

# University of Essex

## Student Support Annual Review 2011-12

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**Did you know that more students had recorded contact with Student Support Advice and Disability services in 2011-12 (3393), than...**

- the number of students living in single rooms in University accommodation on the Colchester campus (3362)?
- the number of students who voted in the Students' Union (SU) Sabbatical Elections in 2011-12 (2538)?
- the number of SU society members in 2011-12 (2883)?
- the number of students participating in SU sports clubs in 2011-12 (1905)?

# 1. Introduction and Overview

*“Thank you for being so informative and reassuring.”*

*“I was very heartened to have such a comprehensive and extensive response to my query about assistance for students with a disability. The response was warm, welcoming, encouraging and efficient. It struck the perfect balance between ‘help for the disabled’ and the directions needed to enable me to paddle my own canoe.”*

*“Thank you very much indeed for all your help and real support.”*

*“I found it very useful. I would like to thank the staff that are working there for their brilliant support.”*

*“I feel that the Student Support service and all the staff within it provide a wonderful supportive, effective service. I have always received a polite, professional service and am put at ease with my concerns and allowed to explain and am listened to and directed accordingly. Thank you.”*

- 1.1. Student Support at the University of Essex provides quality, professional services to students, centred on their needs. The services can be accessed by all students from every one of our campuses through a range of information and contact options. As part of the network of support services, our aim is to provide advice and support to enable students to get the most from their University of Essex education.
- 1.2. This report has been written for several University committees and the wider University community to provide updated information on the work undertaken by the Student Support Services at the University of Essex. It covers Student Support – including Advice and Disability Services, the Residents’ Support Network (RSN) and the Mental Health and Counselling Service. For the first time in 2011-12 the report also includes information on student retention and success.
- 1.3. The report describes some of the achievements and issues arising last year and outlines the priorities for 2012-13. It also contains some statistical information about the profile of Student Support clients and the main areas of work for the academic year 2011-12, with some comparative data from previous years. Some of this year’s highlights include;
  - 3393 different students- around 32.6% of **all** students to whom Student Support services are available- had recorded contact with Student Support Advice and Disability services in 2011-12.
  - Over 55% of students from the Loughton campus accessed central support services- significantly more than at any other campus!
  - The number of one off enquiries dealt with by Student Support increased by almost 700 compared to last year; 3095 to 3783. One off enquiries had an average of 1.8 follow-on contacts in 2011-12, an increase from last year’s average of 1.6.
  - Funding continued to be the most common problem in 2011-12, accounting for 30.8% of one off enquiries. International/immigration enquiries were the next most common and accounted for 19.1% of one off enquiries.
- 1.4. In addition to the services covered in this report, there are others which play an important role in the network of services and collectively aim to respond effectively and appropriately to students seeking support and guidance and to be accessible to students. In particular, academic departments provide academic and pastoral support which is of critical importance for student engagement, retention and success and will be further enhanced in 2012-13 through the implementation of the new Departmental Student Support policy. Other services include the NHS surgeries at Colchester and Southend campuses, Students’ Union Advice Centre, the Multi-Faith Chaplaincy Centre and Nightline.
- 1.5. Further information about the full network of services is available from the Student Support website: <http://www2.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/> or <http://www.essex.ac.uk/students/>

## 2. Key achievements and issues during 2011-12

2.1 Last year's objectives are given in *italics* followed by a description of how these have progressed.

2.2 *Identify ways to keep workload of individual Student Support staff manageable and continue to prioritise Student Support services to ensure that students most in need of assistance or at risk are able to benefit from individual support.*

Demand for student support services has continued to grow, and we have been able to respond to this through flexible contracts, limited outsourcing, and use of external income where possible. We also appointed a graduate trainee in January 2012 (and hope to continue this post in to next year) which provided some increased capacity as well as developing employability skills for the post holder.

2.3 *Implement restructuring of counselling and mental health provision into a combined wellbeing service. Wellbeing services will be developed during 2011-12 and beyond, with the intention of offering a single assessment process for students seeking mental health, psychological or emotional support and to enhance support available to students.*

A new Deputy Director of Student Support (Wellbeing) was appointed in September 2011 and a number of changes implemented during the year including introduction of a new assessment process for students seeking support. A formal consultation on further restructuring took place in the summer term with agreed changes to be implemented from September 2012. Further details are given in section 6 below.

2.4 *Support the development and co-ordination of student retention initiatives including the appointment of a new Retention Strategy Officer post from autumn 2011. Work to embed relevant recommendations of the Mature Students Retention Project (including Peer Mentoring). Support implementation of recommendations of the Tutorial Working Group.*

The Retention Officer started in December 2012 and has been working with colleagues across the University to identify factors contributing to retention and success; to identify groups of students who may be at risk and to implement key recommendations from the Mature Students Retention Project. Other work pertaining to this new role is reported in section 9 below.

The Tutorial Working Group recommended a new Departmental Student Support policy in which all undergraduate and taught postgraduate students would be allocated a named departmental adviser. This was approved by Senate for implementation in 2012-13.

2.5 *Plan and implement greater use of electronic file and document management processes to improve efficiency, including confidential Student Support areas of electronic student files and updates to management information systems.*

Enhancements to computer systems have been defined, and should be implemented in 2012-13.

2.6 *Actively participate in Student Centre Project, due to open in 2013, to ensure reasonable needs of Student Support clients and staff are incorporated and to enhance students' experiences. In preparation for the Student Centre review and update Student Support processes.*

Student Support are represented on the Project Implementation Group and have been actively involved in a number of initiatives this year, including a LEAN process review of intermission and a staff conference. The expected opening date has been delayed to 2014. One team member was allocated additional hours and responsibilities to co-ordinate our input into the Student Service Centre project.

2.7 *Implement recommendations from internal review of support services at the Southend Campus to enhance support provision for Southend-based students.*

Student Support services at Southend campus have been expanded, systems enhanced and a new drop-in service introduced for students to access information, advice and guidance services, with close support from staff at the Colchester campus.

2.8 *Participate in review of the Multi Faith Chaplaincy Centre, due to report in spring 2012.*

The review was completed and a report presented to the University Steering Group in June 2012. The recommendations will be implemented in 2012-13.

2.9 *Contribute to University Crisis Management plans- develop the voluntary information and crisis helpline and establish partnerships to build resilience in the event of a crisis situation.*

A partnership agreement was drafted with the British Red Cross to provide additional support in the event of a crisis. In addition a new University British Red Cross Group was established, attracting interested from nearly 100

staff and students. The volunteer information and crisis helpline team completed a training exercise using volunteer callers from among the University community.

- 2.10 *Continue to develop the Residents' Support Network to enhance the living and learning experience of students, including implementation of new arrangements for programming and training of volunteers for 2011-12.*

The changes to the Residents' Support Network first introduced last year were successfully embedded this year- in particular the programming model was fully implemented. Further details are given in section 5 below.

- 2.11 *Work with the Students' Union, Police Community Support Officer and Communications and External Relations to improve community relations especially in relation to promoting positive student impact and minimising disruptive behaviour in the local area.*

Several community relations initiatives which began in previous years have been embedded this year, including the Police Community support officer position, the use of community@essex for external queries and the Student Street initiative. All are expected to continue in to 2012-13 and beyond.

- 2.12 *Look into more effective ways of collecting feedback from students on support services including longitudinal feedback from students over the course of their studies and focus groups for underrepresented client groups. Consider how to use national resources developed by AMOSSHE, the student services organisation, to demonstrate the value and impact of Student Support interventions.*

Further feedback has been sought this year, and some action taken in relation to groups who are underrepresented in the use of student support. More details are given in section 8 below.

### 3. Statistics – who uses Student Support services?

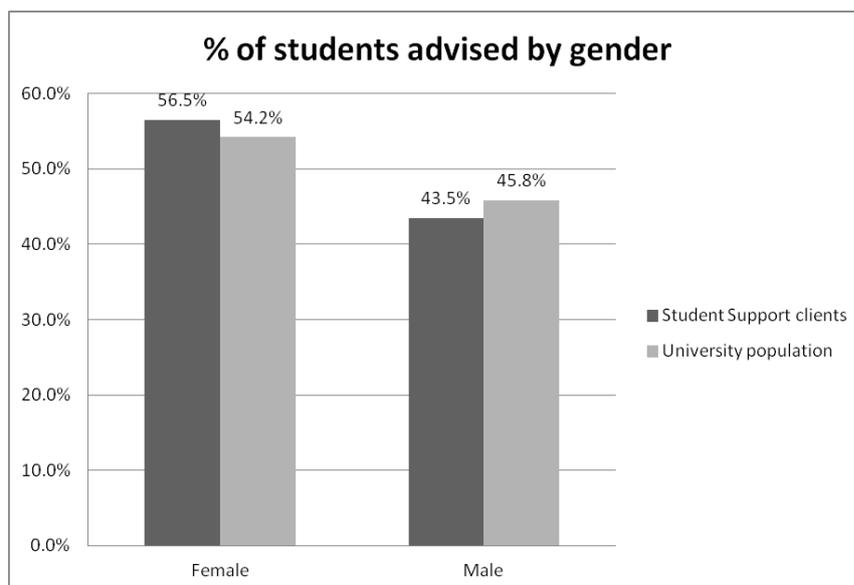
3.1 All significant contact with Student Support services is recorded on a confidential database to ensure effective casework management. The data is linked to the University Student Records Database (known as MIS) to enable equality and diversity and other statistical monitoring. Reports are available to review the nature of the work undertaken and to identify any trends. The statistics below include all direct personal, email and telephone contacts with Student Support (incorporating disability and one off study skills support, Access to Learning Funds (ALF) and international students' enquiries), but exclude applicants and enquiries from non-students and weekly study skills sessions. Counselling and Residents' Support Network are also not included as these are recorded separately - see below.

#### 3.2 Who uses Student Support services?

- 3.2.1 The number of different clients matching MIS records in 2011-12 (i.e. registered students) was **3393**, up from 3219 in 2010-11, 2823 in 2009-10, 2705 in 2008-9 and 2506 in 2007-8. The increase from last year was therefore 5.4%, over two years 2010-2012 was 20.2%, and over three years 2009-2012 was 25.4%.
- 3.2.2 A further 507 clients had records on the Student Support database but did not match MIS records. This was up from 416 in 2010-11. This area includes information, advice and guidance to prospective students, such as those with a disability, who may require a significant amount of individual guidance but who may never register as students at the University of Essex.
- 3.2.3 The total number of students on MIS with equality and diversity data recorded was 11,933; therefore Student Support clients represented 28.4% of the whole student population (up from 27.9% last year, and up from 26.9% the year before). Included in the 11,933 are 1598 from partner colleges (or professional/staff development). These students' support is arranged locally and only 37 had contact with Student Support. When these are excluded, the proportion of registered students having contact with Student Support during 2011-12 increased to **32.6%**.
- 3.2.4 The profile of Student Support clients reflects the diversity of the University's community. More details on the profile of clients, including equality and diversity characteristics such as nationality, ethnicity and disability, are given below.

#### 3.3 Gender

- 3.3.1 The gender of clients closely matches the profile of the student population: 56.5% of student support clients were female compared with 54.2% of the overall student population. It should be noted that whilst females have been overrepresented as Student Support clients for the last three years, 2011-12 saw a slight shift in this, and for the first time, females were overrepresented by over 2%; 2.3% in 2011-12, 1.8% in 2010-11 and 0.1% in 2009-10.



### 3.4 Nationality

3.4.1 The data below excludes nationalities with less than 10 students in the population to protect confidentiality. Nationalities with more than 75 students are shown in bold. The table shows the proportion of the total student population of that nationality seen by Student Support. As noted earlier the average usage was 28.4% as this data includes some students at partner institutions.

2011-12 Nationality of Student Support Clients	
<b>40% - 65% (high users)</b>	Estonia, Bangladesh, <b>United States (54.3%)</b> , Kenya, Uganda, Iran (Islamic Rep), Libya, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), South Africa, Austria, Japan, Jordan, Syria, South Korea, Pakistan, Canada, Azerbaijan, <b>Nigeria (40.0%)</b>
<b>20% - 39.9% (medium users)</b>	Ghana, Kazakhstan, Colombia, <b>India (36.7%)</b> , Latvia, <b>Lithuania (35.4%)</b> , Egypt, Kuwait, Brazil, Portugal (Madeira, Azores), Sweden, Vietnam (Soc Rep), Zimbabwe, <b>United Kingdom (31.9%)</b> , Iraq, Poland, Malaysia, <b>Romania (29.7%)</b> , <b>Turkey (28.4%)</b> , Russia, Finland, Philippines, <b>Germany (27.0%)</b> , <b>Norway (26.1%)</b> , <b>Saudi Arabia (25.9%)</b> , Brunei, Netherlands (Holland), Spain, <b>Thailand (23.7%)</b> , Nepal, Ireland (Rep), <b>China (22.3%)</b> , Botswana, <b>France (20.1%)</b>
<b>Less than 20% (low users)</b>	<b>Italy (19.3%)</b> , <b>Bulgaria (19.2%)</b> , <b>Greece (17.1%)</b> , Taiwan, Mexico, Czech Republic, <b>Cyprus (EU) (15.1%)</b> , Hong Kong, Slovakia, Denmark, Indonesia, <b>UCAS-Unknown UK (2.4%)</b>

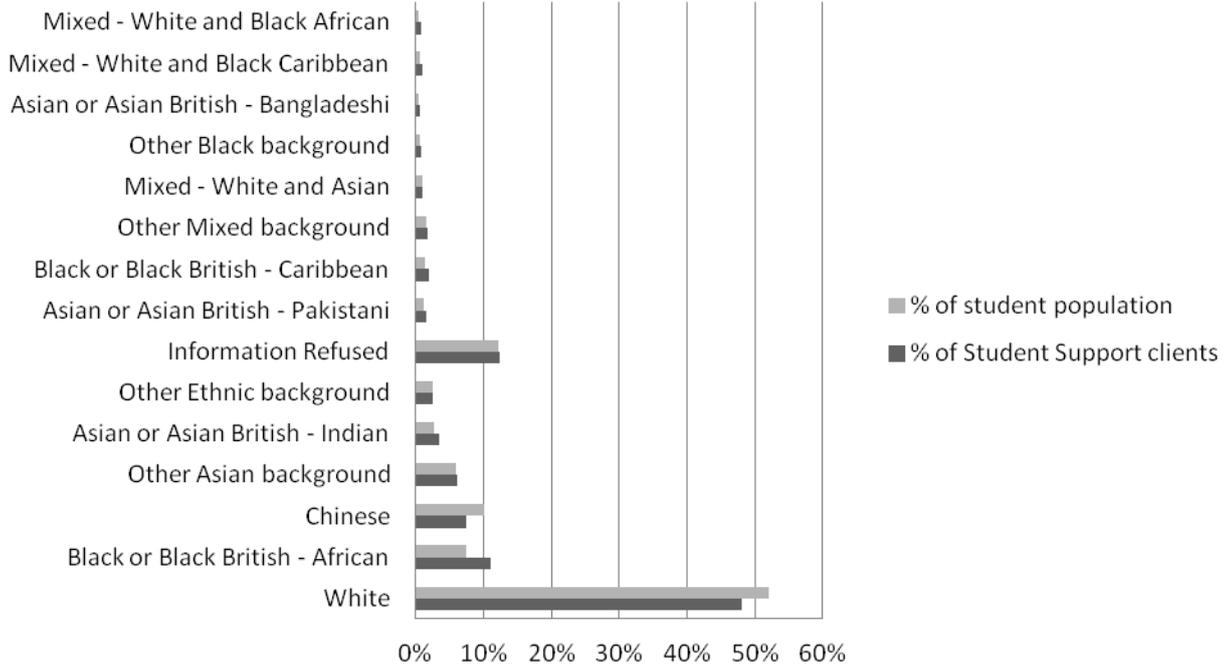
There are several notable changes and similarities since 2011-12 (for nationalities with more than 75 students in either year).

- Only students from United States remained high users from last year. Students from United States were consistent high users (54.3% this year, 41.2% last year, and 41.1% the previous year).
- Students from Nigeria had increased from medium to high users (38.7% to 40.0%), and students from Norway had increased from low to medium users (19.8% to 26.1%).
- Students from India had decreased from high to medium users (40.4% to 36.7%), and students from Bulgaria had decreased from medium to low users (26.3% to 19.2%).
- Lithuania, Romania, Turkey, Germany, Saudi Arabia, Thailand, China and France have all remained medium users from 2009-12.
- British students are slightly up (30.3% to 31.9%). This probably reflects the rise in overall client percentages. British students by nationality are still average users of Student Support services.
- The proportion of students from China using Student Support has decreased from 2010-12 (from 26.2% to 22.3%). Chinese students remain the largest group of international students with 971 students registered (there were 865 Chinese students registered last year, and 766 the year before). See also 3.6 below.
- Of the low users with more than 75 students last year, Cyprus, Greece and Italy all remain in this category. This could be because of cultural similarities and/or immigration requirements that do not lead to problems compared with other students from outside the UK.

### 3.5 Ethnicity

3.5.1 Chinese students were the most notable minority ethnic group who were underrepresented as clients of Student Support (7.3% of clients compared with 10.2% of the student population. This was down from 7.6% of clients in 2010-11 and 8.7% of clients in 2009-10). White students (the largest ethnic group) were underrepresented (48.0% of clients, 52.0% of students). Other black and minority ethnic students were well represented with proportionally more clients than the student population, with the exception of 'Mixed – White and Asian' where 0.9% of clients compared with 1.0% of all students.

### Ethnic origin of clients compared with University population



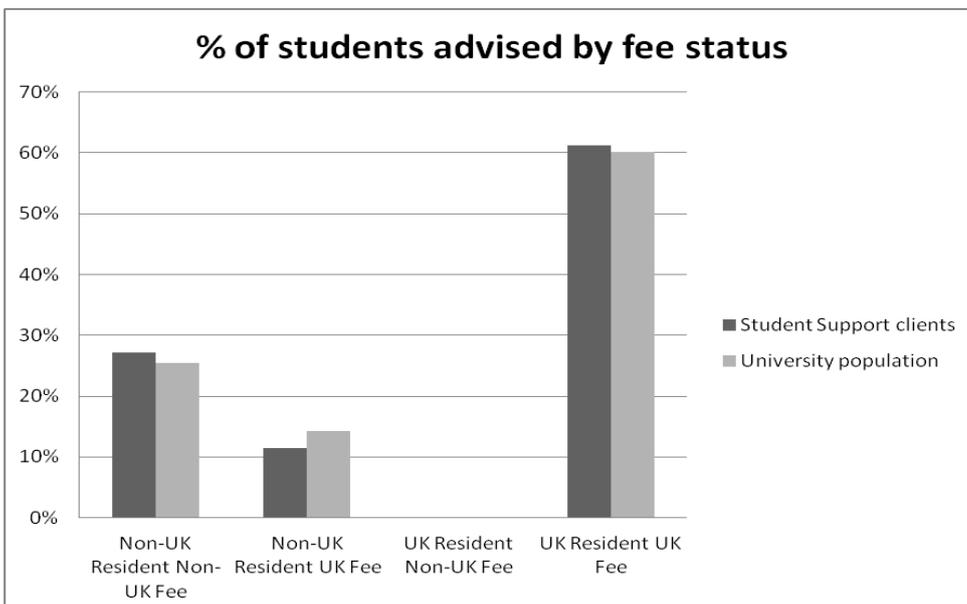
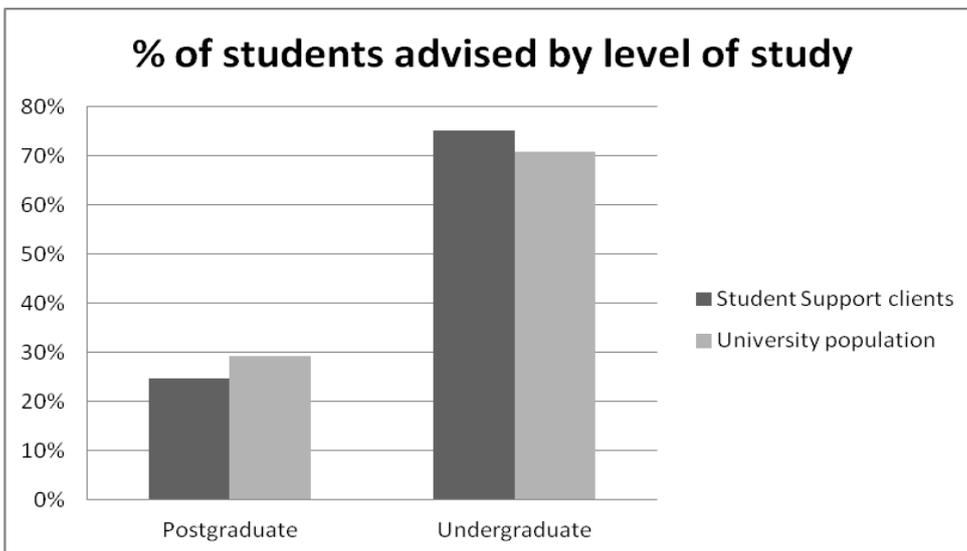
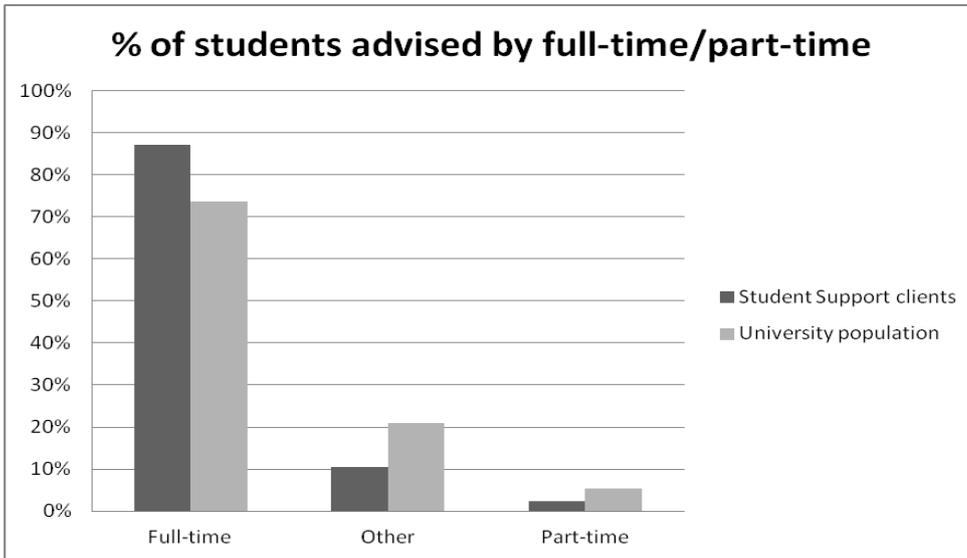
### 3.6 Chinese Students

- 3.6.1 In recent years Chinese students, both by ethnicity and nationality, were relatively low users of Student Support services and as Chinese students are the largest single non- UK nationality with over 950 students, this remains a cause for concern.
- 3.6.2 In 2011-12, there was a greater underrepresentation of Chinese clients using Student Support in relation to the percentage of Chinese students in the overall student population, than in previous years. This was a cause for concern last year and was followed up in 2011-12, through the organisation of a focus group with Chinese students. Looking into more effective ways of collecting feedback from Chinese students on support services and increasing awareness further among Chinese students should be made a priority in 2012-13. A summary over the past five years is shown below.

	2011-12		2010-11		2009-10		2008-9		2007-8	
	clients	students								
<b>Chinese Ethnicity</b>	7.3	10.2	7.6	9.9	8.7	9.8	8.1	10.5	7.3	11.3
<b>China Nationality</b>	6.4	8.1	6.4	7.5	7.3	7.1	5.8	7.8	6.3	8.0

### 3.7 Student/ Fee Status and Level of Study

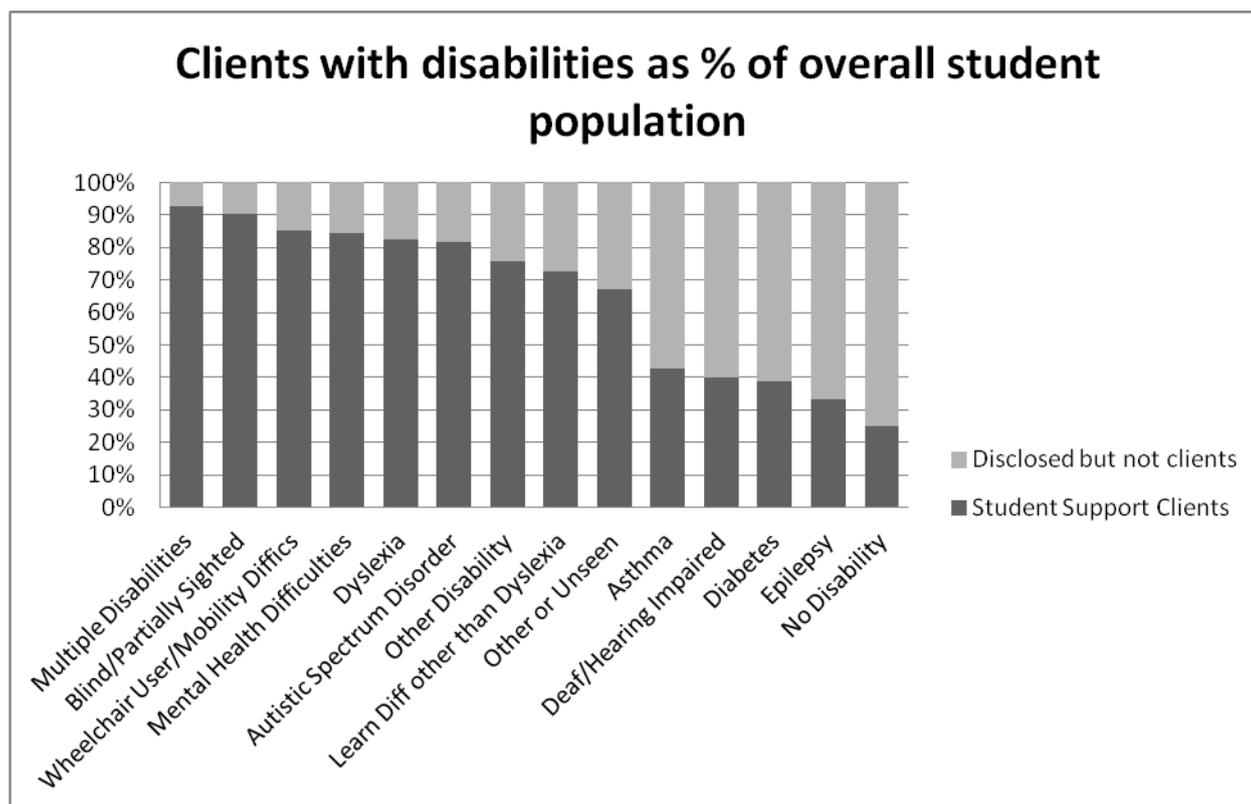
3.7.1 As in previous years, Student Support clients were more likely to be undergraduate and full-time compared with the student population as a whole.



- 3.7.2 The numbers of international student clients (Non-UK Resident Non-UK Fee) decreased to 919 in 2011-12, after a steady previous three years: 964 in 2010-11, compared with 948 in 2009-10 and 955 in 2008-9).
- 3.7.3 EU student clients (Non-UK Resident UK Fee) increased again in 2011-12 (389 compared with 332 in 2010-11 and 251 in 2009-10). As in previous years, EU students were underrepresented in 2011-12 (11.5% of clients compared with 14.2% of the student population).
- 3.7.4 UK/Home students were underrepresented in previous years, but were slightly better represented in 2010-11 than in previous years. In 2011-12, UK/Home students were overrepresented for the first time (61.0% of clients compared with 59.8% of the student population).

### 3.8 Disability

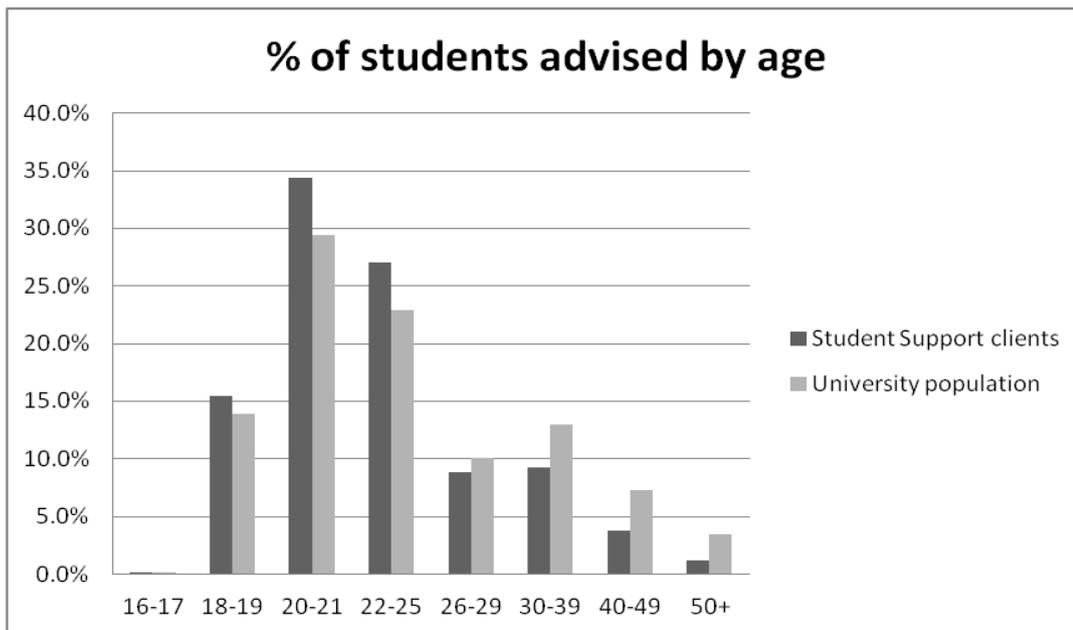
- 3.8.1 As in previous years, and predictably, a high proportion of students who had disclosed a disability to the University made significant use of the Student Support services. This is to be expected as there are a team of specialist Student Support advisers for disabled students.
- 3.8.2 Students with multiple disabilities were the highest users (26 out of 28: 92.9%) in 2011-12, which is an increase from last year (21 out of 28: 75.0%). Last year's highest users were students with an autistic spectrum disorder (18 out of 20: 90.0%). It is worth noting that students with an autistic spectrum disorder were the sixth highest users in 2011-12 (18 out of 22: 81.8%). Blind/partially sighted students (19 out of 21: 90.5%); wheelchair users/ students with mobility difficulties (23 out of 27: 85.2%); students with mental health difficulties (59 out of 70: 84.3%); and dyslexic students (290 out of 352: 82.4%) were all higher users of Student Support than students with an autistic spectrum disorder.



### 3.9 Age

- 3.9.1 Students up to the age of 26 were well represented as Student Support clients, although older students made less use of the support services than younger ones; only 9.6% of students over 50 years of age were clients (7.2% in 2010-11, 7.9% in 2009-10 and 12.6% in 2008-9).
- 3.9.2 Mature students often have additional support needs and are at greater risk of withdrawal than younger students. Recommendations from the Mature Students Retention Project, which reported in 2011, have been implemented during the year. Further information is provided in section 9.

3.9.3 Under-18s often generate significant work, not just for Student Support but for many departments, as the University owes an enhanced duty of care to these students. As expected, a high proportion (62.5%) of under-18s had recorded contact with Student Support during the year.



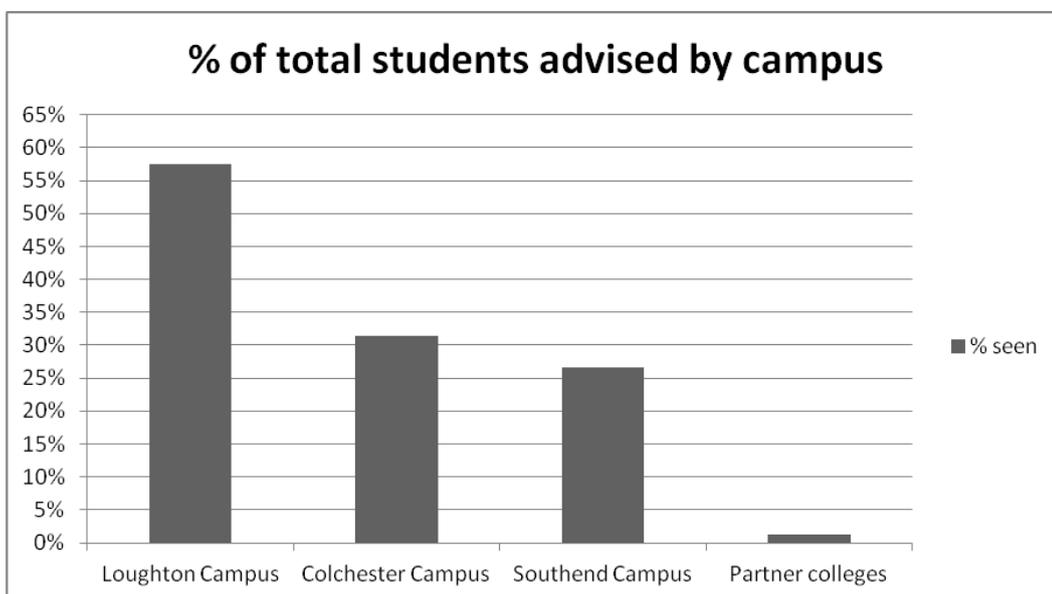
### 3.10 Campus

3.10.1 A breakdown of Student Support clients by campus is given below. Students from Loughton campus, despite its distance from the main Student Support base in Colchester, have remained as proportionately the highest users (57.5% this year, up from 52.8% last year, and 47.1% the year before). The users of Student Support at Colchester campus has remained almost the same (31.5% this year, 31.7% last year, 30.5% the year before).

3.10.2 At Southend campus some changes to support provision have been implemented with more clients advised in-house rather than through our partners at South Essex College, who also provide support to their own Higher Education students. The percentage of students advised by Student Support at the Southend campus has increased noticeably (10.6% in 2009-10, to 19.2% in 2010-11, and to 26.7% in 2011-12).

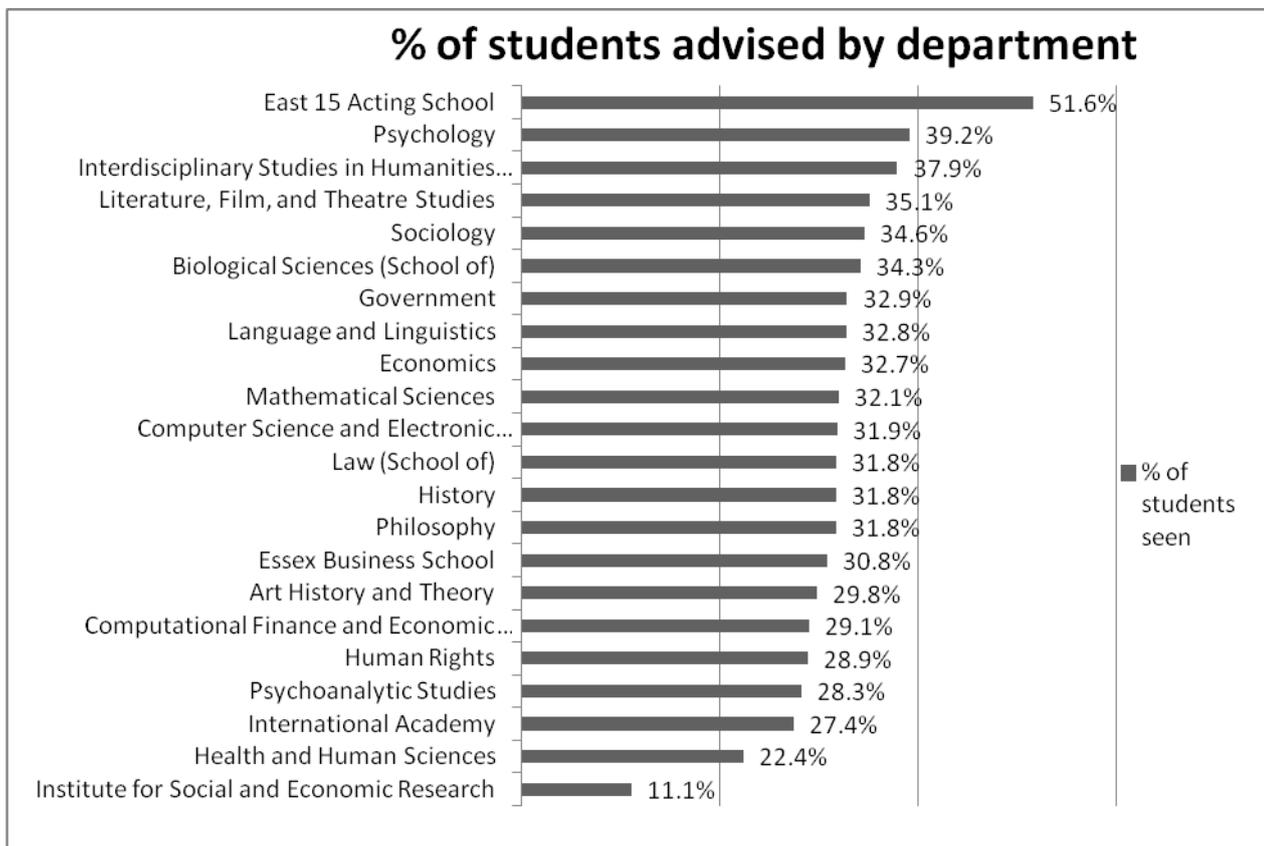
3.10.3 At both Southend and Loughton campuses Student Support Advisers based on site recorded some of their work on the Student Support database for the first time. This started part way through the year and may account for some of the increase in client numbers on these campuses.

3.10.4 Partners all make their own arrangements for Student Support; however a few students (1.3% this year, 1.6% last year, and 2.0% the year before) also contact the University Student Support services direct.



### 3.11 Academic Departments, Schools and Centres

- 3.11.1 A breakdown of Student Support clients by department is shown, with clients as a proportion of those registered in the department. European occasional, junior year abroad and junior year exchange students are excluded from the table. Staff and professional development, as well as all partner colleges, are also excluded.
- 3.11.2 The average take up of Student Support services across the departments included in the table below has been calculated at 32.3% (compared with 31.4% last year). Students from all the departments below Economics in the table were therefore proportionally lower users of Student Support services in 2010-11. The only departments which were consistently low users in 2008-9, 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 were the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, Health and Human Sciences (HHS) and Essex Business School (EBS). It should be noted that in 2009-10 and 2010-11, the department of Language and Linguistics and the School of Biological Sciences were low users, but in 2011-12, Language and Linguistics and Biological Sciences students were high users of Student Support.
- 3.11.3 As in previous years, East 15 students were high users of central services, despite it being based at Loughton and Southend. In 2011-12, East 15 students were the heaviest users of Student Support services; 51.6% this year compared with 41.1% last year. Some changes have been made to support provision at Loughton and Southend campuses to address support needs and identify any patterns.
- 3.11.4 Students undertaking multi-disciplinary courses in the Humanities continue to be one of the heaviest users of Student Support services; 37.9% this year, 41.9% last year, and 41.5% the year before. It is worth noting that the top five highest users in 2010-11 remained the same in 2011-12; East 15, Psychology, CISH, LiFTS and Sociology.
- 3.11.5 Students undertaking courses in the Psychoanalytic Studies department, the Computational Finance and Economic Agents department and the Institute for Social and Economic Research, would be less likely to use the Student Support services, as they are departments consisting of mostly postgraduate courses, and Student Support clients are less likely to be postgraduate students (see 3.6.1). This fact supports the table below, as it shows all three departments to be low users.



### 3.12 Qualification Aimed For

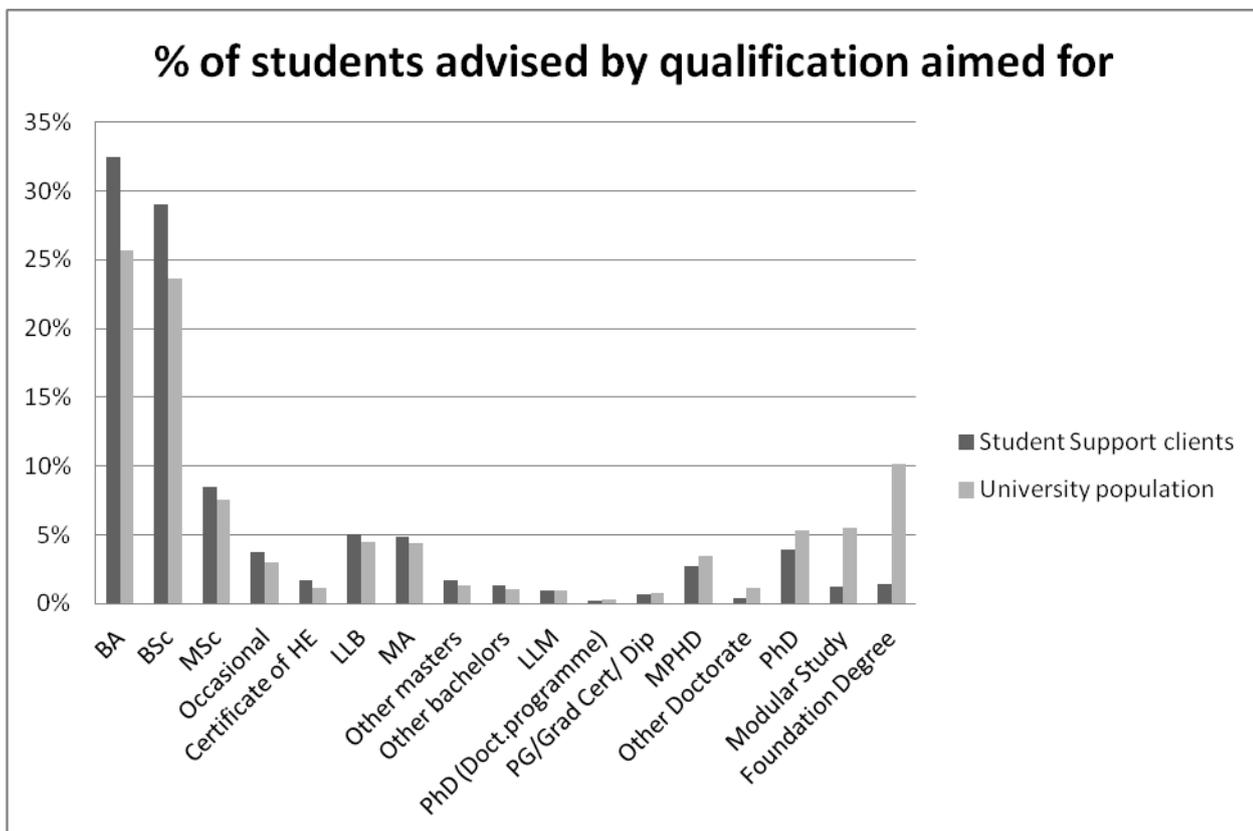
3.12.1 Students who are registered on a BA or a BSc course are proportionally among the highest users of the Student Support services. Together, they account for the largest proportion of the University population (49.3%), and they account for the largest proportion of Student Support clients (61.5%). This has steadily increased since 2009-10, when students doing a BA or a BSc made up 46.2% of the university population, and 56.8% of Student Support clients. It is noteworthy that Occasional U/G Study students, Certificate of Higher Education Students (these include some International Academy students) and taught Masters courses are also overrepresented.

3.12.2 Proportionally underrepresented as Student Support clients are students registered on the following courses (in order of most underrepresented – least underrepresented):

Foundation Degrees, P/G and U/G Modular Study, Other Doctorates (inc D.Ed Psych), PhD, Occasional students, PhD (Doct. Programme)

The majority are postgraduate research degrees or part-time degrees. As already discussed in section 3.6.1, Student Support clients are more likely to be undergraduate students and students who are studying part-time make up a small proportion of the university population.

3.12.3 Students registered on Foundation Degrees make up over 10.2% of the University population, and so the fact that they only make up just 1.5% of Student Support clients would be a cause for concern were it not the case that such courses are mainly delivered by partner colleges who make their own arrangements for student support.



## 4. Main areas of Student Support work

4.1 The table below shows changes in the main categories for the Advice and Disability services between 2007 and 2012. One off enquiries are generally dealt with by the Advice Team although they include disability enquiries which do not require ongoing support. One off enquiries have increased by 22.2% from last year and have more than doubled since 2007.

4.2 One off enquiries have an average of 1.8 follow-on contacts – this is fairly stable over the last four years. Each disability case file has an average of 5.0 separate entries made by an advisor. This is an increase from 4.6 times in 2010-11. 215 (31.3%) of disability enquiries were only worked on once. Of the disability case files which were worked on more than once, there was an average of 6.9 separate entries.

	Total separate enquiries/cases	No. of times worked
One off enquiries 2007-8	1,750	3,364
One off enquiries 2008-9	2,201	3,886
One off enquiries 2009-10	1,971	3,497
One off enquiries 2010-11	3,095	5,062
One off enquiries 2011-12	3,783	6,657
Change over period	116.2%	97.9%
Disability cases 2007-8	516	2,359
Disability cases 2008-9	654	2,843
Disability cases 2009-10	582	2,680
Disability cases 2010-11	643	2,956
Disability cases 2011-12	688	3,461
Change over period	33.3%	46.7%
Hardship cases 2007-8	512	-
Hardship cases 2008-9	400	-
Hardship cases 2009-10	375	-
Hardship cases 2010-11	383	-
Hardship cases 2011-12	461	-
Change over period	-10.0%	

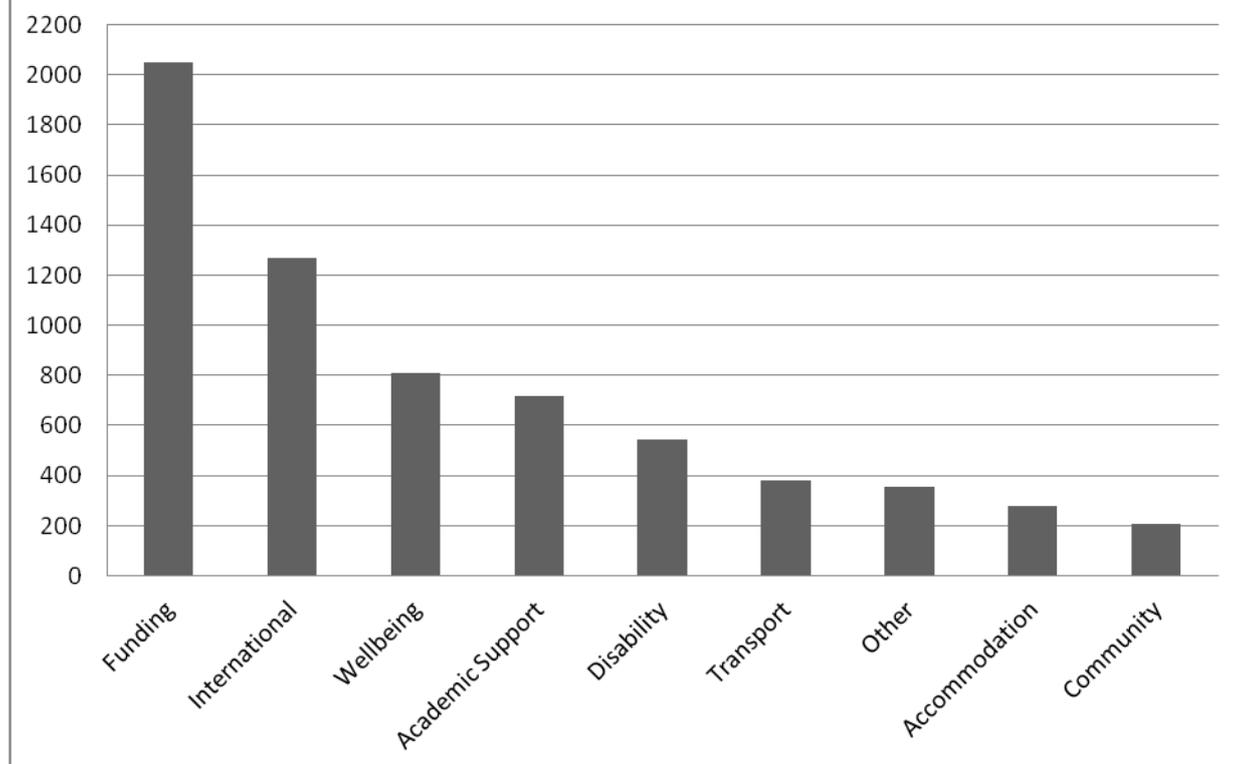
4.3 There were 3,080 new Student Support identifiers (SSiD) added to the Student Support database between 1 August 2011 and 31 July 2012. Of the 3,019 different SSiDs with one off enquiries, 2,281 were new and 738 had had contact with Student Support in previous years (around 120 of these students first made contact prior to 2009-10).

4.4 Of the total number of disability cases in the last year (688), 364 were new disability cases and 324 were ongoing.

### 4.5 Types of problems – one off enquires

4.5.1 Topics for one off enquires are outlined below.

## Primary Problems - One Off Enquiries 2011-12



4.5.2 Like the last four years, funding continued to be the most common problem in 2011-12, accounting for 30.8% of one off enquiries (down from 33.9% last year, and 32% the year before). International student and immigration enquiries were the next most common primary problem, as in previous years, and accounted for 19.1% of one off enquiries in 2010-11 (down from 21.8% last year, and 28.6% the year before).

4.5.3 As can be seen from the table below, Student Support had a larger proportion of 'wellbeing', 'disability', 'community' and 'other' one off enquiries in 2011-12 than in 2010-11.

	Funding	Accommodation	International	Academic Support	Wellbeing	Disability	Transport	Community	Other
<b>2010-11</b>									
<b>Number of cases</b>	1711	260	1101	588	520	287	346	85	147
<b>% of total one off enquiries</b>	33.8%	5.1%	21.8%	11.6%	10.3%	5.7%	6.8%	1.7%	2.9%
<b>2011-12</b>									
<b>Number of cases</b>	2049	280	1270	715	807	543	383	207	356
<b>% of total one off enquiries</b>	30.8%	4.2%	19.1%	10.7%	12.1%	8.2%	5.8%	3.1%	5.3%

# 5 Residents' Support Network

## 5.1 The role of the Residents' Support Network

- 5.1.1 The voluntary Residents' Support Network (RSN) continued to play a vital role in community life on Colchester campus, off-campus (Forest Road and Avon Way House), and on Southend Campus, by providing welfare support when other services were closed. In particular the RSN continues to provide exemplary out-of-hours service, responding immediately to welfare needs of our students. Residents' Assistants (RAs) respond to disruptive behaviour using a structured and respectful conflict resolution approach.
- 5.1.2 Feedback regarding the transformation of the RSN has confirmed that it has delivered positive results; A Students' Union survey in October 2011 indicated that 78% of respondents knew who their RA was and 73.8% had met them within the first few weeks.
- 5.1.3 The raised profile of the network was demonstrated by a 19% increase in applicants for RA roles for 2012-13.
- 5.1.4 RAs receive in-depth training and monitoring to focus on future employability skills. Several were nominated for internal employability awards, with one receiving the Outstanding Peer Support Award.

## 5.2 Incidents by area and type

5.2.1 A breakdown by area of Colchester campus is provided below.

### BREAKDOWN OF RSN INCIDENTS BY AREA OF COLCHESTER CAMPUS 2009-12.

	11-12				10-11				09-10			
Area of campus	North	Quays	South	Total	North	Quays	South	Total	North	Quays	South	Total
Total by area	180	190	572	942	336	179	601	1116	356	198	663	1217
% by area	19%	20%	61%		30%	16%	54%		29%	16%	55%	

5.2.2 In 2011-12 South Campus residents were overrepresented as users of the RSN, and residents of North Campus and the Quays were underrepresented. This year we also have figures for the number of RSN incidents off-campus (Forest Road and Avon Way House) and Southend Campus.

### BREAKDOWN OF RSN INCIDENTS BY AREA 2011-12.

Area of campus	North	Quays	South	Southend	Off Campus	Total
Total by area	180	190	572	143	9	1094
% by area	17%	17%	52%	13%	1%	
Number of Residents	953	767	1598	378	320	4016
% of Residents (% of Colchester campus incidents)	24% (19%)	19% (20%)	40% (61%)	9%	8%	100%

5.2.3 Details of the nature of RSN incidents are shown below. Noise complaints remain the most common RSN incident. The number of warnings decreased this year; from 199 warning letters in 2010-11 to 142 in 2011-12.

RSN INCIDENTS 2009-12

Year	2011-12		2010-11		2009-10		Change	Change
Type of incident	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	2010/11-2011/12	2009/10-2011/12
Noise	297	27.1%	315	27.0%	283	23.3%	-5.7%	4.9%
Unsubstantiated noise	100	9.1%	133	11.4%	258	21.2%	-24.8%	-61.2%
Verbal warnings*	N/A	0.0%	N/A	0.0%	141	11.6%	0.0%	100.0%
Follow-up visit	147	13.4%	56	4.8%	81	6.7%	162.5%	81.5%
Ended noise	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	21	1.7%	0.0%	-100.0%
Flat meeting	69	6.3%	35	3.0%	60	4.9%	97.1%	15.0%
Party	18	1.6%	18	1.5%	33	2.7%	0.0%	-45.5%
Disputes	3	0.3%	79	6.8%	29	2.4%	-96.2%	-89.7%
Proctor referral	46	4.2%	38	3.3%	32	2.6%	21.1%	43.8%
Under 18's	7	0.6%	1	0.1%	1	0.1%	600.0%	600.0%
Mental Health concern	31	2.8%	44	3.7%	37	3.0%	-29.5%	-16.2%
Other	12	1.1%	80	6.8%	43	3.5%	-85.0%	-72.1%
SSO Request	9	0.8%	26	2.2%	13	1.1%	-65.4%	-30.8%
Smoking	16	1.5%	35	3.0%	16	1.3%	-54.3%	0.0%
Health/Illness	26	2.4%	15	1.3%	25	2.1%	73.3%	4.0%
Theft	21	1.9%	5	0.4%	26	2.1%	320.0%	-19.2%
Written Warning*					26	2.1%		
Harassment	31	2.8%	28	2.4%	10	0.8%	10.7%	210.0%
Cleanliness/Mess	9	0.8%	11	0.9%	9	0.7%	-18.2%	0.0%
Unwanted visitors	7	0.6%	12	1.0%	7	0.6%	-41.7%	0.0%
Aggressive behaviour	10	0.9%	8	0.7%	14	1.2%	25.0%	-28.6%
Complaints	17	1.6%	0	0.0%	13	1.1%	0.0%	30.8%
Assistance	5	0.5%	1	0.1%	7	0.6%	400.0%	-28.6%
Drunkenness	8	0.7%	2	0.2%	3	0.2%	300.0%	166.7%
Drugs	19	1.7%	4	0.3%	7	0.6%	375.0%	171.4%
Injuries	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	2	0.2%	0.0%	-100.0%
Lock-outs	0	0.0%	6	0.5%	2	0.2%	-100.0%	-100.0%
Criminal damage	19	1.7%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	1800.0%	0.0%
Fire Alarms	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Maintenance	20	1.8%	15	1.3%	18	1.5%	33.3%	11.1%
Welfare Transfer	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Emergency Loan/Financial	2	0.2%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Police Involvement	3	0.3%	1	0.1%	0	0.0%	200.0%	0.0%
1 <sup>st</sup> Warning letter	128	11.7%	158	13.5%			-19.0%	
2 <sup>nd</sup> Warning letter	14	1.3%	41	3.5%			-65.9%	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1094</b>		<b>1168</b>		<b>1217</b>			

\* 1<sup>st</sup> Written Warning replaced Verbal Warning in 2010-11.

### 5.3 RSN Programming

5.3.1 For the first time, the Residents’ Support network has completed a full year of programming within the Accommodation. A programme is a planned activity designed to provide fellow students with opportunities to interact with and get to know other students in their area, thus developing a strong community that students feel is supportive and encouraging. Students spend a great deal of time where they live, and the residences provide an excellent location to foster the living and learning experience. RAs can deliver programmes designed to extend and complement the overall student experience, helping students meet one another, improve study habits, learn more about themselves and broaden their interests, to name just a few. Programmes are fun and they provide students with one important essential: a break from the daily academic routine. They should also build a positive environment and a sense of community amongst the residents.

5.3.2 In the programming model there are criteria that need to be considered when planning the programmes: RAs are expected to complete 10 programmes over the course of the academic year; five will be completed in the autumn term, and five will be completed in the spring/summer terms; one programme must have been completed independently for an RA’s own group of residents; one programme must have been completed with another person in their patch; one programme credit is given for an area-wide programme led by the Assistant Area Coordinators and the Senior RA. RAs must also complete a programming requirement that brings residents to an event happening on campus and finally, one programme must provide residents with a connection to the broader Colchester (or Southend) community.

5.3.3 Within those categories, RAs need to fulfill programming in all of these areas at least once over the course of the academic year:

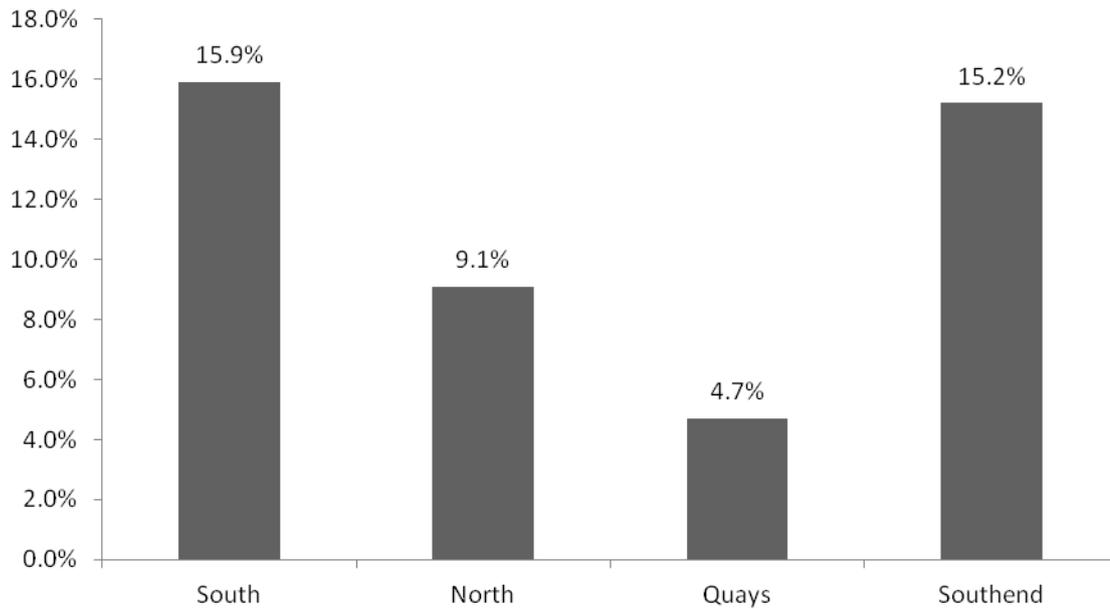
- **Social** – (eg: movie night, coffee chat, game night)
- **Academic** – Enhancing academic learning (eg: CV workshop)
- **Wellness (physical, emotional, spiritual)** – (eg: yoga, drug/alcohol awareness, chaplaincy)
- **Community service and volunteering** – (eg: charity collection, soup kitchen, cards for senior citizens)
- **The Arts** (eg: Lakeside/Cliff town theatre, exhibitions)
- **Diversity and Culture** (eg: international events, food, disability awareness, LGBT)

5.3.4 South campus had the highest proportion of Students’ Union-related programmes, and the Quays had the highest proportion of programmes which offered an alternative to alcohol (i.e. programmes occurring on a Wednesday, Friday or Saturday evening):

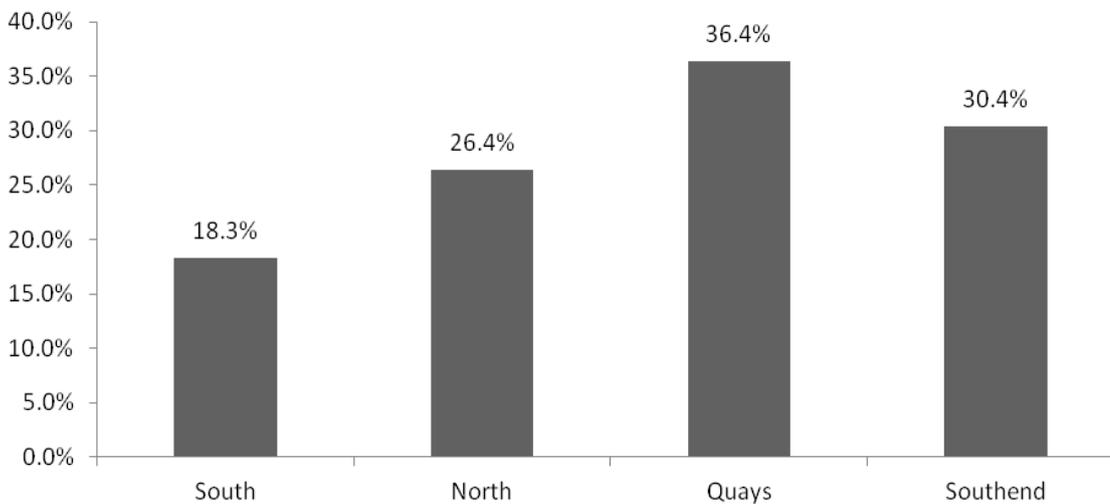
#### BREAKDOWN OF PROGRAMMES BY AREA 2011-12

Area of campus	Total number of residents	Total number of programmes	Total number of participants	Average number of participants per area of campus	Average number of participants per programme
South	1598	252	2000	1.25	7.9
North	953	121	1103	1.16	9.1
Quays	767	107	737	0.96	6.9
Southend	378	46	914	2.42	19.9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>3696</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>4754</b>	<b>1.29</b>	<b>9.0</b>

### **% of Students' Union-related programmes**



### **% of programmes which offered an alternative to alcohol (i.e. programmes occurring on a Wednesday, Friday or Saturday evening)**



## 6 Wellbeing Service (Mental Health and Counselling)

6.1 Following a consultation period, The Mental Health advisory team and the Counselling Service have undergone a restructure and been amalgamated into one integrated, multi-disciplinary 'Wellbeing Service' to be fully launched for the start of the academic year 2012/2013. Changes include:

- The *Mental Health and Counselling Service* will be renamed the *Wellbeing Service*.
- A Wellbeing drop-in will run alongside the Advice and Disability team drop-ins during Student Support opening hours.
- Similarly to the Advice and Disability Teams, the first point of contact for students wanting to contact the Wellbeing Team will either be via telephone, email or drop-in. We hope to be able to make use of a new generic email [wellbeing \(@essex.ac.uk\)](mailto:wellbeing@essex.ac.uk).
- A new confidentiality policy will be written for the Wellbeing Service as a whole by the end of August 2012. The policy will be available in full on the web site, referenced on publicity and discussed with students at their first contact with the service.
- A Senior Practitioner will be appointed to support the Deputy Director and will act as a Clinical Lead for the counselling provided by the service.
- Clinical meetings will be held regularly with the purpose to discuss clients causing concern and the allocation of clients, to give team members the opportunity to share good practice, and to facilitate team building and improved professional practice.
- There will be an expanded range of workshops and groups during term-time to support students' wellbeing.
- A new Administrator/PA (Wellbeing Service) will join the Student Support administrative team.

6.2 Because the changes were partially implemented during the year, the figures below reflect the number of students seeking counselling in the Autumn term and the number of students approaching the newly integrated team in the Spring and Summer (i.e. students receiving both counselling and other mental health support such as mentoring).

6.3 During the last academic year, the student Counselling Service used a standard evaluation system known as CORE (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation). Students complete the CORE assessment form at the beginning and end of their counselling, indicating how they have felt during the past week by answering a range of questions. Each question is scored on a 5-point scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 4 (most or all of the time). Their answers are then summarised and organised into 4 domains – functioning, problems, risk and well-being.

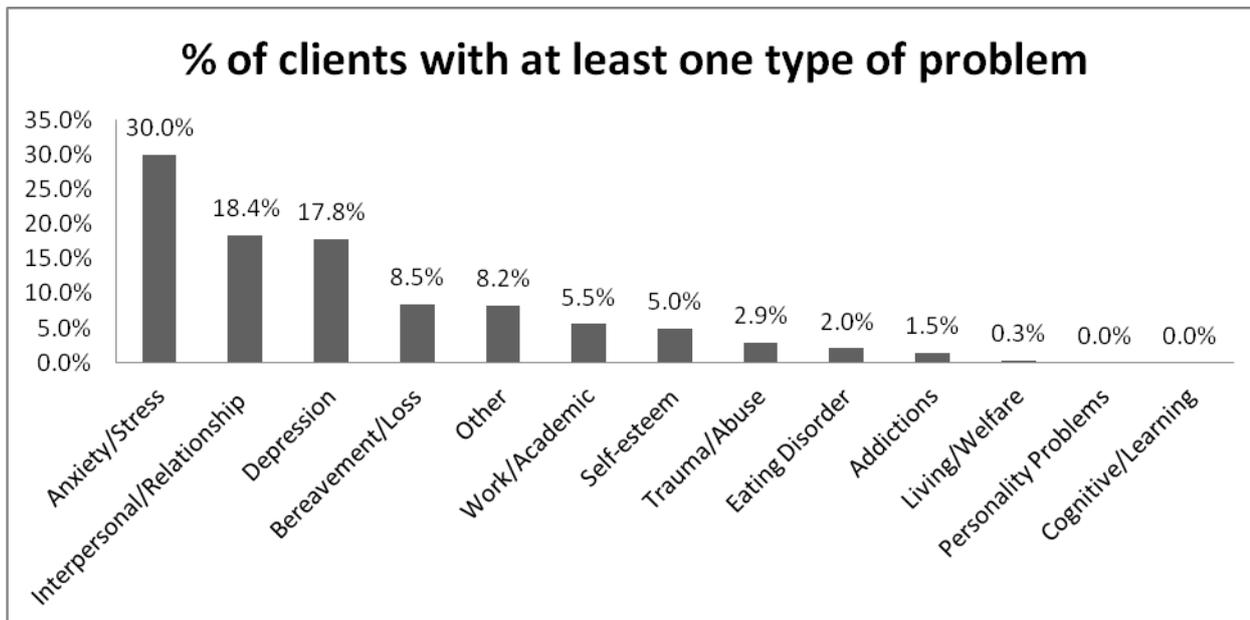
6.4 Representative scores from the general population have been identified through extensive research (Jacobson et al. 1988; Jacobson & Traux, 1991; Evans, Margison & Barkham, 1998) and can be compared with students' scores to determine whether they fall into a range that indicates a clinical need for counselling, indicated by a score above the identified 'cut-off' as shown below. The average scores recorded for students receiving counselling, and received an average of six sessions of counselling, were as follows:

6.5 Of the 274 clients who completed a CORE questionnaire, 252 (92.0%) were above the clinical cut-off and 22 (8.0%) were below or equal to the clinical cut-off. This demonstrates that the vast majority of students accessing the Mental Health and Counselling services were presenting with significant difficulties and needed support.

6.6 Of the clients who completed the end CORE questionnaire, 81.9% saw an improvement and 18.1% saw no change. Please note that this data is taken from the CORE system and only includes cases started and finished during the year. It is therefore incomplete.

### 6.7 Types of Problem- Counselling

The table below shows the number of clients with at least one presenting problem within the designated categories. It shows that the top category of problem for which students sought help from counselling was anxiety/stress, which is the same as in previous years. Interpersonal/relationship and depression and were the second and third most common problem areas, as in previous years.



## 7 Disability and Study Skills Support

### 7.1 Diagnostic assessments

Assessments of Specific Learning Difficulties by Educational Psychologists, or suitably qualified equivalent, cannot be funded from Disabled Students Allowances, but an up to date diagnostic assessment is required to access individual funding. In 2011/12 the full cost of these assessments was at least £290 of which £225 was covered by the Access to Learning Funds (ALF); the remainder was able to be met by University funds. 168 students had diagnostic assessments, of which 28 were Loughton students and 56 were from Southend. This compares with 131 students who had diagnostic assessments last year, of whom 14 were Loughton students and 24 were Southend students. Changes to the funding for Diagnostic Assessments are anticipated for 2012-13 with a student contribution required for the first time in several years.

### 7.2 Assessments of Need

Through our partnership with Cambridge Access Centre, 261 needs assessments were undertaken at the Colchester, Loughton or Southend campuses- this was the highest number ever and was achieved through use of freelance assessors following the retirement of a staff member who specialised in these assessments. 127 of the assessments were for students or prospective students of other universities. Last year, 249 needs assessments were undertaken at all campuses, of these 120 were for students or prospective students of other universities.

### 7.3 Mentoring and Mental Health Support

A total of 48 students had ongoing mentoring from a specialist mental health mentor during the year. This provision is now part of the Wellbeing Service.

### 7.4 Study Strategies

238 students were eligible for one-to-one study strategies tutorials and 107 took up this support (45.0%). The proportion of eligible students taking up study strategies tutorials has increased from 43.8% to 45.0% since last year. In total 1439 tutorials were delivered to these students. The total number of sessions last year was 1085, and in 2009-10 was 1133.

# 8 Student Feedback

## 8.1 Feedback from students

This is important in reviewing our services and ensuring that they meet the changing needs of students. Feedback is sought in a number of ways and the results are analysed by the Student Support management team during the summer vacation.

## 8.2 National Student and Student Satisfaction Surveys

The National Student Survey and the University's own Student Satisfaction Survey are important to the University and departments and we do not wish to overwhelm students with additional surveys about specific services if this reduces the response rate of the global surveys. Much of the free text within these surveys is relevant to 'student experience' and there are sometimes comments about Student Support services. All of the free text comments are reviewed to identify comments relevant to Student Support services.

## 8.3 Student Services Centre Survey

An online survey about the University's student services and how they could be improved was launched in February administered by a student enterprise group. Students were asked about the services the University currently provides and what improvements they would most like to see in the new service provided by the new Student Services Centre. To help get a good response rate, the survey and focus groups were promoted to students that came into Student Support. A total of 395 students took part in the online survey and 35 students attended the focus groups. The findings will be reviewed over the summer and the results will be considered by the Student Services Centre Project Implementation Group, before they are presented at the next Student Services Centre staff briefing meeting in the autumn term. The results will form a baseline for measuring feedback about individual services prior to co-location, and will be used by the Student Support Management Team in planning any interim developments.

## 8.4 Feedback cards/ web based feedback

Specific feedback is sought from students making use of our services. Small feedback cards are available in the Student Support reception and a link to a web based feedback form is included in email signatures of generic Student Support (sso) and Disability Service (disab) accounts. The link (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/stdsup/index.shtm>) is also on the Student Support home page. This feedback is analysed annually and a summary circulated to Student Support staff and displayed on our notice-boards. The level of feedback tends to be disappointing (only 8 web based feedback forms were completed, and only 5 feedback cards were completed in 2011-12). Of the 13 responses:

- 100% found the information or advice we provided 'very useful'.
- 100% felt that we dealt with their enquiry competently.
- 100% would recommend us to someone else if they needed help or advice.

The quotes at the start of this report were taken from feedback cards and web based feedback in 2010-11.

## 8.5 Ongoing clients- end of year feedback

Where students have had regular support (including counselling, study strategies support and mental health mentoring) a feedback questionnaire is completed at the end of the year (or at the end of the support, if this is sooner). These questionnaires are reviewed by the manager responsible for the service.

32 evaluation forms regarding the support provided by the Mental Health and Counselling (Wellbeing) Service were collected in 2011-12.

- Of the 22 students who had an initial assessment session at Greenwood House, 19 (86.4%) were satisfied with how long they had to wait for an initial assessment session. 3 (13.6%) would have liked to have been seen more quickly. Furthermore, 18 (81.8%) found the assessment session helpful; 2 (9.1%) could not remember their assessment; and 2 (9.1%) found their session "somewhat" useful.
- 80% of 30 respondents said that their expectations from counselling or mentoring were met, and 20% said that their expectations were partly met.
- Of the 19 respondents to which it applied, 14 (73.7%) said that counselling/mentoring helped them to decide whether or not to continue with their academic course. Of these students, 13 (92.9%) said that they are now continuing with their course unchanged and just 1 respondent said that they deferred or intermitted.
- Of the respondents to which it was relevant, 82.8% said that counselling/mentoring helped with their studies.

- Of the 32 respondents, 25 (78.1%) said that counselling/mentoring has helped them a lot; 4 (12.5%) said that it helped them moderately; and 3 (9.4%) said that it helped them a little.
- Of the 32 respondents, 17 (53.1%) said that their ability to cope has improved a lot; 8 (25.0%) said that their ability to cope has improved moderately; and 7 (21.9%) said that their ability to cope improved a little.
- Of the 32 respondents, 26 (81.3%) agreed with the statement 'I was satisfied with the overall experience of counselling/mentoring at the University of Essex', 5 (15.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and just 1 (3.1%) disagreed.

## 8.6 Other specific feedback

8.6.1 *Access to Learning Funds*: Requests for feedback are made to all students who apply to the Access to Learning Funds looking at their perception of the process. Just 6 responses were received:

- 3/6 respondents found out about ALF from the website, 2/6 from word of mouth and 1/6 from a Student Support Adviser.
- 5/6 thought that the procedure was easy to understand.
- 2/6 respondents said that it took just one week, whereas 4/6 said that it took over two weeks for their application to be processed.
- 5/6 were satisfied with the ALF process.
- 1/6 had issues with collecting their cheque from Income; the cheque had not arrived from Colchester when the student went to collect it from the Admin Counter in Southend.

Additional comments included:

- *"This is fantastic and it was a huge help to me as I could not afford books for my essay or a train ticket home. I got much more than I expected and for that I am very grateful. Thank you."*
- *"I think the Student Support Team is great when it comes to dealing with student issues. They offer full support in all circumstances and do their best for everyone. I have particularly received great services from them and I am very grateful for this."*
- *"I appreciate the honesty of this office. I went in to get advice on a difficult financial situation and was advised this fund existed. If the representative hadn't told me I don't know what I would have done, maybe would have to postpone my studies."*

8.6.2 *Feedback from Residents' Assistant Survey, April 2012*: Residents' Assistants (RAs) were asked to complete a feedback form regarding their RSN experience. Responses to the question 'Please comment on what you feel have been the overall benefits of the RA role to you included:

- *"Helped develop my confidence in resolving circumstances I would have tried to avoid before becoming an R.A. Developed organisational skills such as time management and event co-ordination"*
- *"Improved employability skills and I'm more comfortable in communicating with stressed people."*
- *"Although there are times of frustration, this experience, in general, has been interesting and satisfactory. I obtained some experiences of organizing activity, mediation, as well as pushed my boundaries further."*
- *"Having an influence on a group of new people. I feel as if I have had a positive influence on these students' lives and have been able to introduce them well to university life and have taught them something that they may remember me for. Also, it's nice to know a few more individual faces."*

Additional comments included:

- *"The training in June and September equipped me with skills I thought I would never use as an RA. As a result, my confidence was boosted and allowed me to approach and handle situations which I would not be able to handle otherwise."*
- *"I think the trainings have been well planned and organized, especially the 'role play' scenarios."*

8.6.3 *University of Essex Students' Union Conference 2012*: Students attending the conference in May were given the opportunity to give their views on a host of topics. Rachel Fletcher, Director of Student Support, hosted one of the topics; feedback and perceptions of Student Support services.

Feedback collected from the students implied that many students were unable to distinguish the difference between the Students' Union Advice Centre and Student Support. Some students seemed unclear about the role and operation of Student Support, and it was suggested that more publicity was needed, using posters and social media sites, such as Facebook. Students indicated that using societies may be key to target underrepresented groups of clients, such as Chinese and Cypriot students. Students felt that the terms "mental health" and "counselling" had negative connotations and a social stigma attached to them. There was a general consensus that the term "wellbeing" was better, but clarification would be needed as to what sort of support was offered by a wellbeing service.

## **8.7 Feedback collected from groups underrepresented as Student Support clients**

A Frontrunner was employed by Student Support for the period of January to June 2012 to investigate why Chinese students and postgraduate students have been identified as underrepresented groups of Student Support clients in previous years. Data and feedback was collected throughout the project to enable the frontrunner to identify possible reasons for this underrepresentation.

8.7.1 *Chinese Students Focus Group:* A focus group was organised for 25/04/12 to investigate any possible underlying reasons for the underrepresentation of Chinese clients using Student Support services. The aim of the focus group was to hold an informal discussion about the impressions and experiences that Chinese students had of Student Support, and to look into how Student Support could improve their service to Chinese students. Unfortunately, it was not possible to proceed with the planned focus group for Chinese students due to a lack of take up from Chinese students. More focus groups will be organised in 2012-13 for Chinese students.

8.7.2 *Postgraduate Students Questionnaire:* In order to collect a larger sample of feedback, questionnaires were distributed on 9 May 2012 and responses to questions regarding how students found Student Support during their time at the University of Essex were gathered. The questions were designed to uncover possible reasons for the underrepresentation of postgraduate students as Student Support clients, whilst increasing communication with them and their awareness of Student Support.

In total, 45 questionnaires were completed by postgraduate students (both taught and research). Of the 45 responses:

- 33.3% of the respondents had used the Student Support services in the last year, which is more than the whole population of postgraduate students (24.1% of Postgraduate students used Student Support last year).
- 42.2% were unaware of the services Student Support offer. More research students were aware of Student Support than taught students (66.7% of the research students knew what Student Support offered, in comparison to just 41.2% of the taught students).
- 100% of the respondents who had been undergraduates at the University of Essex were aware of Student Support services, compared with 52% of those who had not.

*Postgraduate Students Focus groups:* A focus group was run on 26/06/2012 following the postgraduate questionnaire, to explore some of the issues raised, and to look at postgraduates' awareness and perceptions of Student Support in greater detail. Unfortunately, only three postgraduate students attended, but the session still proved to be useful. The following key findings from the focus group were reported:

- Many students seem to have a lack of awareness of the services that Student Support offer, and many did not seem to know the difference between the Students' Union Advice Centre and Student Support.
- There was a general agreement that postgraduates tend to be older and more mature and are more capable of dealing with their own problems themselves. Participants agreed that many postgraduate students may have their own, established support networks, and so may not need the additional support from Student Support.
- The length of the course for postgraduate students appears to affect postgraduate students' knowledge of Student Support. The participants in the focus group commented on the length of postgraduate courses (often twelve months) and said that often, postgraduates will just sit on a problem and wait until their course is finished.

## 9 Student Retention and Success

**9.1** In mid-December 2011, the newly created Student Retention Officer post was filled. The post is funded by the Access Agreement and so attention has been focussed on the progression of under-represented groups among Home students enrolled on undergraduate degree courses, particularly Bachelor degrees. This work has been conducted in consultation with the Planning Office, Communications and External Relations (CER), Student Support, Registry, and Learning and Development. Departments, Schools and Centres and the Students' Union have also been consulted throughout the year.

**9.2** Ongoing data collection and analysis has taken place throughout the year to identify patterns of retention and success among different student groups. Additionally, examples of sector-wide interventions pertaining to retention and success have been sourced and shared with colleagues throughout the year.

### 9.3 Mature Students

Mature students are one of the under-represented groups above and they are evidently at significantly greater risk of not continuing from Stage 1 to Stage 2 when compared with students who are under 21. Consequently, mature students have remained a priority throughout 2011-12. Principally, the focussed activities have been: the two-day Housewarming in September, the 1-hour Mature Students' reception in Freshers' Week, the bi-termly e-newsletters, three study skills workshops, additional peer mentor training for MSX members, the promotion of the Students' Union clubs and societies, particularly the MSX and the Study Buddy club, the production of 'How to support mature students' postcards for colleagues, and the provision of a communal space for mature students. Supporting the mature students' social and academic transition and integration have motivated these activities.

### 9.4 Peer mentoring

In December 2011, 22 of the 42 new mature students and 58 of the 188 young students who participated in the first-year undergraduate survey reported that they did not have a peer mentor, but wished that they had one. Some of these students were enrolled on courses with Departments, Schools and Centres that had a peer mentor scheme, suggesting that the way the scheme is promoted could be improved.

Feedback and examples from other universities' peer mentor schemes have informed some changes to the University's scheme for 2012-13. Compulsory central training is provided for all mentors and each Department, School and Centre operates their own bespoke version of the scheme, tailored to their students' needs. To help students "connect", Student Support and the Students' Union have increased the number of peer mentor training sessions in June (at the end of their exams and before the summer holidays) and are conducting two further sessions immediately before Freshers'. This is designed to support Departments, Schools and Centres that wish to match their peer mentors to their mentees before Freshers' Week to support transition into University life.

In June 2012, 98 students from all Departments, Schools, Centres and Societies that participate in the scheme attended one of the four training sessions. An additional 57 students have already booked places for one of the two training sessions before Freshers' Week welcome events. Since June 2012, the revised peer mentor guidance has been accessible online via Student Support webpages and all Scheme Coordinators have of a copy of a printed Peer Mentor Guide. All Scheme Coordinators were invited to provide feedback on the revised edition before it was printed in May 2012.

Reward and recognition for peer mentors has also been enhanced. From 2012-13, peer mentoring hours will not only be recognised by the Students' Union V-Team, but they will also be able to contribute to the Big e Award. Consequently, promoting the opportunity to have a mentor to new students is vital for new students in terms of adapting to University and the trained peer mentors in terms of developing Employability skills.

For the first time, the scheme will be promoted via the 'Your campus guide' to be sent out in each student's pre-arrival pack, the University website, and the Students' Union Freshers' Fair.

### 9.5 Intermission

Student Support staff contributed to an Intermission Process Review and took a range of actions to address some of the issues arising from feedback from interviews with students who were currently intermitting, and also informed by colleagues and findings from research conducted elsewhere. 44.9% of the 421 students who intermitted at some stage during 2006-7 to 2010, returned to study. It seems that it is important that when students take a break from their studies they are informed of the academic, visa, funding, accommodation and social implications of intermitting. Moreover, providing them with the opportunity to clarify their understanding well in advance of returning (more than 6 months) is vital for them being able to make arrangements and begin to prepare for their return. Having contact with someone from within the University appeared to be essential for most students who were interviewed about returning. It is acknowledged that the sample was limited to one postgraduate and 14 undergraduate Home students.

# 10. Future plans and priorities for 2012-13 & beyond

10.1 The following are key priorities for Student Support services for the 2012-13 academic year, and beyond.

- Continue to ensure that Student Support services respond to the needs of students and remain aligned with the strategic direction of the University through listening to and seeking feedback from our clients, and active involvement in relevant University plans.
- Support implementation of new Departmental Student Support policy through provision of materials, training and second-tier advice to Departmental Advisers and Senior Advisers.
- Continue to support and enhance partnerships working to improve student services including support to the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Students' Union Advice Centre, close working relationship with student health services, and implementation of recommendations of the multi faith chaplaincy review.
- Continue to support student retention and success through general and targeted activities and liaison.
- Contribute to working parties and initiatives relating to the student experience including review of arrivals and induction, Student Discipline Working Party, Skills Centre Collaboration Group and the International Student Experience Working Group.
- Consider how to increase awareness further among student groups who are underrepresented in the use of support services to encourage students to make use of services available.
- Co-ordinate implementation of recommendations arising from work started in 2011-12 relating to alcohol use and impact.
- Implement changes to wellbeing service for 2012-13 including expansion of drop-in at Colchester campus to include members of the wellbeing team.
- Take steps to ensure that Student Support services are accurately described and accessible to students, including improvements to web and social media.
- Explore ways to increase capacity and support employability without significant additional resources; including use of interns, graduate trainees and/or frontrunners, where a discernable mutual benefit is identified.

*Student Support  
University of Essex  
September 2012*