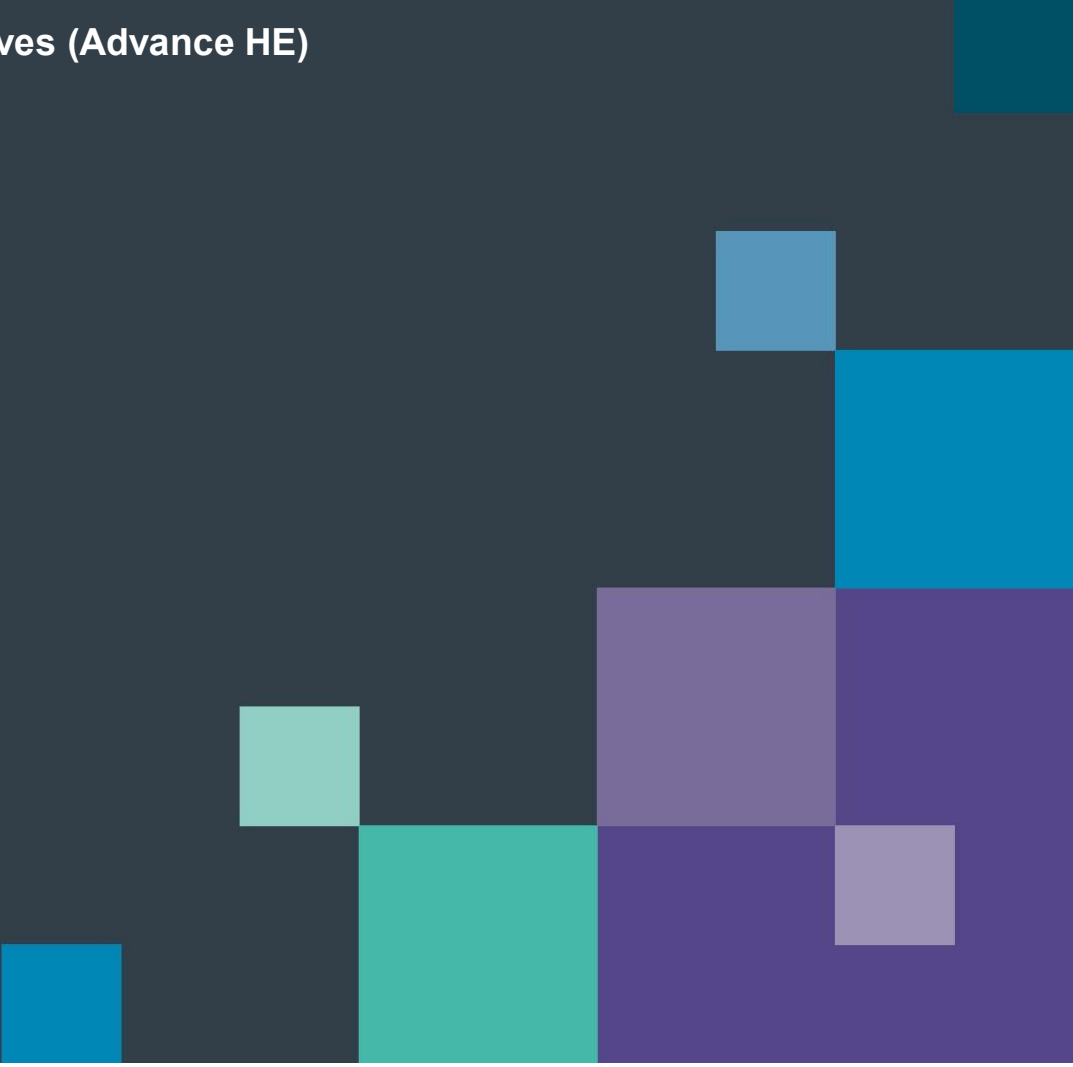


**“AdvanceHE**

**+ Information for participating institutions: Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ)  
National Pilot – Wave 2**

**Dr Michelle Morgan (University of East London) and  
Jonathan Neves (Advance HE)**



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# 1 Introduction

The Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ) has evolved over many years and has been designed to create a roadmap of information on entry on the prior learning experiences, expectations, concerns and expected outcomes of incoming students by a range of student characteristics across all levels of study. This provides invaluable insights enabling institutions to provide targeted support and to develop strategies and policies accordingly. The Undergraduate (UG) and Postgraduate Taught (PGT) PAQs are crafted to take account of the different characteristics of each level of study, enable comparison of responses, and help provide targeted support.

## 2 Background to the PAQ

In the development of the original PAQ (formerly called Entry to Study Survey) over the years, student representatives have been involved in refining and enhancing the content, structure and order of questions. The PAQ was formalised via the 11 University HEFCE funded £2.7m Postgraduate Experience Project (PEP) which was part of the Postgraduate Support Scheme Phase one designed to reenergise the UK postgraduate market (Morgan and Direito, 2016). The Project contributed knowledge and evidence that helped bring in the PG Loan scheme and changed institutional processes.

A number of major reports have been written based on the results, with the latest entitled “Prior learning experience, study expectations of A-Level and BTEC students on entry to university and the impact of Covid19” being submitted as evidence to the Curriculum Review currently taking place. It contained commentaries by 30 notable national experts. Links to these reports can be found at the end.

## 3 Rationale for the PAQ

The PAQ was developed with 3 main aims.

- 1 To assist in the evaluation of the prior learning experiences and future study expectations of students on entry to tertiary level study. (Morgan, 2011; 2013).
- 2 To take entrants through a reflective learning journey to get them to start thinking about their upcoming studies. It is delivered at course level and is a meaningful prearrival/arrival activity that provides a parity of initial academic experience for all students across courses.
- 3 To provide staff across academic and professional support spheres with vital information that will assist them in developing and evolving their provision in real time in order to bridge the perceived and actual skill and knowledge gaps of students.

## 4 Purpose of the national pilot

In spring 2025, Advance HE, University of East London (UEL) and Jisc (working in collaboration as delivery partners) were awarded Office for Students (OfS) Equality of Opportunity (EEO) funding to design and deliver the first national pilot of a PAQ across institutions in England.

The funding is to run until June 2027, covering 2 “waves” of the project and associated promotional and dissemination activity. Wave 1 fieldwork took place in Autumn 2025, with wave 2 fieldwork due to take place in Autumn 2026.

There are a range of overarching objectives for this OfS EEO Innovation funded project.

- + To establish consistency in how the sector collects and acts upon information from students upon arrival around their learning styles, expectations, challenges and requirements.
- + To drive dedicated activity at local level to close the gap between expectations, requirements and the actual experience upon arrival.
- + To provide robust data-led evidence to enable institutions to address inconsistencies in how different groups of students (for example by social background, qualification type, geography and demographics) begin their learning and develop a platform to progress to good outcomes.
- + To create a fuller understanding across the sector of the Pre-arrival experience, providing evidence for wider policy making and cross-sector activity.
- + Support providers in delivering a range of practical outcomes across different student groups, including improved wellbeing and belonging, improved continuation and attainment. Earlier and preventative intervention should further contribute to increased progression to further study or employment.

## **5 Key Benefits of Participation**

- + Free participation for the duration of the project (until June 2027)<sup>1</sup>.
- + Institutions will receive their own results in a fast turnaround after the close of the survey for their own analysis.
- + Institutions will receive detailed benchmark analysis by Advance HE similar to that currently provided for institutions participating in PRES and PTES<sup>2</sup> which will focus on providing anonymised benchmark comparison across all participating institutions.
- + Resources will be provided on how to share the key relevant findings with students, and staff.
- + Membership of a facilitated participation network to access support and advice from peers.
- + Free conference attendance for each year of participation, to share best practice.
- + Access to sector specific reports and published papers based on the overall findings.

## **6 Requirements of participating institutions**

- Confirm participation by signing and returning the required form at least 6 weeks prior to the commencement of fieldwork
- Participate in the relevant project meetings of the project.
- Participate in the UG and PGT versions of the surveys (where appropriate).

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<sup>1</sup> Institutions are required to hold a valid Jisc Online Surveys licence (paid for by institutions directly) for the duration of their participation.

<sup>2</sup> Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES) & Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES).

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- Distribute and launch their own version of the survey using Jisc Online Surveys (for which institutions will need to hold a valid Jisc licence).<sup>1</sup>
- Actively promote participation.
- Distribute the key findings to staff and students along with timely support and advice.
- Produce a case study for each year of participation showing the impact of the use of data and change in practice.
- Participate in the dialogical conference at the end of each year of participation.
- Use the data to inform Access and Participation Plans.

## **7 Participation**

We anticipate working with 20-30 providers in England for each wave/year of the survey.

Should the volume of expressions of interest exceed these numbers, the delivery partners reserve the right to increase the size of the cohort (as resources allow) and/ or make decisions around final participation in order to achieve a cohort that is as representative as possible.

## **8 Content of the PAQ**

The project used as its starting point the PAQ designed and developed through the extensive work of Dr Michelle Morgan. This was refined through steering groups in preparation for wave 1 of the national pilot. The questions for wave 2 will be largely based on the version used for wave 1.

The questions currently asked in the sections listed below are designed not to be triggering but designed to be meaningful, safe and available (Khan, 1990). However, respondents are advised that they will be asked to think about any concerns they may be having at the time they complete the questionnaire. The questions contribute key findings that can inform an institution's work across the eighteen themes of the University Mental Health Charter.

The current sections of the PAQs are as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> [Online Surveys - Powerful surveys for researchers, educators, and privacy-first organisations](#)

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- + Previous study qualifications
- + Previous study experience
- + Motivations and expected challenges of study being undertaken
- + Student expectations
- + Current learning expectations
- + Attitudes towards the level of study being undertaken
- + Demographic/classification details

## 9 The survey delivery platform and ethics

The questionnaire will be delivered in a similar way as Advance HE's PTES and PRES surveys. Institutions will run their own version of the questionnaires separately using the Jisc Online Surveys platform, at a time that suits them within an overall survey window for wave 2 which will run from **September – November 2026**.

Advance HE/Jisc will share the master survey template, and participating institutions then create their own version from this template, adding their own titles, privacy statements etc. Institutions are responsible for distributing their survey to their student population. Detailed support and guidance will be provided for this stage.

Final data will be merged by Advance HE and Jisc and each institution will be provided with benchmark analysis. Institutions will prepopulate student information into their dataset to link to student IDs.

Ethical approval is be provided by the University of East London and will be in accordance with rigorous and ethical research practice. Advance HE has also set up a data handling agreement that institutions will sign up to, which assigns participating institutions as the data controllers and Advance HE & Jisc will be data processors.

## 10 Wave 1 summary

Wave 1 of the PAQ ran successfully, gathering responses from over 5,000 undergraduates and over 2,000 postgraduates.

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Participating institutions received their results in real time in the Jisc platform, enabling instant dissemination and action.

Detailed benchmarking has also been provided by Advance HE enabling each institution to compare to the full sample, both overall and in terms of specific demographics.

Presentation of the key findings (anonymised by institution) have been delivered at a number of events across the section in early 2026, including Jisc Data Matters, AMOSSHE Winter Conference and Explorance Student Voices.

A full sector report showcasing the key findings and learnings is due to be published (open access to all) in early April 2026.

A dialogical conference to discuss the key learnings and showcase best practice is scheduled for 23 April, at the University of East London.

## 11 Wave 2 timeframe

The funded pilot project comprises 2 full waves. Wave 1 has already taken place in Autumn 2025 and wave 2 will take place in a fieldwork window from **September – November 2026**. Institutions will have a choice of specifically when to run the survey, within the overall survey window.

These timescales will provide opportunity for institutions to feedback the headline findings to new students along with advice. It is suggested that institutions pre-prepare this in advance of the survey happening. The current examples used by UEL will be shared.

Wave 2 Project Timings	Key Activities
April 2026	Publication of Wave 1 sector report Institution case studies data collection – post-pilot Year 1 dissemination conference <b>Call for participation for wave 2</b>
May-June 2026	Final confirmation of wave 2 participation
June-August 2026	Institutions setting up ready to participate
September-November 2026	Wave 2 survey window
November 2026-January 2027	Institutions receive initial results directly in the Jisc platform Production and distribution of tailored

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	benchmarking reports for participating institutions
February-April 2027	Preparation and publication of Wave 2 sector report Institution case studies data collection
May 2027	Wave 2 dissemination conference
June 2027	Dissemination activities (i.e. webinars, case studies published)

## Appendix: References and further reading

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Morgan, M. and Direito, I. (2016) *Widening and sustaining postgraduate taught (PGT) STEM study in the UK: a collaborative project. Creating change through understanding expectations and attitudes towards PGT study, experiences and post-study outcomes from the perspective of applicants, students, universities and employers*. Available at:

[https://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/library/PG\\_documents/Postgraduate\\_Experience\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/library/PG_documents/Postgraduate_Experience_Report_Final.pdf)

# Contact us

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Our strategic goals to enhance confidence and trust in HE, address inequalities, promote inclusion and advance education to meet the evolving needs of students and society, support the work of our members and the HE sector.

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