.48, $p < .001$, with the ability of staff to be good at explaining things being most valued and staff organising material in an accessible way as least valued. Additional qualities in teaching staff endorsed by some participants using the other-response option included staff prioritising students, staff interacting with students and staff enjoying teaching. Table 7 shows the qualities students valued in teaching staff that significantly differed based on their personal circumstances.

[Table 7 near here]

Staff being good at explaining things was ranked as significantly more desirable by ESL students than EFL students, and staff making their subject interesting was ranked as significantly more desirable by under-21s than mature students.

Expectations of Organisational and Resources Support

Finally, Table 8 shows the descriptive statistics for the organisational, support and resource issues responses.

[Table 8 near here]

A significant difference was found between the mean ranks of important organisational issues responses, χ^2 (14, $n = 235$) = 327.20, $p < .001$, with clear information on where and when to submit coursework being seen as the most important organisational issue, and avoiding early and/or late teaching slots as the least important. No additional categories for organisational issues were specified by participants using the other-response option. Table 9 shows organisational issues that significantly differed in importance based on students' personal circumstances.

[Table 9 near here]

Carers ranked the ability to contact staff when needed, good advice on study choices, availability of good library resources, access to 24-hour computing facilities, pleasant teaching rooms and clear information on when feedback will be received as significantly more important than non-carers. Females and ESL students ranked availability of help with academic writing, availability of help with maths/statistics and availability of help with personal problems in an emergency as significantly more important than males and EFL students, respectively. Lastly, avoiding early and/or late teaching slots was ranked as significantly more important by under-21s than mature students.

Discussion

The first aim of the current study was to determine whether there are reasons for students attending university that are more prevalent than others and whether particular expectations are endorsed more than others. The second aim was to determine whether students' personal circumstances have an impact on these reasons and expectations. While many reasons and expectations were endorsed more than others, they were all seen as important to a degree and none were seen as wholly unimportant by either the sample as a whole, or on the basis of personal circumstances.

Improving career prospects was seen as the most important reason for attending university, followed by enhancing quality of life and personal development. Making friends was seen as the least important reason. This is consistent with Phinney et al.'s (2006) finding that career and personal growth were most important to students, but also shows that students in general are not attending university for mainly social reasons. When considering individual personal circumstances, carers endorsed personal development, enjoyment of learning and improving potential future earnings over non-

carers, which seems to support Villar et al.'s (2010) finding that university can act as some kind of respite for students with caring responsibilities and give them opportunities for change in the future. Non-carers and under 21s endorsed making friends, implying that students who may have fewer responsibilities might see university as an opportunity for social contact. Again this is consistent with Villar et al.'s finding that older students were less interested in going to university to make friends. EFL students also endorsed making friends, as well as improving potential future earnings over ESL students (as did home students over international students for the latter reason for attending). West et al. (2000) found that improving job prospects was a reason why EU students studied at university, but they did not compare these views with those of UK students. The current study shows that improving career prospects is just as important to home students, and improving future earnings (likely to also be related to career prospects) is actually more important to home students. Mature students endorsed changing direction in life over the under 21s, demonstrating that re-entry students are likely to be going to university with this aim.

In terms of expectations about assessment, it was most important to students that feedback is used to help clarify things they did not understand, whereas the prompt return of marked assignments was seen as least important. Under 21s and students who applied to university through clearing felt that it was more important that assessment arrangements and marks are fair, feedback is detailed, work is returned promptly and that there is clear criteria in assessing work. Since younger students are straight out of high school or further education, this compares to Brinkworth et al.'s (2008) finding that students continue to expect similar forms of learning and teaching to school. Also, since students who entered university through clearing consist of students who did not

achieve the grades they needed for their first choice institution, they may be more in need (or feel more in need) of additional support, so they expect the extra feedback.

Being good at explaining things was the most valued quality in teaching staff, while organising material in an accessible way was least valued. Being good at explaining things was more desirable to ESL than EFL students, presumably because they have a language barrier, which may affect their studies if they cannot clearly understand teaching staff. Under 21s felt it was significantly more important that teaching staff make their subject interesting than mature students. Clear information being provided on where and when to submit coursework was seen as the most important organisational issue, whereas avoiding early and/or late teaching slots was seen as significantly less important. It was more important to carers than non-carers that their tutors are accessible and there is good access to resources (i.e. library, computing facilities), which is perhaps unsurprising since carers have other responsibilities, so may require more point of need support. ESL students and females saw the availability of help with academic writing, maths/statistics and with personal problems as more important than EFL students and males, respectively. This demonstrates the importance of providing academic and pastoral support for students who have a language barrier. Lobo and Gurney (2014) found that the majority of students on an English enhancement course claimed they would have still attended it even if it was not compulsory. Therefore, it is likely that ESL students make good use of these resources. The gender difference is interesting in that it might say more about females' willingness to use these services, rather than them necessarily being more in need of the support than males. Finally, avoiding early and/or late teaching slots was ranked as significantly more important by under 21s than mature students, which probably relates more to their social habits than practicalities of commuting to

university during peak times, particularly since this issue was seen as least important by the sample as whole.

As with similar questionnaire-based research, the main limitation of the current study is that there is likely to be an issue with selection bias. Therefore, reasons for attending university and expectations endorsed in the current study may reflect the particular characteristics of the participants who chose to participate. However, attempts were made to reduce this issue by making the questionnaire available to all students in each cohort and encouraging them to take part. There could also be further issues with generalisation since the sample was located completely in one university, which is likely to attract students from similar backgrounds. While the current study also gave participants the opportunity to provide other reasons for attending and expectations about university that were important to them, the structure of the questionnaire still made assumptions about what the reasons and expectations were likely to be, based on previous research.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Implications of the current study are for educators to be more aware of students' expectations that cannot be met, since changes could be made to bring students' experiences more in-line with their expectations, or to provide students with more accurate conceptions of what to expect when they start university. Educators should also be aware that the impact of varying personal circumstances highlights the heterogeneity of students, which should be considered when addressing student needs. Future research may want to follow up with students to determine whether they feel their expectations have been met, and how they feel their experience of university has been affected if they were not met. It would also be advantageous to gain an in-depth

understanding of why certain reasons and expectations are important to students through a qualitative approach.

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Table 1. Demographics and Personal Circumstances of Students in the Sample

	n	%
Gender		
Male	50	19.4
Female	207	80.2
Not Stated	1	0.4
Age Groups*		
Under 21	190	73.6
Mature Student	66	25.6
Not Stated	2	0.8
Ethnicity		
White	130	50.4
Black or Black British	51	19.8
Asian or Asian British	46	17.8
Mixed	21	8.1
Other	7	2.7
Not Stated	3	1.2
Carer Responsibilities		
Pre-School Children	5	1.9
School-Aged Children	6	2.3
Elderly Relative/Friend	1	0.4
Long-term Sick Relative/Friend	3	1.2
Other Caring Responsibilities	16	6.2
Pre-School Children and School-Aged Children	5	1.9
Pre-School Children and Disabled Relative/Friend	1	0.4

None	221	85.7
Application Route		
Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)[†]	211	81.8
Direct Application	2	0.8
Clearing[††]	39	15.1
Not Stated	6	2.3
Working during Term Time		
Yes	88	34.1
No	166	64.3
Not Stated	4	1.6
Fee Status		
Home	221	85.7
International	34	13.2
Not Stated	3	1.2
Language		
English is first (or equal first) Language (EFL)	209	81.0
English is second (or more) Language (ESL)	45	17.4
Not Stated	4	1.6

Note. * UCAS defines a mature student as anyone aged 21 or over at the commencement of their studies. [†] UCAS provides an undergraduate application service in the UK, which is the usual route undergraduates are expected to take when applying to, and receiving an offer from, a university. [††] Clearing is the process in which universities offer vacant places to undergraduates who have been rejected by their first choice universities after receiving their grades. Sometimes universities offer clearing places to students with lower entry grades than if they applied through the normal UCAS route.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Students' Reasons for Going to University

Reasons for Going to University Item	n	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	SD	Range
Personal development	254	4.56	4.45	5.00	0.62	2-5
Improved career prospects	253	4.70	4.90	5.00	0.57	2-5
To make friends	251	3.78	2.76	4.00	1.01	1-5
To change direction in my life	247	4.11	3.48	4.00	0.91	1-5
For the enjoyment of learning	254	4.15	3.54	4.00	0.84	1-5
To improve my potential future earnings	253	4.46	4.27	5.00	0.75	1-5
To enhance my quality of life	252	4.58	4.60	5.00	0.66	2-5

Table 3. Differences in Reasons for Going to University Based on Personal

Circumstance

Reasons for Going to University Item	Circumstance	*M*	*M*rank	*Mdn*	*U*	*z*	*p*
Personal development	Carers	4.74	153.70	5.00	3,045.00	-2.75	.006
	Non-Carers	4.49	123.03	5.00			
To make friends	Carers	3.42	102.96	4.00	4,811.50	2.21	.027
	Non-Carers	3.87	129.98	4.00			
	Under 21s	3.90	134.56	4.00	4,405.50	-3.49	<.001
	Mature	3.48	100.25	4.00			
	EFL	3.87	128.26	4.00	3,684.00	-2.10	.036
	ESL	3.55	104.87	4.00			
To change direction in my life	Under 21s	3.99	116.37	4.00	6,992.50	2.63	.009
	Mature	4.35	141.76	5.00			
For the enjoyment of learning	Carers	4.53	149.76	5.00	3,191.00	-2.13	.033
	Non-Carers	4.08	123.71	4.00			
To improve my potential future earnings	Carers	4.42	149.39	5.00	3,167.50	-2.31	.021
	Non-Carers	4.39	123.16	5.00			
	EFL	4.45	130.47	5.00	3,474.00	-2.92	.004
	ESL	4.21	100.20	4.00			
	Home	4.43	128.62	5.00	4,346.50	1.96	.05
	International	4.21	105.66	4.00			

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Aspects of Assessment of Importance

Aspects of Assessment Item	n	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	SD	Range
The assessment arrangements and marks I receive are fair	237	4.61	3.69	5.00	0.70	1-5
I receive detailed feedback on my work	237	4.65	3.72	5.00	0.60	2-5
I receive feedback on my work promptly	235	4.42	3.09	5.00	0.74	2-5
I am clear about the criteria used in assessing my work	239	4.54	3.46	5.00	0.71	1-5
Feedback I receive helps me clarify things I did not understand	238	4.71	3.87	5.00	0.57	1-5
Efficient mechanisms for assignments being returned after marking	232	4.45	3.17	5.00	0.66	2-5

Table 5. Differences in Aspects of Assessment of Importance Based on Personal

Circumstance

Aspects of Assessment Item	Circumstance	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	U	z	p
The assessment arrangements	Under 21s	4.62	124.25	5.00	4,393.00	-2.70	.007
and marks I receive are fair	Mature	4.39	102.35	5.00			
	UCAS/direct	4.51	113.65	5.00	4,127.50	2.26	.024
	Clearing	4.81	135.93	5.00			
I receive detailed feedback	Under 21s	4.67	124.18	5.00	4,343.50	-2.71	.007
on my work	Mature	4.32	102.35	4.00			
	UCAS/direct	4.54	113.63	5.00	4,132.50	2.70	.023
	Clearing	4.81	136.07	5.00			
I receive feedback on my	Under 21s	4.46	123.67	5.00	4,208.50	-2.64	.008
work promptly	Mature	4.19	99.99	4.00			
	UCAS/direct	4.36	112.67	4.00	4,082.50	2.01	.044
	Clearing	4.58	134.64	5.00			
I am clear about the criteria	Under 21s	4.60	124.25	5.00	4,558.00	-2.14	.033
used in assessing my work	Mature	4.29	105.72	5.00			
	UCAS/direct	4.48	114.53	5.00	4,272.00	2.16	.031
	Clearing	4.73	137.17	5.00			

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Qualities Valued in Teaching Staff

Teaching Quality Item	*n*	*M*	*M_{rank}*	*Mdn*	*SD*	Range
Approachable	254	4.66	3.47	5.00	0.57	2-5
Good at explaining things	254	4.74	3.69	5.00	0.54	2-5
Make their subject interesting	253	4.66	3.49	5.00	0.63	1-5
Enthusiastic about what they teach	254	4.66	3.47	5.00	0.63	1-5
Have good knowledge of subject	254	4.69	3.61	5.00	0.65	1-5
Organise material in an accessible way	253	4.57	3.28	5.00	0.73	1-5

Table 7. Differences in Qualities Valued in Teaching Staff Based on Personal

Circumstance

Teaching Quality Item	Circumstance	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	U	z	p
Good at explaining things	EFL	4.70	122.19	5.00	5,214.00	2.20	.027
	ESL	4.90	141.00	5.00			
Make their subject interesting	Under 21s	4.68	130.60	5.00	5,188.50	-2.18	.029
	Mature	4.45	112.82	5.00			

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics for Organisational, Support and Resource Issues Most

Important to Students

Organisational Item	n	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	SD	Range
Availability of advice and support with my studies	254	4.52	8.78	5.00	0.69	1-5
Being able to contact staff when I need to	254	4.54	8.82	5.00	0.65	1-5
Good advice on study choices	251	4.44	8.34	5.00	0.70	2-5
Availability of help with academic writing	252	4.39	8.13	5.00	0.75	2-5
Availability of help with maths/statistics	250	4.31	7.77	5.00	0.90	1-5
Availability of help with personal problems in an emergency	250	4.09	6.91	4.00	0.97	1-5
Availability of good library resources	254	4.38	8.09	5.00	0.72	2-5
Access to 24 hour computing facilities	253	4.03	6.59	4.00	1.04	1-5
Efficiency of timetabling (minimum number of gaps in my timetable)	252	4.15	7.11	4.00	0.90	1-5
Avoiding early (9am) and/or late (4pm) teaching slots	252	3.75	5.79	4.00	1.18	1-5
Knowing in good time which days I need to attend university	252	4.48	8.67	5.00	0.73	1-5
Pleasant teaching rooms	254	4.28	7.63	4.00	0.80	1-5
Good channels of communication if there are changes or cancellations	250	4.54	9.02	5.00	0.65	2-5
Clear information on where and when I will receive feedback on my course work	254	4.50	8.74	5.00	0.70	1-5
Clear information on where and when to submit my coursework	253	4.64	9.60	5.00	0.61	2-5

Table 9. Differences in Organisational, Support and Resource Issues Most Important to Students Based on Personal Circumstance

Organisational Item	Circumstance	M	M_{rank}	Mdn	U	z	p
Being able to contact staff when I need to	Carers	4.79	149.38	5.00	3,205.00	-2.28	.023
	Non-Carers	4.48	123.77	5.00			
Good advice on study choices	Carers	4.79	154.12	5.00	2,857.50	-2.83	.005
	Non-Carers	4.41	121.29	4.00			
Availability of help with academic writing	Males	4.23	108.39	4.00	5,621.50	2.05	.04
	Females	4.44	130.06	5.00			
	EFL	4.34	119.94	4.00	5,494.00	2.37	.018
	ESL	4.62	145.09	5.00			
Availability of help with maths/statistics	Males	4.13	101.21	4.00	5,865.00	2.78	.005
	Females	4.39	130.53	5.00			
	EFL	4.28	119.69	5.00	5,288.50	1.96	.05
	ESL	4.55	140.52	5.00			
Availability of help with personal problems in an emergency	Males	3.97	105.18	4.00	5,678.50	2.23	.026
	Females	4.18	129.61	4.00			
	EFL	4.11	119.46	4.00	5,261.00	2.03	.042
	ESL	4.21	142.07	4.00			
Availability of good library resources	Carers	4.79	148.27	5.00	3,246.00	-2.06	.039
	Non-Carers	4.36	123.96	4.00			
Access to 24 hour computing facilities	Carers	4.21	149.39	4.00	3,100.00	-2.10	.036
	Non-Carers	3.99	123.29	4.00			
Avoiding early (9am) and/or late (4pm) teaching slots	Under 21s	3.79	131.13	4.00	4,970.50	-2.16	.031
	Mature	3.68	109.47	3.00			

Pleasant teaching rooms	Carers	4.58	155.42	5.00	2,981.50	-2.73	.006
	Non-Carers	4.24	122.74	4.00			
Clear information on where	Carers	4.74	148.14	5.00	3,251.00	-2.13	.033
and when I will receive	Non-Carers	4.44	123.98	5.00			
feedback on my course work							