



# RVCSU Student Experience Survey

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## Executive Summary

### Why?

The pandemic has affected everyone's life in different ways and to different extremes. Whilst it is inevitable that many frustrations are born out of a desire for things to return to normal (and the fact that this is impossible at present), we recognise that there are many legitimate frustrations which we are glad to have objectified through this survey.

### What did we discover?

Approximately a third of the student body completed the survey. The summary of the findings (relating to this academic year) are as follows:

- A third of students have approached the College or SU for support, mostly through the Advice Centre (63%), and also their personal tutor (57%).
- Importantly, around 50% felt they had inadequate support. Postgraduates were the most (75%) satisfied with their support, undergraduate biosciences students were the least satisfied (43%).
- For nursing, postgraduate taught and research, and undergraduate students, around 30-50% of students felt confident they were meeting their learning objectives.
- Many students were dissatisfied with communication from the College
- Around 60% of students have faced increased financial pressure over the last academic year.
- Many students felt online exams have caused them additional stress, with only 9-15% feeling less or no additional stress.



- Depending on course, between 60-75% experienced problems with the proctoring of exams. 27% of those encountering problems with their exam did not have their issue(s) resolved before the end of the exam.
- Importantly, 7% of students reported not receiving, or having difficulty receiving their required exam accommodations.

Respondents were also invited to leave comments. More than a third of students brought up mental health, highlighting the importance of mental health support for students during the current crisis. The majority of negative comments were related to Proctorio (exam proctoring software), but communication and tuition fees were also topics that featured highly.

### **What next?**

We have already met with senior staff members of the college to present and discuss the survey results. We expect some changes to be made immediately, but issues that we are pursuing with renewed focus include:

- Special exam arrangements for online exams we believe are currently discriminating against some students. These should be reviewed and improved so that no student is unfairly disadvantaged when taking online exams.
- Communication between the College and students should be improved, particularly regarding online exam arrangements and support.
- We are also encouraging RVC to seek alternatives to Proctorio given the high numbers of problems encountered with its use.
- Pastoral care and wellbeing services should be reviewed to ensure that students receive adequate and timely support.
- This should also extend to financial support, and the SU is calling for a freeze on tuition fees

### **Support**

If you have been affected by any of the topics discussed in this survey, please don't stay silent. We have provided a non-exhaustive list of contacts below – please utilise them.

- [RVCSU](#) – all of our Officers are here to help you, including Officers dedicated to welfare and equality & diversity who can support you with these issues.
- [The Advice Centre](#) – they provide all kinds of support including mental health and disability support
- The [University of London Housing](#) Service – they assist with problems with private renting
- [Money Matters](#) – they give advice and support regarding finances, and can also support applications to the [Student Support Fund](#) and the new [Digital Support Fund](#)



Thank you all for taking part in this survey. By sharing your experiences, you not only guide our positions as an SU, but also support us in taking these positions to the College. We have read every single comment left for us, and it has made clear the range and depth of the impact of the pandemic on our student body.

Yours sincerely

Quentin Wedmore  
RVCSU President 2020/21



## Methods

The survey was run over 3 days (lunchtime Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> to lunchtime Monday 25<sup>th</sup> of January 2021) as an action point from the RVCSU Council meeting of Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> of January. The survey was shared via email and social media.

The majority of questions were ordinal, and open comments were coded based on positive, negative or mixed content and on the content themes for broad analysis.

Reduced n-way ANOVA models were run with the outcomes of adequate support and satisfactory problem resolution to identify services or exam problems that were more or less likely to have positive outcomes. Chi square testing was used to identify whether students who had already taken online exams reported less stress over their exams. Open comment themes were compared with positive, negative and mixed outcomes using Chi-square tests (Bonferroni corrected thresholds).

## Response

Overall response rate was approximately 30.4% (716 responses). Response rate for all courses with responses was >10%, with highest rates between 75-100%, and a mean response rate by course of 32.9%. Notably, some PGT/PGMed courses did not respond (PGDip Vet Ed, MSc Vet Ed, GradDip ELR, CertAVP or PG Vet Nursing courses).

Courses were categorised into 6 course types: Nursing, undergraduate biology courses (UGBio), undergraduate medicine courses (UGMed), postgraduate medicine courses (PGMed), postgraduate research (PGR) or postgraduate taught (PGT). Numbers of responses and response rate by course type are below in Table 1.

<i><b>Table 1: Number of responses and response rate by course type</b></i>		
<b>Course Type</b>	<b>Number of responses</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>
Nursing	43	21.61
PGMed	12	12.63
PGR	34	24.44
PGT	25	35.71
UGBio	137	40.05
UGMed	465	31.06

Notably, the response from PGR, PGT and PGMed students was greater than the 2020 Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES; covers PGT and PGMed) and Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES; covers PGR).

## Results

### Student Support

Across all students, 30.4% (218/716) had approached the College or SU for support this academic year (Figure 1). Fewer PGR and PGMed students appeared to approach than other course types.



Have you approached the College or SU for support during this academic year so far?

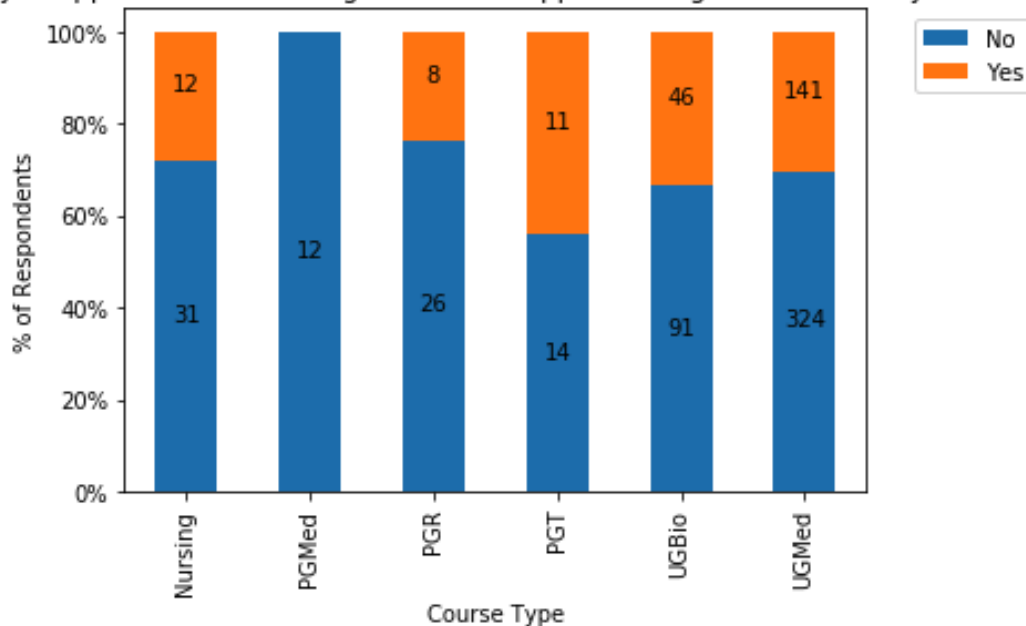


Figure 1: Percentage of students by course type that approached the College or SU for support, annotated with the number of individual respondents per group.

The 218 students who had approached the College or SU for support were then asked further questions regarding this. The majority of students seeking support approached the Advice Centre (63.3%), with their personal tutor a close second (57.3%) (Figure 2).

3.a If so, which of the following?

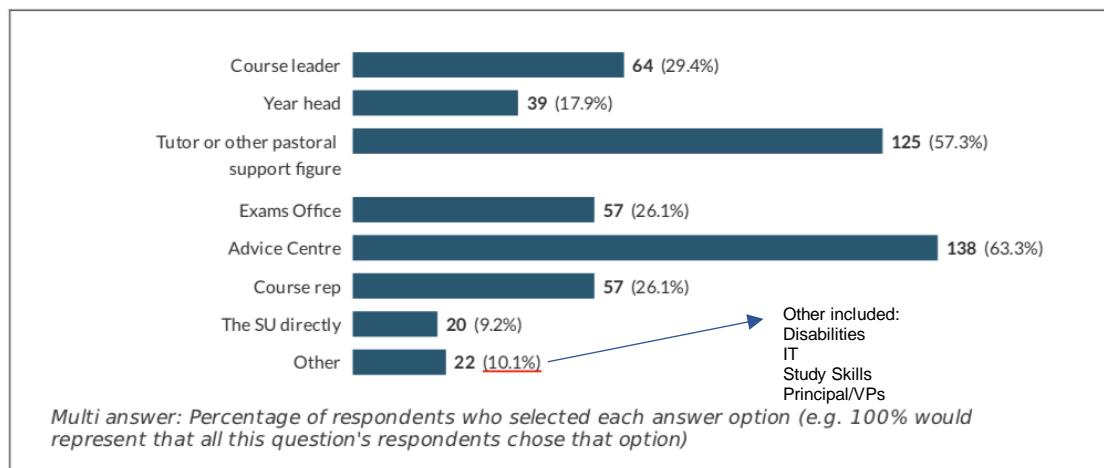


Figure 2: Services/figures that students approached for support.

PGRs were distinct in that the majority contacted one service/individual on one occasion – other course types were contacting more frequently or more services (Figure 3).

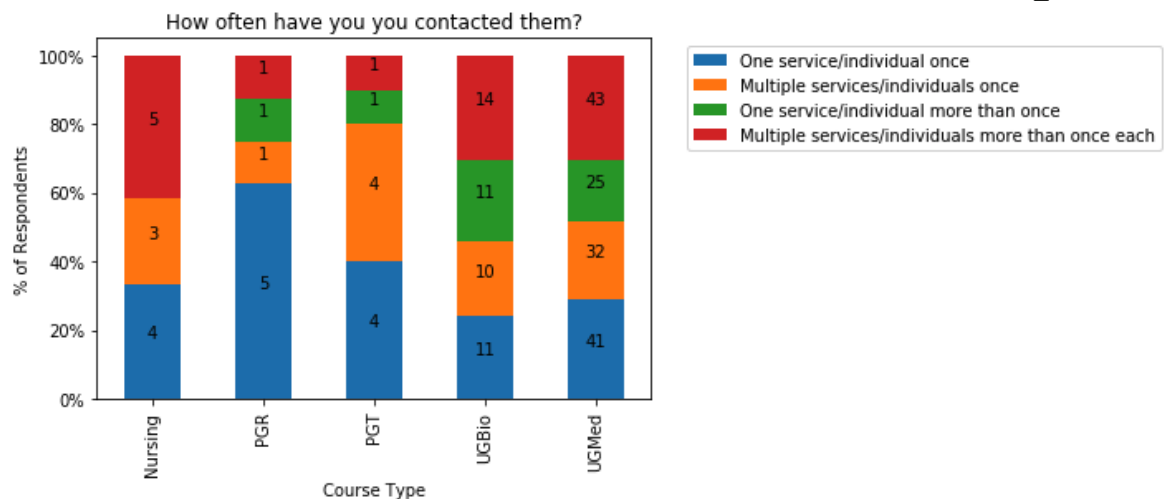


Figure 3: How many and how frequently students approached support services/figures by course type, annotated with the number of individual respondents by group.

When students were asked if they felt their support was adequate, again PGRs were distinct with 75% responding ‘yes’. Other course types returned between 43 and 50% ‘yes’. Broad themes described in ‘other’ included mixed results by service (‘Yes & No’), resolution of problems separately without any personal reply, and slow response or high student effort to gain a response. These are broken down below (Figure 4).

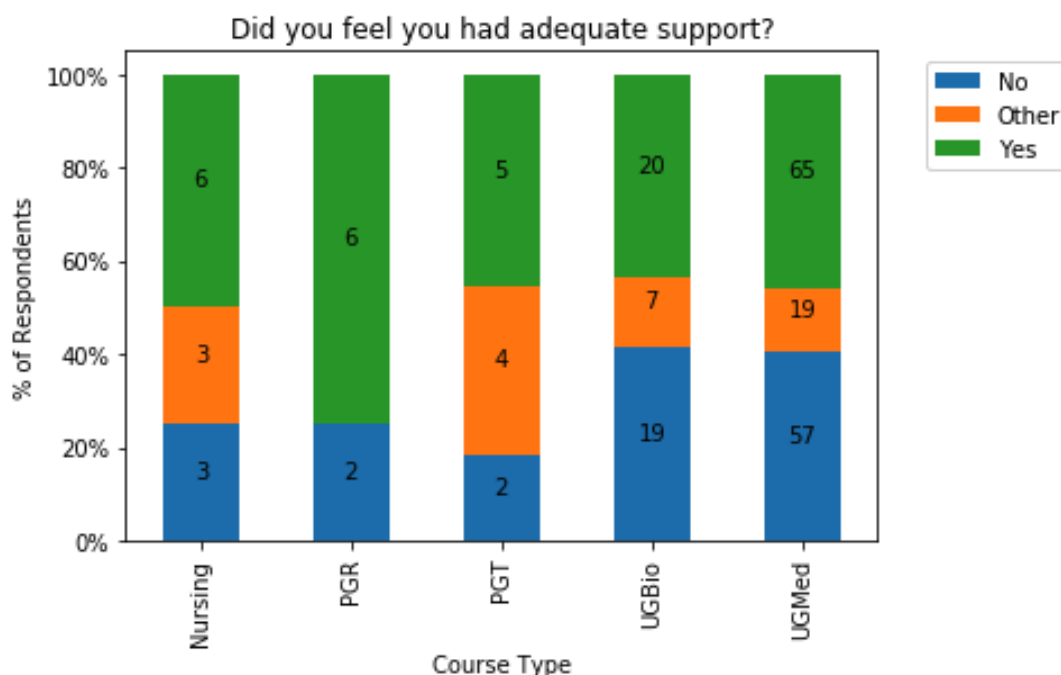


Figure 4: Percentage of students feeling they received adequate support by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

At this point, respondents were routed to re-join the main survey questions.

## Associations

To identify any factors associated with better or worse support outcome, association analysis was run as described in the methods. In the first reduced model, frequency of contact was significantly associated with adequate support ( $p=0.000004$ ) (Figure 5).

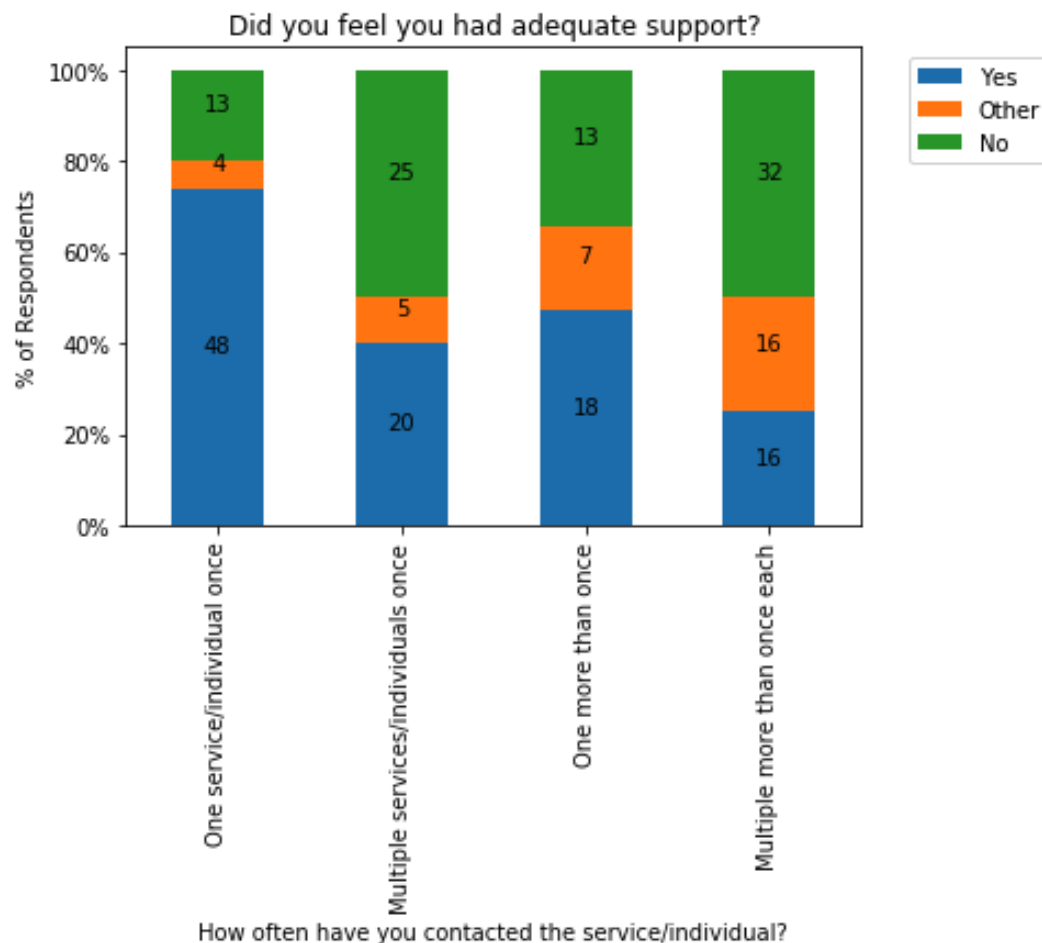


Figure 5: Student feelings of adequate support broken down by frequency and number of services contacted. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

In the second model, contacted services were analysed. Services that remained significant were tutor, course rep, and other (respectively  $p=0.033$ ,  $p=0.025$ ,  $p=0.036$ ). Contacting these three were associated with a poorer support outcome. It is to be noted that sample size was small for those contacting other services.



Table 2: Services that were significantly associated with adequate support outcome				
		Did you feel you had adequate support?		
Services contacted		Yes	No	Other
Tutor/pastoral support figure	Yes	50	55	20
	No	52	28	13
Course rep	Yes	17	26	14
	No	85	57	19
Other (incl Finance, Accom, ROVER, etc)	Yes	0	3	1
	No	102	80	32

### Meeting Learning Outcomes

Students were then asked two Likert scale questions, the first of which regarded their confidence in achieving their learning outcomes (Figure 6). No PGMed students disagreed with this statement, and disagreement was lower in PGRs (21%) than other course types (37-47%). Agreement was lowest and disagreement highest in UGBio students (31% agreement and 47% disagreement).

I feel confident that I can achieve my learning outcomes in the current mode of course delivery

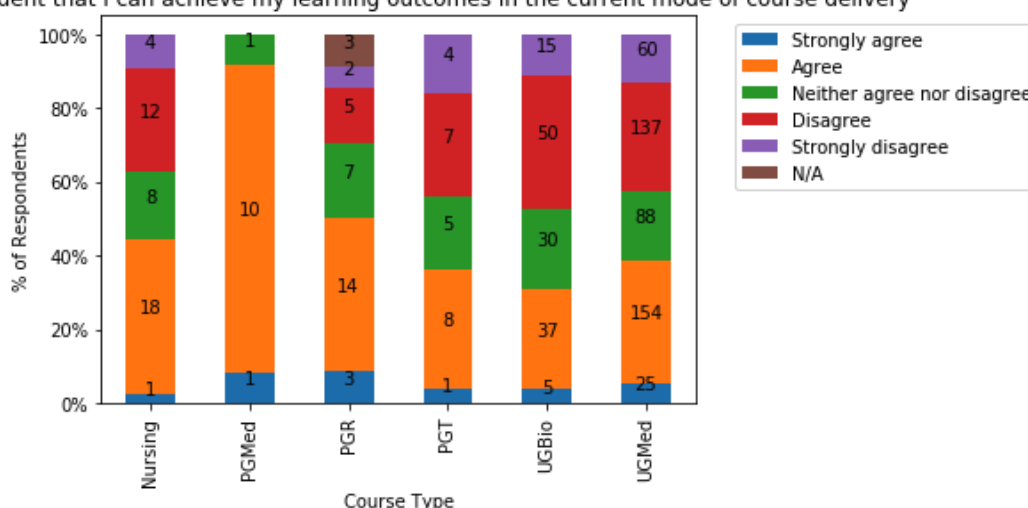


Figure 6: Student confidence that they will achieve their learning objectives. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

### Communication from College

The second Likert scale question regarded student satisfaction with College communication (Figure 7). Again, PGMed and PGR students had the highest agreement (respectively 75% and 68%) and lowest disagreement (8% and 24%). Other course types varied between 31-53% agreement and 29-48% disagreement.





I am satisfied with the communication from the College during the pandemic

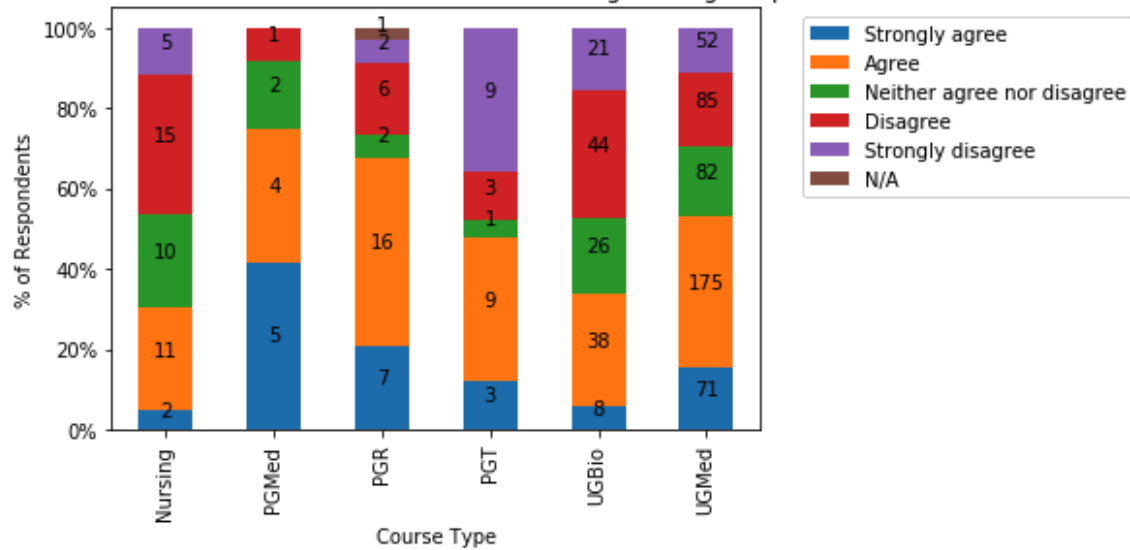


Figure 7: Student satisfaction with communication from College. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

## Finances

Students were then asked a multiple option question, asking whether they have faced additional living costs, reduced income or neither. Overall, 57.7% of students reported either additional living costs, reduced income, or both, with 34.4% encountering additional living costs and 37.6% facing reduced income. PGMed and Nursing students were the least affected, with PGR students comparable to UGBio and UGMed, and PGT the most impacted.

Have you faced additional living costs, reduced income or both this academic year due to the pandemic?

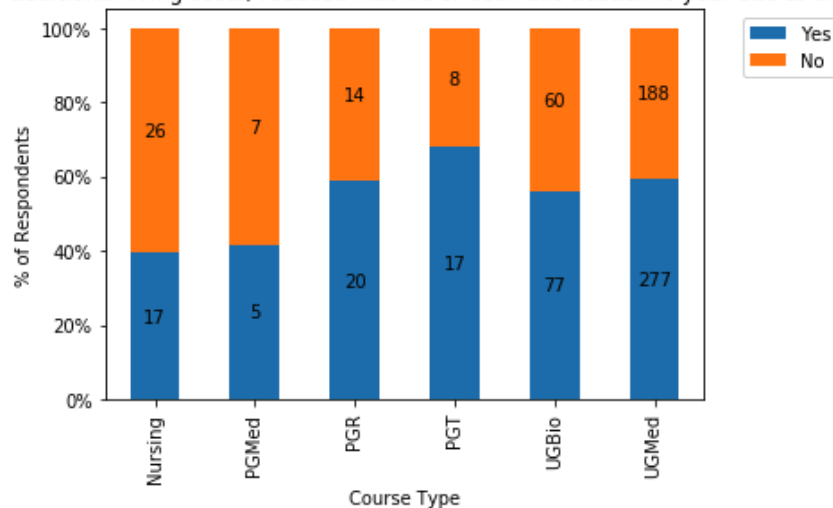


Figure 8: Students by course type that have experienced financial impacts due to the pandemic. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

## Online Exams

We asked students whether they felt any additional stress regarding online exams versus in-person exams. This question was structured to be comparable to previous SU surveys regarding stress. The majority of PGMed and PGR students do not take online



exams, but of those who do, 50% of PGMed and 61.5% of PGRs either felt no additional stress or less stress over their exams, with the reminder feeling mild additional stress.

The remaining course types present a different picture, with 24-30% feeling extreme additional stress regarding online exams and only 9-15% feeling less or no additional stress (Figure 9).

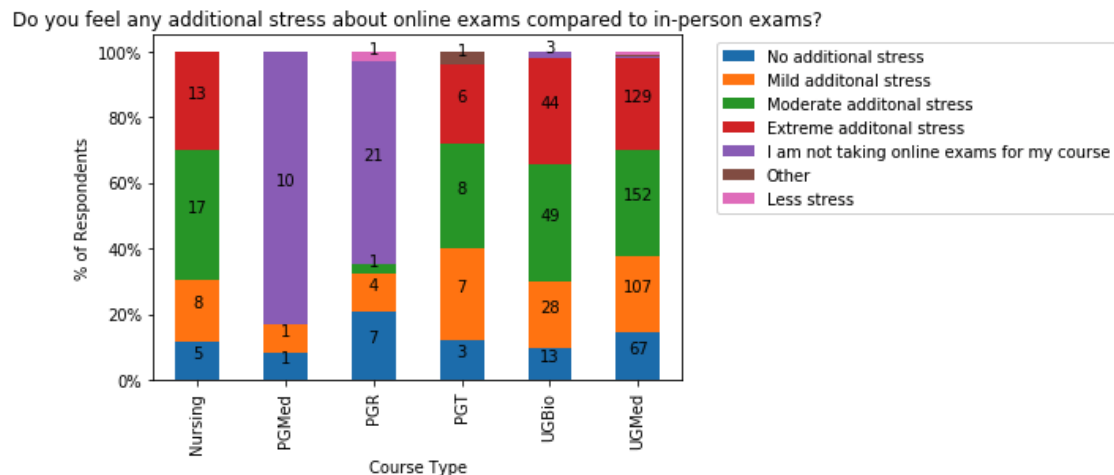


Figure 9: Student stress regarding online exams by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

We asked students whether they had undertaken any proctored exams this year, of which 62.4% (447) students had. Of those that had, we then asked a series of questions regarding their exam experiences – only PGT, UGBio and UGMed had >5 individuals reporting they had, so these course types were examined further.

Firstly, we asked a multiple option question asking if students had experienced any of a list of potential problems during their exams. Those who had not taken any online exams were not shown any further questions on this topic. 36.2% of students taking proctored online exams had not experienced any problems, between 25-40% by course type with PGTs encountering the most problems (Figure 10).

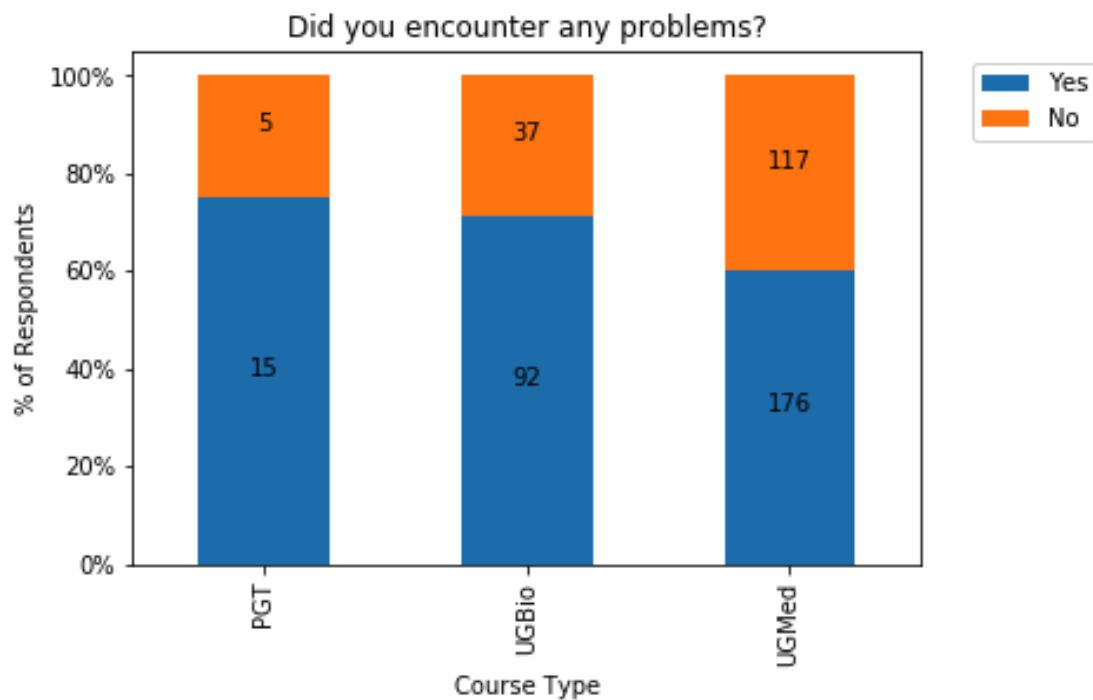


Figure 10: Percentage of students experiencing problems with their online proctored exams by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

A breakdown of which problems students reported encountering is below (Figure 11). The most commonly experienced issues were connectivity issues (30.2% of students) and issues with Proctorio software (33.3%). However, notably 7.2% of students reported not receiving or having difficulty receiving their required exam accommodations. Figures provided to the SU indicate approximately 16% of students at RVC report a disability, and whilst all of these may not receive accommodations, this indicates a minimum of 45% of those potentially eligible for accommodations have had difficulty receiving them in the current circumstances.

#### 7.a Did you encounter any of the following problems?

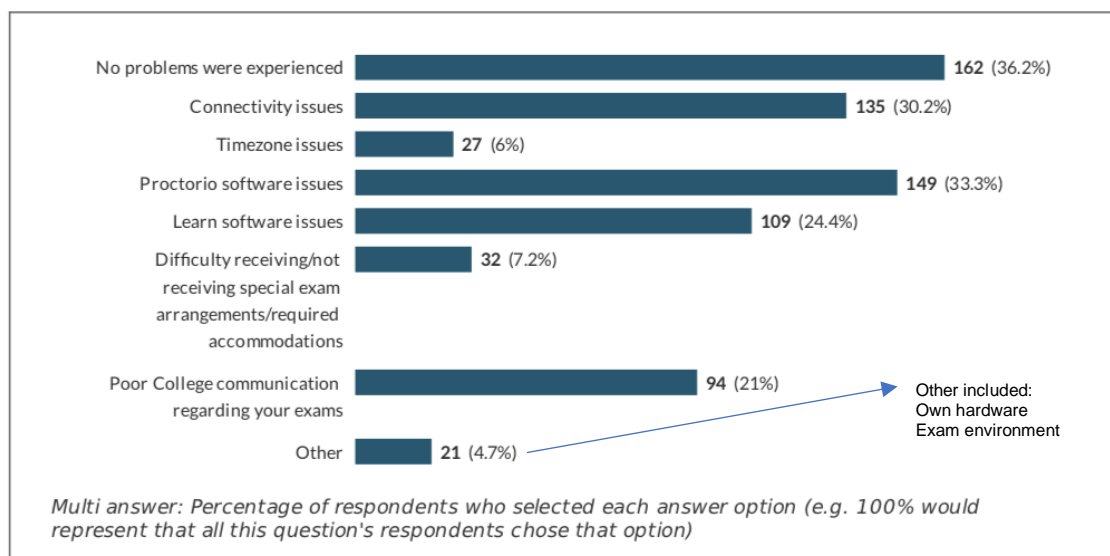


Figure 11: Problems encountered by students during online proctored exams.



Overall, 43.7% of students had their problems resolved either prior to the exam beginning or within ten minutes during the exam. However, 27.2% either did not have the problem resolved by the end of the exam or never had the problem resolved. UGMed students had slightly better resolution times than the other two course types (Figure 12).

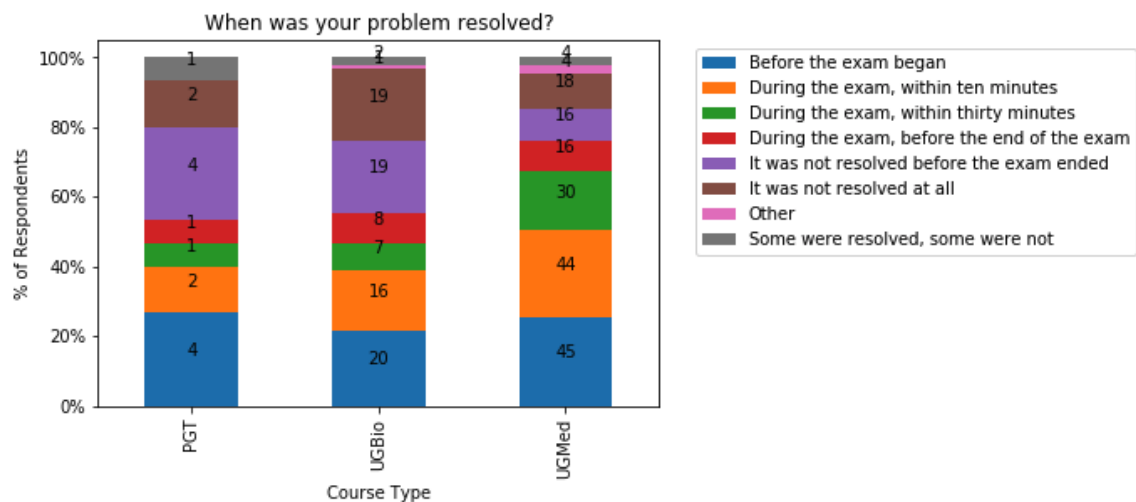


Figure 12: Problem resolution time by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

We then asked students whether they were satisfied with the resolution of their problem. Overall, 58% said 'yes' and 42% said 'no', with UGMed students generally happier with problem resolution than other course types (Figure 13).

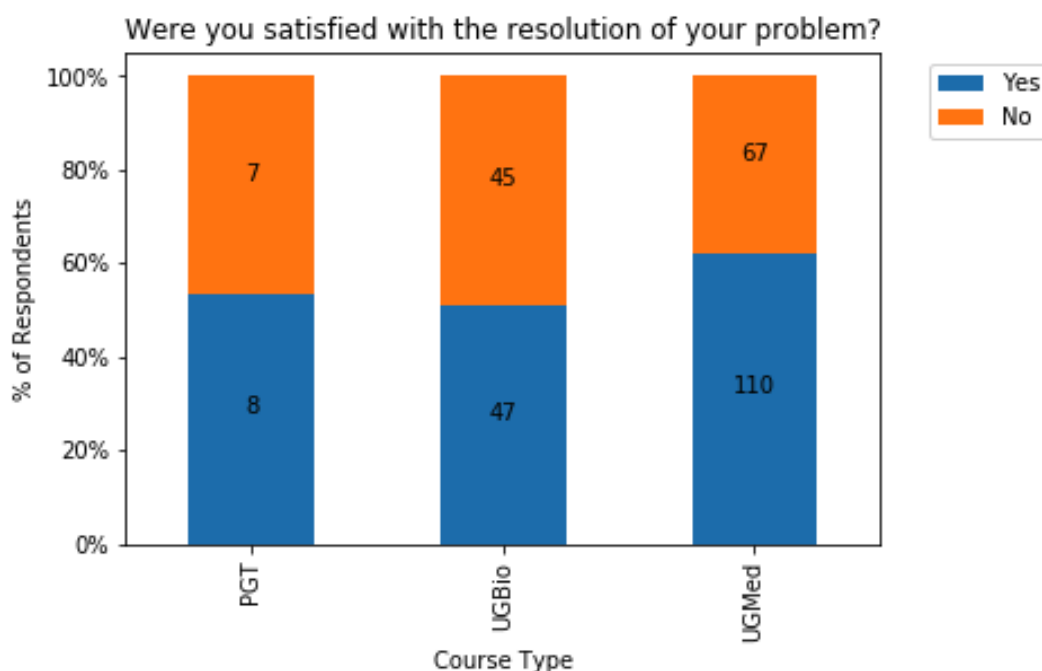


Figure 13: Student satisfaction with their problem resolution by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.



## Associations

Chi square testing was used first to identify whether students who had already sat online exams reported less stress (ie that students are apprehensive over an unknown system). This did not appear to be the case, with very similar distributions across stress levels between those who had and had not yet sat exams (Figure 14).

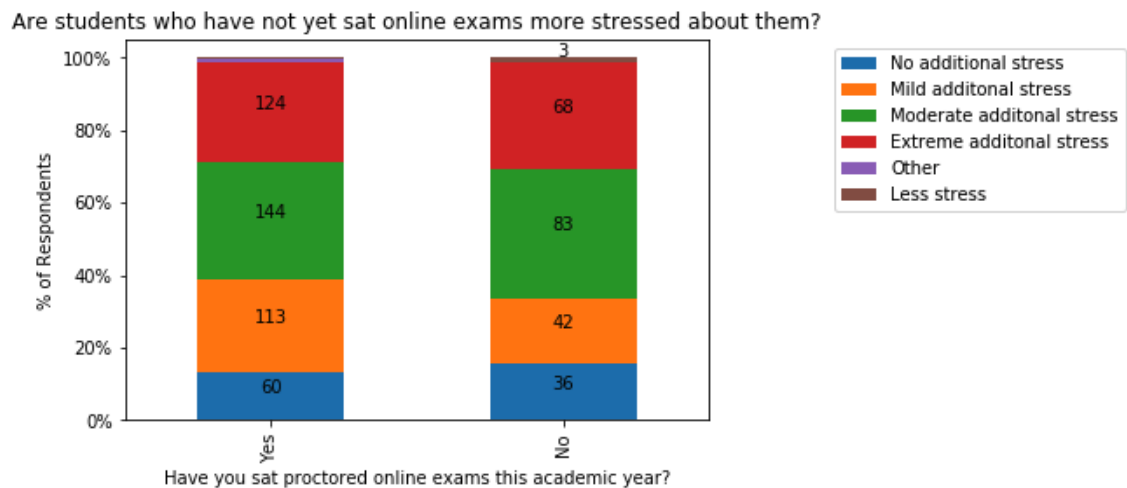


Figure 14: Student stress levels around online exams by whether these students have already sat exams. Students who reported not sitting exams as part of their course were excluded. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

To identify any factors associated with better or worse support outcome, association analysis was run as described in the methods. In the first reduced model, speed of resolution was significantly associated with satisfaction with resolution ( $p=2.13e^{-16}$ ) (Figure 15).

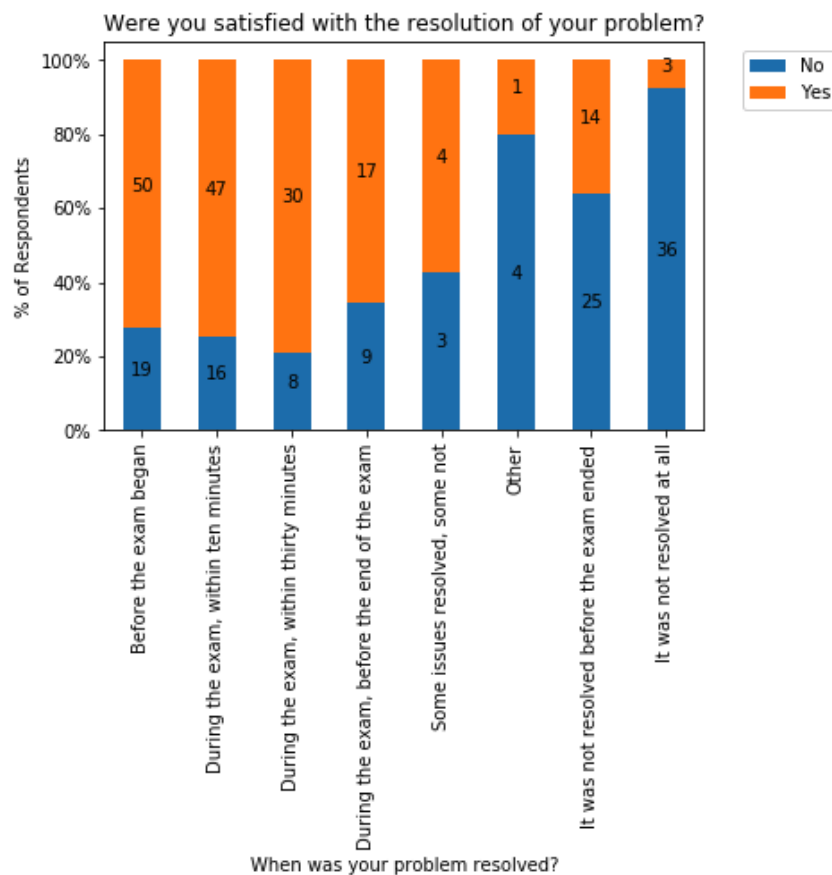


Figure 15: Students satisfaction with exam problem resolution by the time problem was resolved in. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

In the second model, problems encountered were analysed. Problems that remained significant were exam accommodations, poor communication, and exam environment (respectively  $p=7.05e^{-4}$ ,  $p=6.79e^{-7}$ ,  $p=4.46e^{-2}$ ). Experiencing these issues was associated with a poorer problem resolution outcome, but small sample size for environment was noted.

Table 3: Exam issues that were significantly associated with the outcome of problem resolution satisfaction			
		Were you satisfied with the resolution of your problem?	
Problem		Satisfied	Not satisfied
Difficulty receiving/not receiving special exam arrangements	Yes	8	24
	No	158	96
Poor College communication regarding exams	Yes	34	60
	No	132	60
Exam environment issues	Yes	1	3
	No	165	117



## Open Comments

266 students (of 716; 37%) left open comments. These were then categorised by theme. PGR and PGMed students were less likely to leave open comments than other course types (Figure 16). The majority of comments were negative, but it is notable that undergraduate student course types were more likely to leave positive or mixed comments than postgraduates.

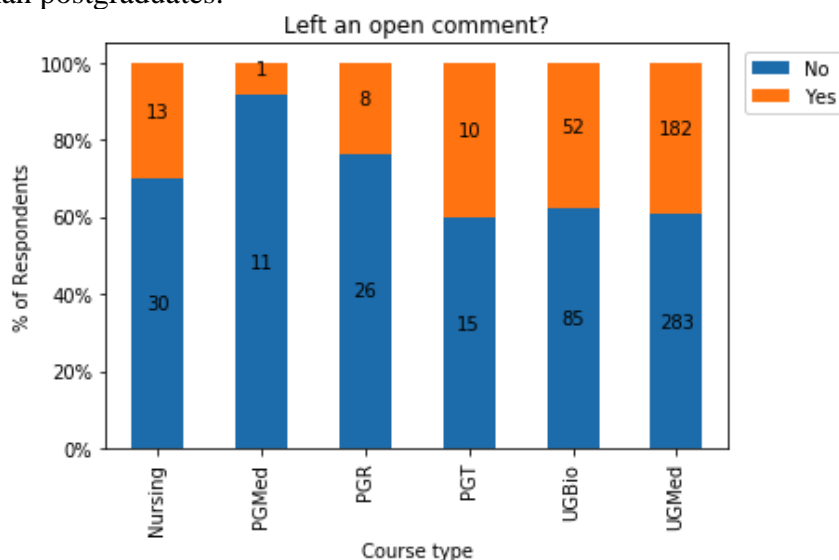


Figure 16: Percentage of students leaving open comments by course type. Numbers of individual respondents per group is annotated.

Chi square tests were used to identify themes associated with positive, negative or mixed comments, with significant themes only associated with positive comments. Comments regarding the SU were significantly more likely to be positive whilst comments regarding mental health were significantly less likely to be positive.

Table 4: Breakdown of open comment themes				
Theme	Number of negative comments	Number of positive comments	Number of mixed comments	Total (as % of total comments)
Proctorio	81	5	25	111 (42.5%)
Mental health	71	1*	23	95 (27.8%)
Communication	51	3	20	75 (35.7%)
Tuition fees	22	0	6	28 (10.5%)
Disabilities	16	0	4	20 (7.5%)
International students	16	0	1	17 (6.4%)
Lab access	12	0	2	14 (5.3%)
The Advice Centre	7	0	6	13 (4.9%)
Course reps	3	0	2	5 (1.9%)
The SU	1*	3*	4	8 (3.0%)
<b>Total (as % of total)</b>	<b>189 (71.0%)</b>	<b>19 (7.1%)</b>	<b>54 (20.3%)</b>	<b>266</b>
Cells marked with * indicate statistical significance with Chi square testing using a Bonferroni corrected $p < 0.05$ threshold				



## RVCSU Conclusions & Positions

- Special exam arrangements for online exams should be better established, made clear to students, and communicated better between RVC departments (for example, but not limited to: the Exams Office, the Advice Centre and year leaders). No student entitled to special exam arrangements should be denied access to these. The accessibility of the exam and learning platforms being used should also be reviewed.
- Communication regarding online exams needs to be improved. Clearer instructions on issues such as what students should be doing, how long to leave for room scans, what is taken into account should they encounter problems, and what accommodations they receive etc should be issued. Students' main concern is around what happens if/when something goes wrong – it should be made clear what protocol is in place for these situations.
- Students are reaching out for support and are not always satisfied with the support being provided. We recommend implementing further training/support for pastoral staff (with mental health challenges caused by the pandemic in mind) and further resourcing of key student support services.
- Mental health and pandemic-induced financial concerns are more widespread than perhaps realised. Clearer direction of students to support and easier access to this support is needed. For example, shortening lengthy and exhausting student support fund applications. We feel that it would be appreciated by students to receive a more formal communication acknowledging the challenges they have and continue to be faced with – not just those associated with changing course content.
- In line with the financial implications that our students have been faced with over the last year, we call for tuition fees to be frozen for existing international students so not to add to the financial pressures they are currently under.
- Due to the high proportion of students experiencing issues with Proctorio, and the many reports of problems with hardware functionality once Proctorio is installed, RVCSU opposes the use of Proctorio software for online exam proctoring. We feel that the College should be using its influence to address the issue of exam proctoring with the RCVS and seeking alternatives for those courses that are not under RCVS or other official regulations.
- The College needs to recognise how current systems are discriminating against disadvantaged students and urgently put in place measures to prevent this. For example, but not limited to: those who require special exam arrangements or have a specific learning difference, those who may not have access to required hardware or internet connection (or have multiple home pressures on bandwidth), and those who have adverse home environments for exam conditions.





## Appendix 1 – Survey Questions



Online surveys

### RVCSU Student Experience Survey (copy)

Showing 0 of 0 responses

Showing **all** responses

Showing **all** questions

1 What course are you on?

*No responses*

2 What year are you in?

Gateway	0
Year 1	0
Year 2	0
Year 3	0
Year 4	0
Year 5	0
Year 6	0
Intercalated	0
GAB	0
Other	0

2.a If you selected Other, please specify:

*No responses*

3 Have you approached the College or SU for support during this academic year so far?

Yes	0
No	0



3.a If so, which of the following?

Course leader	0
Year head	0
Tutor or other pastoral support figure	0
Exams Office	0
Advice Centre	0
Course rep	0
The SU directly	0
Other	0

*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)*

3.a.i If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

3.b How often have you contacted them?

One service/individual once	0
Multiple services/individuals once	0
One service/individual more than once	0
Multiple services/individuals more than once each	0
Other	0

3.b.i If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

3.c Did you feel you had adequate support?



Yes		0
No		0
Other		0

**3.c.i** If you selected Other, please specify:

*No responses*

**4** How far do you agree with the following statements:

**4.1** I feel confident that I can achieve my learning outcomes in the current mode of course delivery

Strongly agree		0
Agree		0
Neither agree nor disagree		0
Disagree		0
Strongly disagree		0
Not applicable		0

*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)*

**4.2** I am satisfied with the communication from the College during the pandemic

Strongly agree		0
Agree		0
Neither agree nor disagree		0
Disagree		0
Strongly disagree		0
Not applicable		0

*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)*

**5** Have you faced additional living costs or reduced income this academic year due to the



pandemic?

Additional living costs | 0

Reduced income | 0

Neither | 0

*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)*

**6** Do you feel any additional stress about online exams compared to in-person exams?

No additional stress | 0

Mild additional stress | 0

Moderate additional stress | 0

Extreme additional stress | 0

I am not taking online exams  
for my course | 0

Other | 0

**6.a** If you selected Other, please specify:

*No responses*

**7** Have you taken any proctored online exams this academic year?

Yes | 0

No | 0

**7.a** Did you encounter any of the following problems?



No problems were experienced	0
Connectivity issues	0
Timezone issues	0
Proctorio software issues	0
Learn software issues	0
Difficulty receiving/hot receiving special exam arrangements/required accommodations	0
Poor College communication regarding your exams	0
Other	0

*Multi answer: Percentage of respondents who selected each answer option (e.g. 100% would represent that all this question's respondents chose that option)*

7.a.i If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses

7.a.ii When was your problem resolved?

Before the exam began	0
During the exam, within ten minutes	0
During the exam, within thirty minutes	0
During the exam, before the end of the exam	0
It was not resolved before the exam ended	0
It was not resolved at all	0
Other	0

7.a.ii.a If you selected Other, please specify:

No responses



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**7.a.iii** Were you satisfied with the resolution of your problem?

Yes		0
No		0

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**8** Would you like to provide us with any additional information on any of these topics?

*No responses*