


The Students' Prospective on Starting at University: Results of a National Questionnaire



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Starting at University Questionnaire

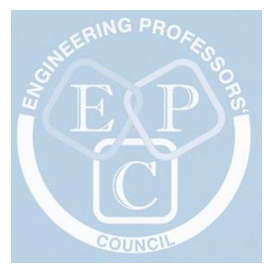
- Took place in autumn term, 2008
- It was intended as a pilot survey of engineering student opinion
 - In particular, examining the experiential differences between students staying at home and those living away from home
- In the event, it turned out much bigger than expected
- **We are very grateful to all that helped to administer the questionnaire**

The Coverage

- **15** universities took part
 - Broad range of university type and geographical location
 - Broad range of engineering subjects
- **1521** students responded
 - 14% female
 - 22% from outside UK

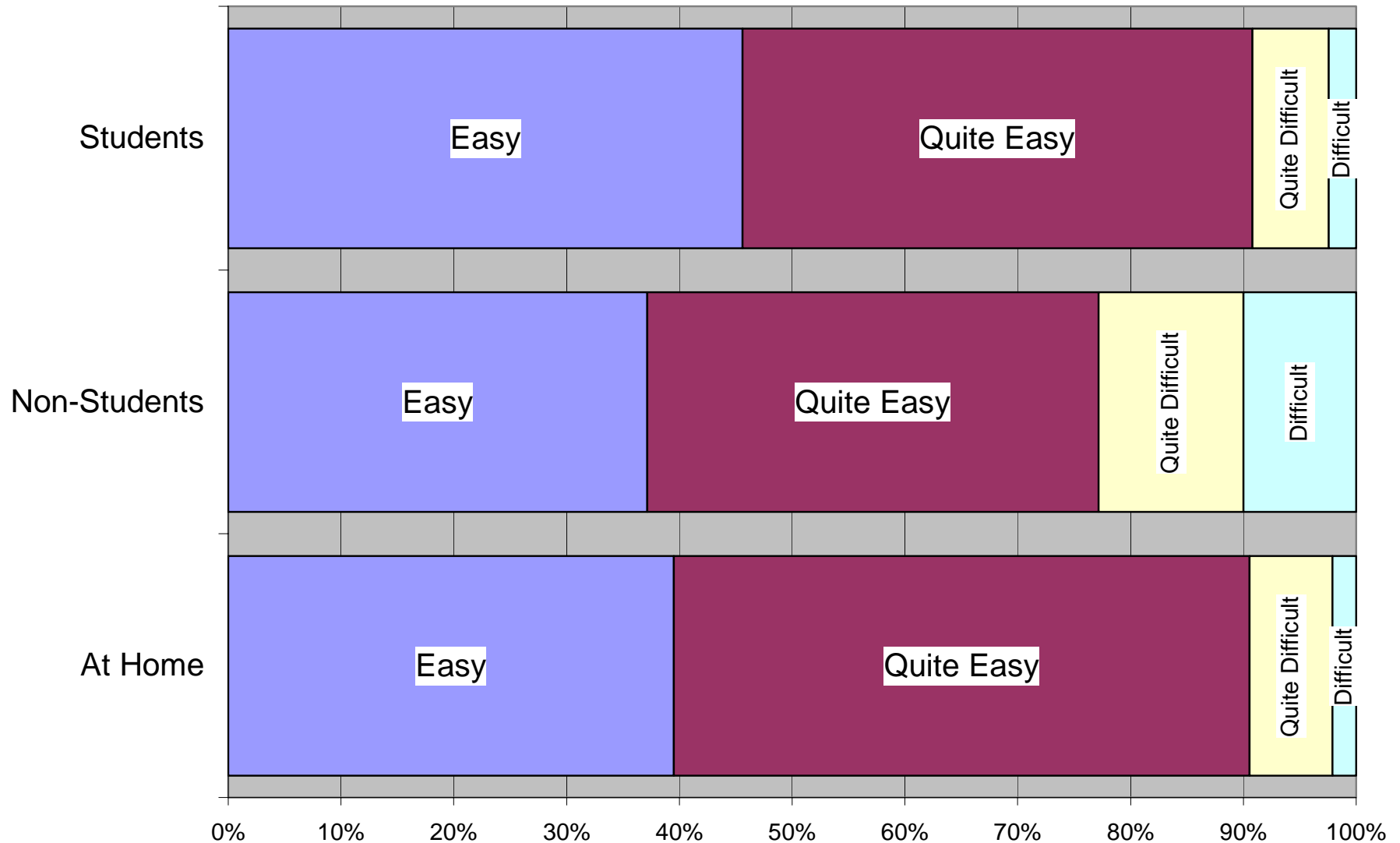
The Closed Questions

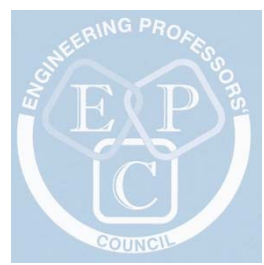
- Home: inside or outside UK?
- Gender?
- Term-time residence: home, with other students or with non-students?
- Travel time?
- Ease of making friends?
- Problem understanding lecture.
Who do you ask first?



Making Friends

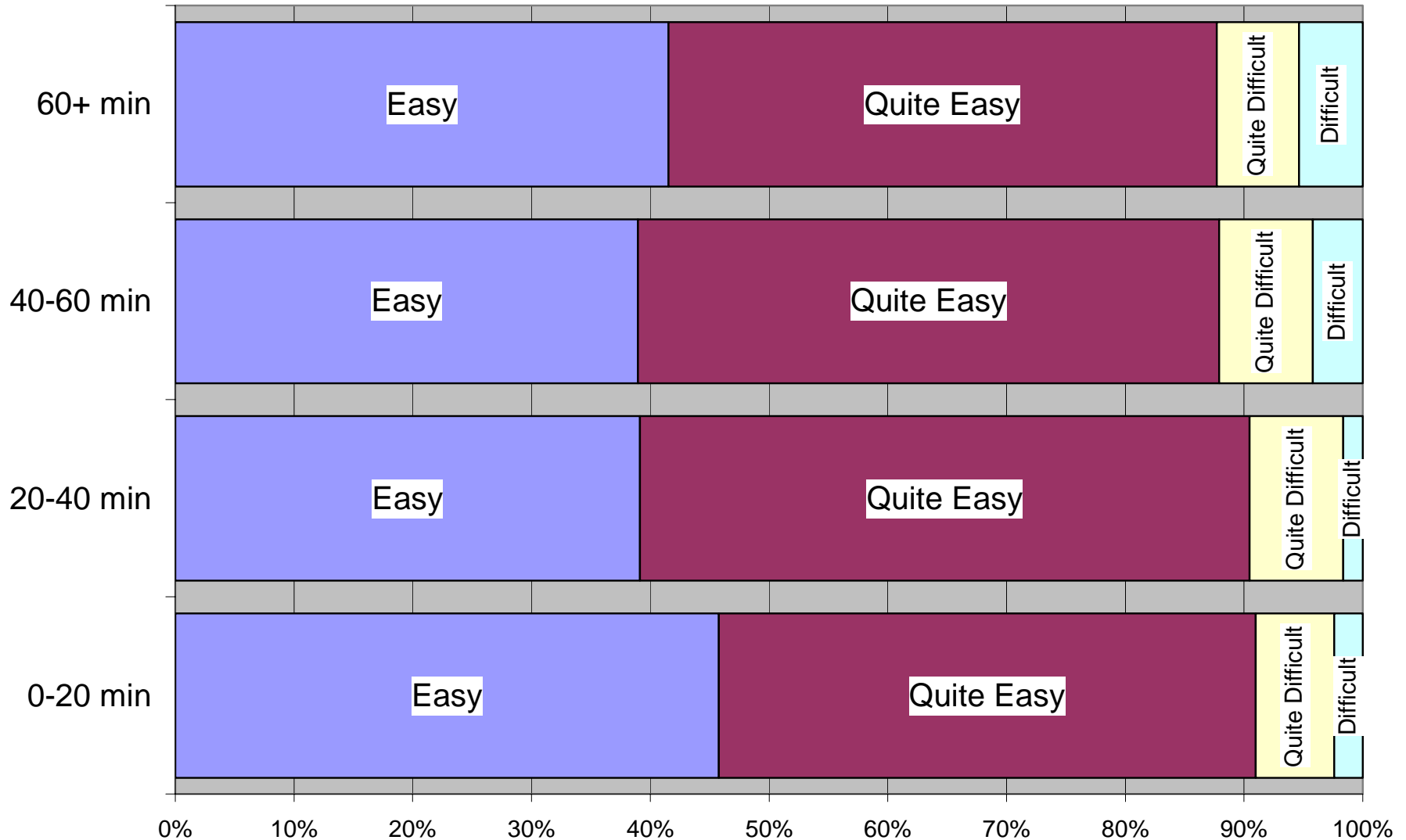
Ease of making friends *versus* term-time residence

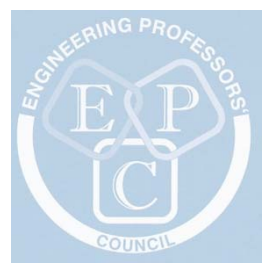




Making Friends

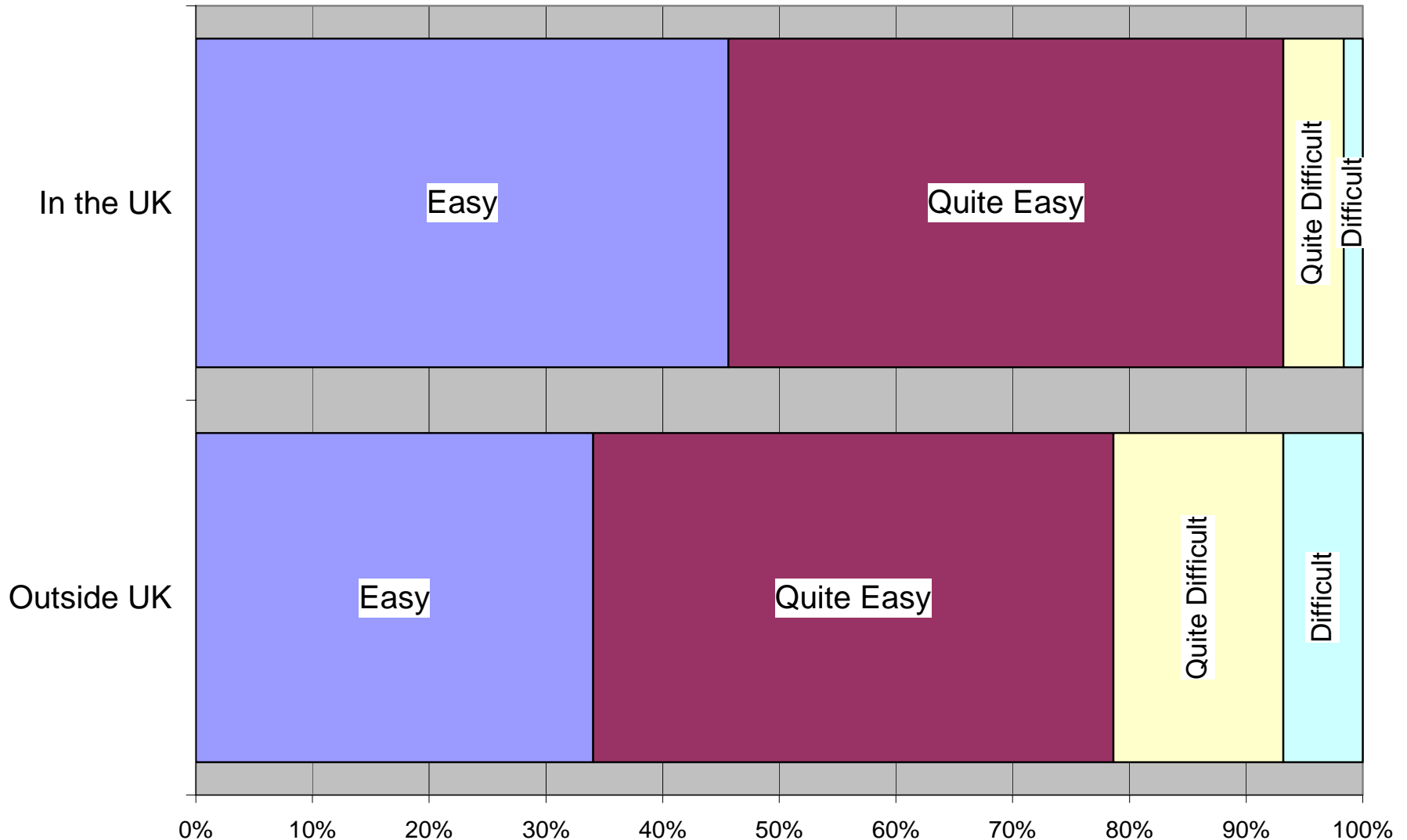
Ease of making friends *versus* travel time

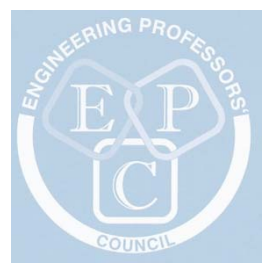




Making Friends

Ease of making friends *versus* home domicile

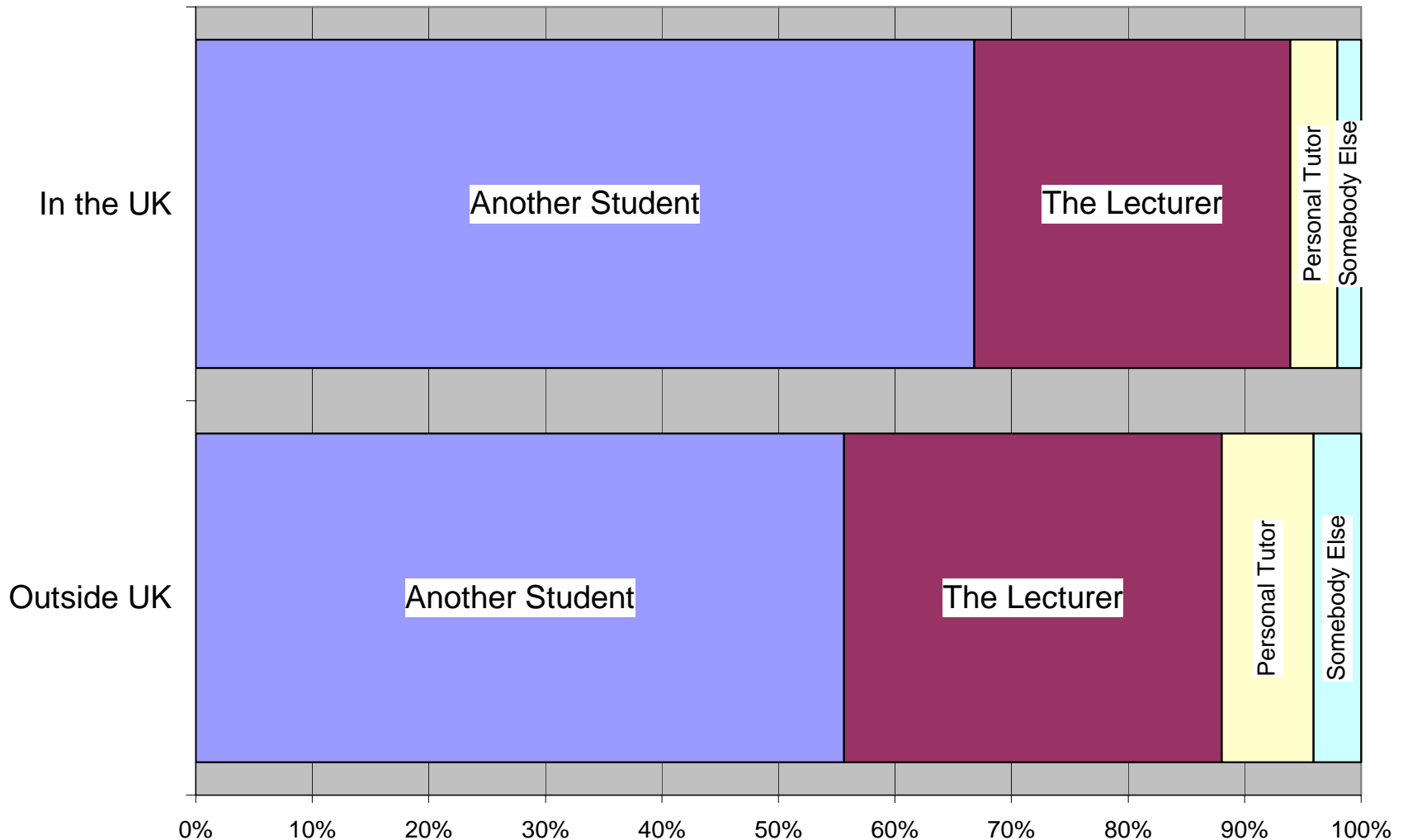




Who do You Ask?

Problem understanding lecture.

Who do you ask first? versus home domicile



The Open Questions

- What has turned out better than expected?
- What has turned out worse?
- What could the University do to make starting at university better?

Student Replies

- An enormous number of comments
- Ranging from the impossibly unrealistic:
 - Provide free food or free beer, no fees, no lectures, etc.
- . . . to the sensible and practical:
 - Provide contact with other years, undertake group work in first week, provide after-uni classes, etc.
- There were a number of common themes to the replies which painted a rather alarming picture . . .

Your New Students:

- Apprehensive
- In culture shock
 - *“The lectures are completely different from how we are taught at school. I still haven't worked it out.”*
 - *“Freshers’ week to 20+ lectures is a bit of a culture shock.”*
- Mindset still “at school”
 - *“... provide free planners.”*
- Disoriented
 - *“... the university is massive. Therefore, it is easy to get lost .”*

You Cannot Have Too Many Icebreaker Sessions!

- The demand for more icebreaker sessions was positively *deafening!*
- More team-building exercises
 - “... like the LEGO Robots one at the start.”
- Run them just for each course
 - Students want to get to know their colleagues
- Be culturally aware
 - “Arrange freshers’ activities that don’t involve getting drunk.”
 - “More social events during the day. Less party based.”

Make Induction Student-Centred

- Long introductory lectures just bore the students
 - *“Less welcome lectures to allow people to get to know each other better.”*
 - *“No four-hour talks during freshers’ week.”*
- But give the information the students need to know at that stage
 - *“Provide a clearer overview of the course contents and the exam structure/schedule for the year.”*
 - *“Show where all classes/labs are before you go to them.”*

Noses Forced to Grindstone? No Thanks

- The “Hit ‘em hard with coursework” approach is not appreciated by students
 - Result: unhappy overworked students
 - *“Smooth out the transition from A-level to Uni more efficiently, as for the first month or so, I had no idea what was going on in terms of the work.”*
 - *“Give students more time to study not just keeping them busy with reports, assessments, weekly exams, etc.”*

Ramp Up the Pace Gently

- Give students time to adjust
 - *“Feels like we started easy and jumped to impossible in one lecture.”*
- Better to:
 - *“Gradually increase the workload because it can be a bit scary if you are not ready.”*
 - *“Gently increase the pressure on tougher subjects.”*

Encourage – Don't Frighten

- Don't knock their achievements
 - *“Don't denigrate A Levels.”*
- Don't discourage
 - *“Not give the ‘You're going to fail’ speech in the first week.”*
 - *“Make the first week at uni more joyful because it felt like we had to settle down to work straight away.”*
- Don't frighten
 - *“Stop saying ‘EXAM, EXAM, EXAM’.”*

Support in the Early Weeks

- Understand where students are at
 - *“Provide lecturers who care if the students understand their module.”*
 - *“The lecturer says ‘I can’t answer each and every one in the class. Just go and read the books. . .’”*
- Provide extra support
 - Both academic and practical guidance frequently requested
 - *“Maybe give more time in the first few weeks to help students get settled.”*
 - *“Keep the student advice centre open more often.”*

... Support in the Early Weeks

- Hands-on early

- *“More practical activities to show how the material taught in lectures applies in real life.”*

- Make it fun!

- *“Possibly make first day of engineering lectures more fun.”*

- Help students to adapt to new learning techniques

- *“Perhaps running organisation skills workshops could help students plan their work and how to tackle their coursework.”*

In Conclusion

- This questionnaire has provided a window into new students' view of university
- New students are in culture shock, disoriented and apprehensive
- Little wonder that so many just drop out!
- Don't let them become alienated right at the beginning of their course

**There is so much we can do
to ease their transition to
university life**