

PERFECT PROGRESSION: PROJECT RESEARCH SUMMARY

COLLEGE COLLABORATION FUND (CCF) PROJECT WITH ACTIVATE LEARNING,
BOURNEMOUTH AND POOLE COLLEGE AND NEWBURY COLLEGE



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AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of the project was to research best practice sector-wide to promote progression to Level 3 for current Level 2 students.

The objectives were to identify which methods are successful in progressing Level 2 students, including identification of common issues and pressures and to collaboratively develop toolkits of guidance and resources to implement rapid and effective actions for progressing (**Perfect Progression**) Level 2 learners.

The project followed three workstreams:

1. Research with learners, staff and the wider sector on the issues and solutions for Level 2 retention and progression. (Bournemouth and Poole College (BPC) lead)
2. Collaboratively create high-quality toolkits and resource packs for learners and staff based on research derived from Workstream 1. (Activate learning (AL) lead)
3. Produce final, versions of the toolkits and detailed report for use by colleges nationwide. (Newbury College (NC) lead)

The project involved the development of six toolkits aimed at supporting both students and teachers on the topic of Perfect Progression.

WORKSTREAM 1 - RESEARCH WITH LEARNERS, STAFF AND THE WIDER SECTOR ON THE ISSUES AND SOLUTIONS FOR LEVEL 2 RETENTION AND PROGRESSION.

REVIEW

Student retention and progression are crucial to the long-term success of a Further Education (FE) college, but they are also important factors used to measure performance and increase funding.

Education Encyclopaedia (2022) defines retention within education by stating:

"Retaining a student is fundamental to the ability of an institution to carry out its mission. A high rate of attrition which is the opposite of retention is not only a fiscal problem for schools, but a symbolic failure of an institution to achieve its purpose."

With every student that withdraws or chooses not to progress, the risk of financial or performance troubles grows. Brunsden (2000) explains that these risks can impact in three ways: wasted resources, effort and reputation.

There are a number of impacts that link to low retention rates. These are:

- Low self-esteem of students
- Reduced progression into the next level of education or employment
- Reduced capability through non-attainment of appropriate qualifications
- Societal challenges due to unemployment

These findings are echoed in the White Paper, Skills for Jobs: Lifelong Learning for Opportunity and Growth (Department for Education 2021). This paper states that:

“There are currently significant skills gaps at higher technical levels” and “only 4% of young people achieve a qualification at higher technical level by the age of 25” (2021, p.6).

The White Paper goes on to say that:

“Colleges and independent training providers do not have enough support and incentive to offer high-value training and education. Current funding rules encourage providers to put on cheaper and lower-value courses which can be filled easily”

and yet according to the Code Institute (2021, p.6) FE colleges are seen as an integral part of creating the technical workforce with higher technical skills.

“Colleges are deeply embedded in the local community, so they are key in bridging the digital divide and creating the skilled workforce local employers are looking for.”

These findings are supported by research carried out by the Southern Universities Network (SUN) and the Bournemouth and Poole College (Smith and McDonald, 2019) which show that most students studying at Level 2 plan to enter the workplace – either directly (21%) or through an apprenticeship (43%) but 41% do not know what career they want to pursue. Of those surveyed 20% were concerned that their academic ability (including maths and English level) would stop them from achieving their dreams.

SO HOW CAN WE TURN THE TIDE AND IMPROVE RETENTION AND PROGRESSION ONTO HIGHER LEVELS OF LEARNING?

All partner colleges have identified lower retention before the funding data cut-off date (day 42) and reduced numbers progressing onto higher level qualifications amongst our Level 2 learners.

Below are the findings of research carried out by all three partner colleges and includes cohorts of students studying Level 2 qualifications in the academic year 2021-22 and staff responsible for teaching these students.

The research aims to identify the key concerns and issues that impact on student retention and progression and how equipped staff feel to support students around these issues.

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

At the beginning of the project, focus groups and surveys were conducted with students across the Level 2 cohort from all three colleges to collect their thoughts on a number of topics.

SURVEY RESPONSES

QUANTITATIVE FEEDBACK - CAREERS

- When asked if they had a clear career path in mind, 57% of participants said “Yes”
- When asked if they agreed they knew which qualifications they require to achieve their career goal, 65% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”
- When asked if they agreed they knew which skills they needed to develop to achieve their career goal, 74% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”
- However, when asked what they wanted to achieve from attending college, only 38.5% stated employment as an end goal

QUANTITATIVE FEEDBACK - GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

- When asked if they felt confident in knowing what their options were after their course, 64% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”
- When asked if they agreed they knew where to find job information and careers advice, only 47% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”, with 53% unsure where to get help
- When asked if they agreed they knew who to go to for support about next steps, 66% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”
- When asked if they agreed they knew who to go to for support for challenges in their personal life, 68% of participants said, “Quite True” or “Very True”

These results demonstrate that approximately 30% of students studying a Level 2 programme are not fully aware of their career options or next steps, what support is available and where to go for this support.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK

Comments were invited in the survey from participants who had expressed they felt like leaving or not progressing.

- “...construction course here doesn’t include everything I need and want to do in construction”
- “...I’m just quite unsure on what to do in the future”
- “...wasn’t sure if it was right for me but then found out it definitely was”
- “...because I want to do bricklaying instead of the course I’m doing right now”
- “...I need to earn money”
- “...I don’t know what career I want”

FOCUS GROUP RESPONSES

STUDENT FEEDBACK

Focus groups were also held with Level 2 students across all three colleges with the purpose of exploring why students might leave and not progress. The main reasons students identified were:

- believed they may leave because they were on the wrong course
- didn't enjoy the course they were on
- were undecided on their chosen career
- were unsure where to find job information

When questioned on what they felt the college could do to improve student retention and progression, students said:

- that lessons should be more engaging
- the college should listen to their students
- they would like more support
- they would have liked more cross college activities and events

STAFF FEEDBACK

Focus groups were also carried out with teachers who teach Level 2 students to ascertain what they believed the main issues were with keeping and progressing students and what could be done to support them. The top 4 reasons identified were:

- lack of student motivation/commitment
- students left or chose not to progress because they were on the wrong course
- students left because they found the work too difficult
- students did not realise they would have to resit Maths and or English GCSE

Comments were invited from teachers on what could be done to support their students:

- *"...giving us more hours to train students fully rather than maximising teaching hours"*
- *"...staff training in engaging Level 2 learners"*
- *"...celebration of success"*
- *"...give staff the resources to do their jobs to the best of their ability"*
- *"...right student right course"*
- *"...more support with wellbeing"*
- *"...give teachers more time to develop lessons that engage"*
- *"...better advice and guidance before students start the course"*
- *"...teachers and student alike need an enriching environment"*

The main thoughts of teachers focussed on being given more time to teach and prepare engaging lessons, more support for students and making sure students were on the right course for them.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH

The students interviewed discussed their concerns around a lack of clear career direction and knowing where to go to for careers advice. Students, therefore, chose a course not to pursue a career but for other reasons. The impact was that over 30% had thought about leaving or not progressing because they were on the wrong course.

The lack of desire to stay or progress in students was echoed by teaching staff, 18% identified a lack of motivation or commitment from students as a main consideration for students withdrawing, students making the wrong course choice was also noted as a major factor.

CONSIDERATION

Using our own investigation of the research and existing student voice we identified three key times in the academic year and the key challenges that influence a student and their thoughts around progression.

PROGRESSION ROUTES AND PATHWAYS

At the beginning of the academic year the students must make the choice of what course to study and what career they want to pursue. Many are unaware of their options and choices and feel trapped once they make their initial choice, and some are confused by the many different pathways they can take:

- What do you mean by progression?
- What progression route do I take?
- What skills do I need?
- What career do I want?

MOVING LEARNERS ON TO LEVEL 3

At the end of the first term, thoughts turn to progression and career guidance. What support is available for students and how do they know what to do?

- Am I on the right course?
- What does next year look like?
- What grades do I need?
- What progression routes are available?
- What is an apprenticeship?

PREPARING LEARNERS FOR THEIR NEXT STEPS

Preparing for progression – an emerging theme was that students were not always sure of what to expect when progressing onto a Level 3: For example, students asked:

- What is the difference?
- Do I have to do maths and English?
- What do I need to pass?
- What support is available and how do I get it?
- What exams/assessments are there?
- What days/hours is Level 3?

The investigation found that from this lack of knowledge students felt:

- Anxiety over exams
- Unsure of career options and development

Having reviewed the results and research, we have identified several recommendations to be developed into toolkits to support both students and teachers.

TOOLKITS

The project developed six toolkits using three critical academic periods, induction, pre-Christmas, and post-Easter, along with the staff and student voice. Each period has a toolkit for staff and students. Student Toolkits aim to support students during key elements of their college life, and companion CPD Staff Toolkits help teachers understand the pressures students face and how to support them.

PROGRESSION ROUTES AND PATHWAYS

Student Toolkit

This toolkit aims to explore the many different progression routes and pathways open to students. It helps them explore the skills needed and what help and support is available to them.

Staff Toolkit

This toolkit examines how the Level 2 and Level 3 curriculum are linked, what skills the students need for Level 3 and how are they made aware of this. It also explores the biases teachers may have and how to overcome them.

MOVING LEARNERS ON TO LEVEL 3

Student Toolkit

This toolkit explores the progression timeline: what, when and why to transition onto Level 3 so the student can visualise what they are going to be moving on to after Level 2.

Staff Toolkit

This toolkit looks at how we change/mitigate poor student behaviours rather than use them as a reason not to progress and how well we promote next steps rather than focusing on this year's completion.

PREPARING LEARNERS FOR THEIR NEXT STEPS

Student Toolkit

The final toolkit focusses on helping the students prepare for their next step by understanding what a Level 3 course entails, exploring the differences between Level 2 and 3 and what to expect next.

Staff Toolkit

The final teacher toolkit explores curriculum progression, what barriers there are to student progression and what to do to support student progression.

The toolkits are easily accessible and can be customised to meet your organisational branding and departmental guidelines.

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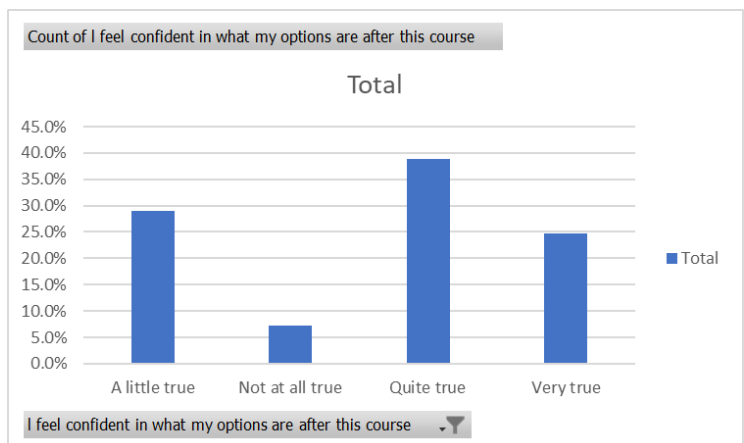
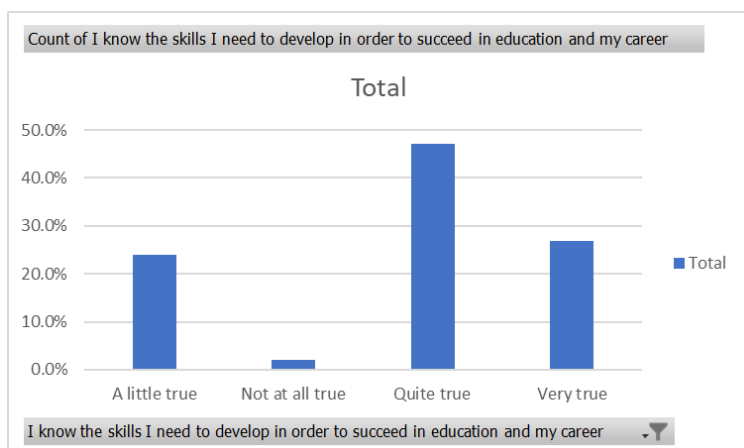
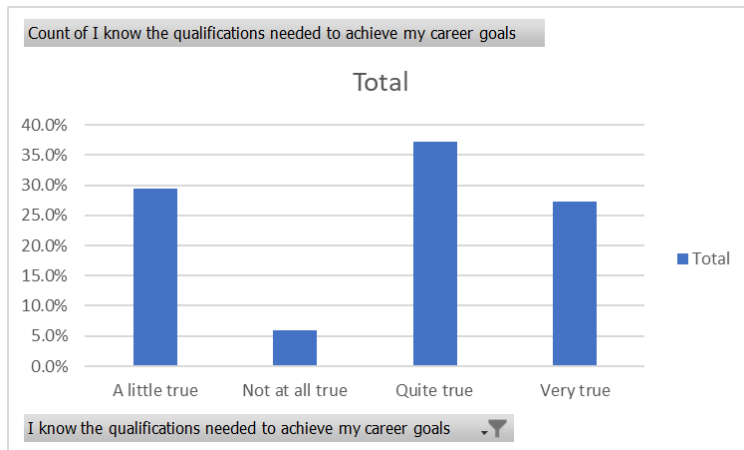
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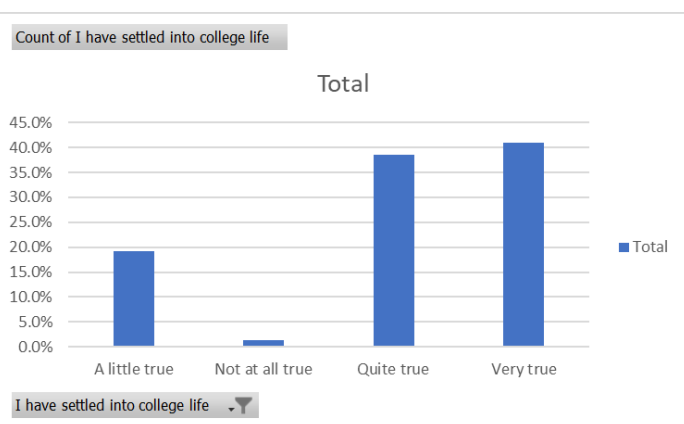
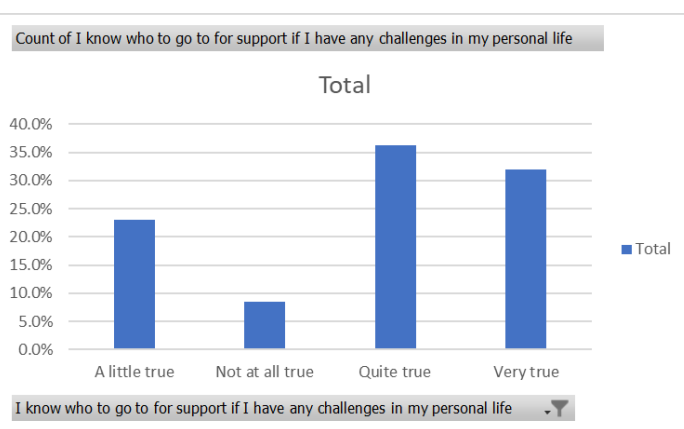
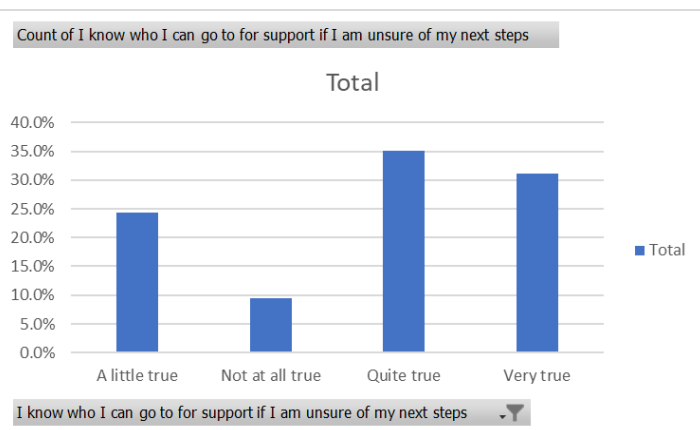
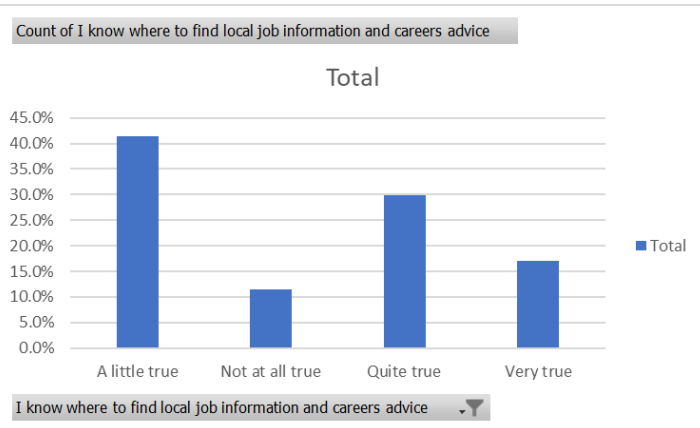
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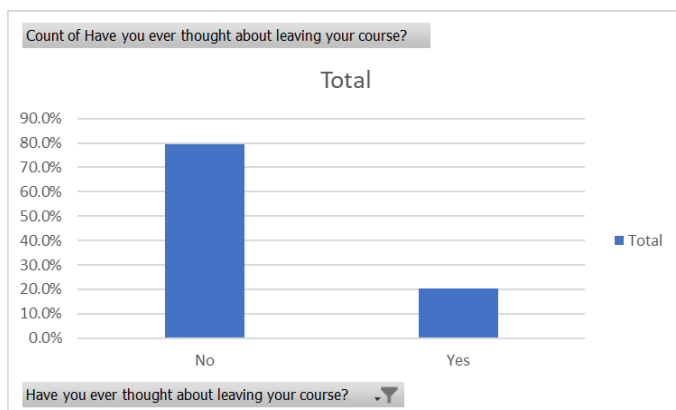
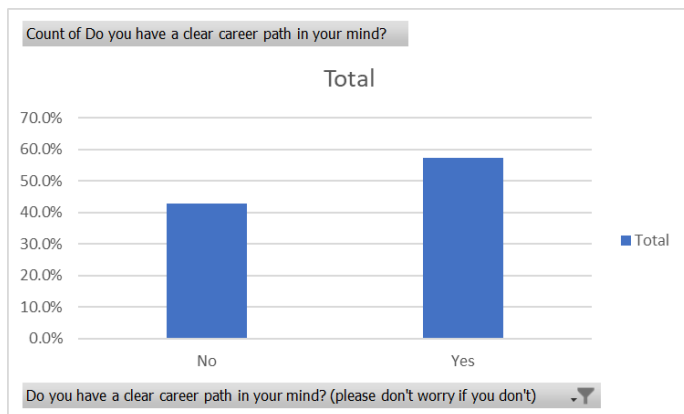
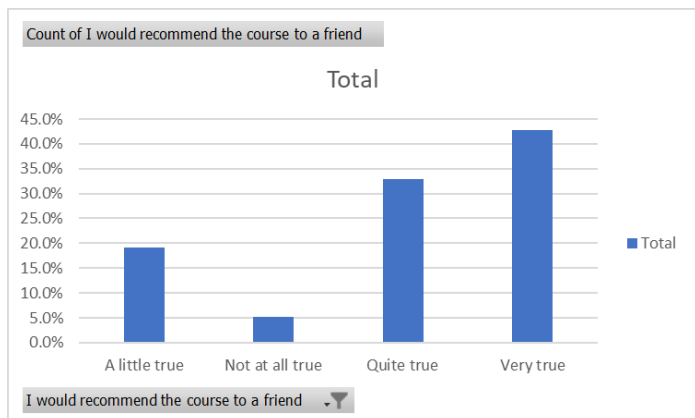
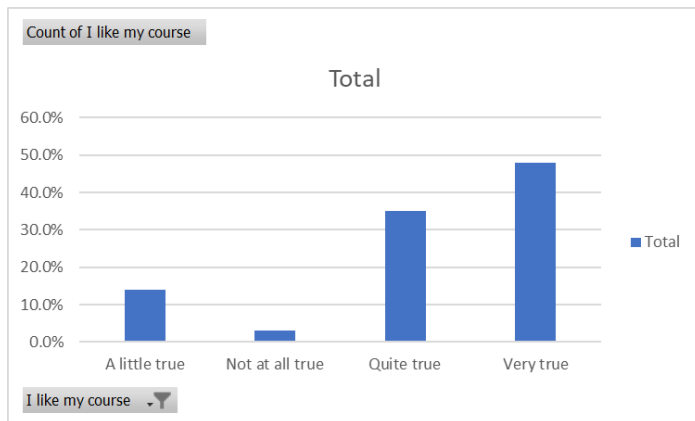
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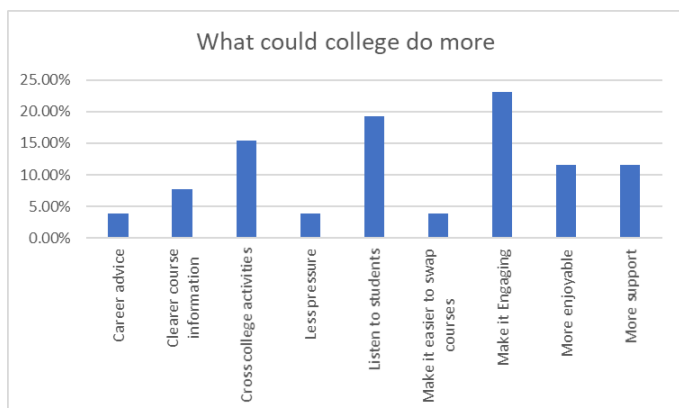
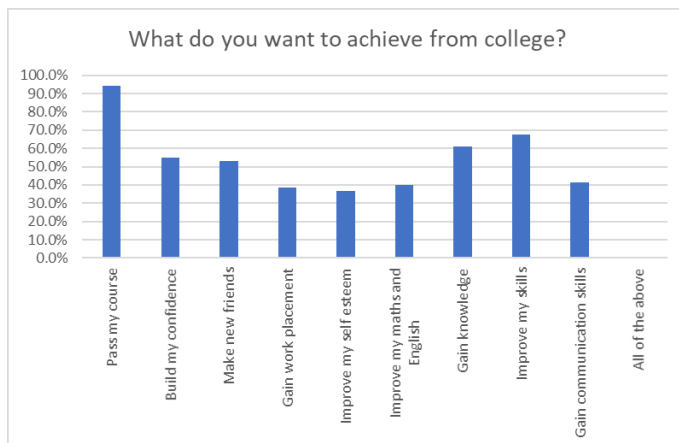
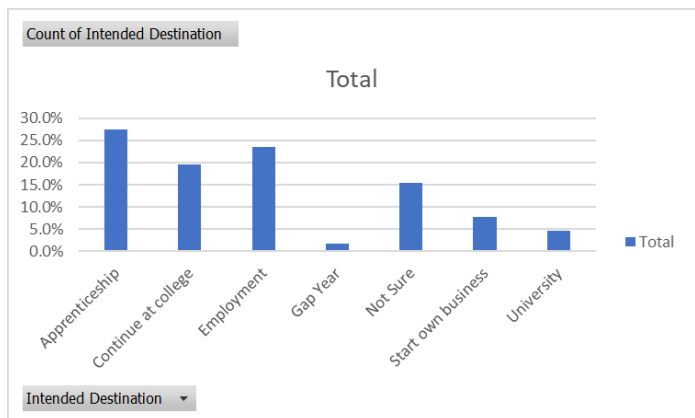
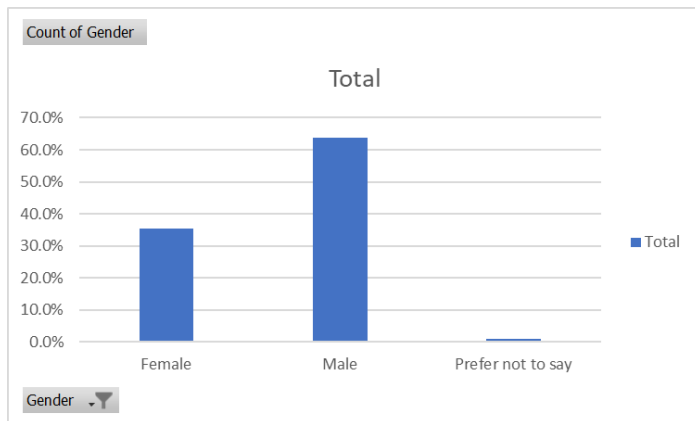
APPENDIX

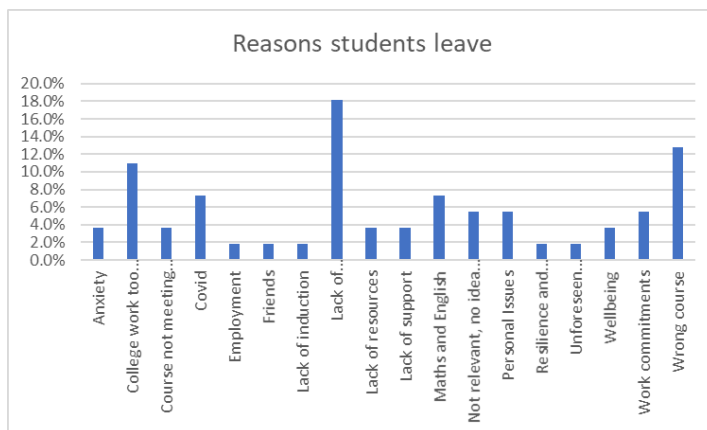
ANALYSIS OF RESULTS









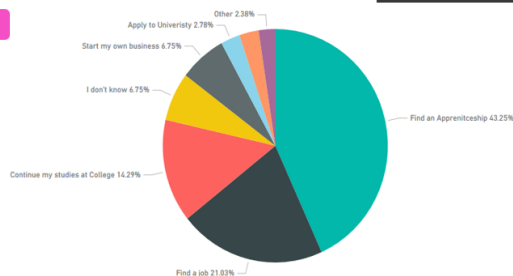


Next step after finishing this course

SUN SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES NETWORK

HEADLINES:

- Most students studying at Level 2 **plan to enter the workplace** – either directly (21%) or through an Apprenticeship (43%)
- University remains in the plans for some (3%) with some acknowledging their next step is to remain at college and pursue their level 3 (14%)
- Almost 7% of students want to start their own business as their next step



Career aspirations

SUN SOUTHERN UNIVERSITIES NETWORK

Top 10 career aspirations

Don't Know	165	41%
Self Employed	46	11%
Apprenticeship	39	10%
Construction	25	6%
Mechanic	16	4%
Military	11	3%
Find a job	8	2%
Hairdressing	6	1%
Media	6	1%
electrician	5	1%

Headlines

- A large proportion (41%) of our Level 2 students do not know what they want to do yet
- Many of our students show the desire to own their own business in their lifetime (11%). How can we prepare them for this? How different are the skills required to that of Employability?
- And many are wanting to progress into either an Apprenticeship (10%) or a job (2%)
- Some students hold high aspirations which include Level 4 learning pathways. For example: Medicine (3), Midwife (3), Social Work (2), Vet (1), Teacher (3), Pharmacy (2), Accountant (1)

Insights

- When students say they want to be self employed their word count describing their future is higher and words used more passionate.
- Some students listed Level 3 as their aspiration, showing a marked difference between those who look short versus long term in their goals.