

## Foundation Degree in Counselling : Student Survey (March 2009)

Hi, my name is Frank Williamson. I work for the Western Vocational Lifelong Learning Network (WVLLN) as a Progression Coordinator and I am based in the Education Support Unit at the University of Bristol. I have particular responsibilities for supporting this Foundation Degree and its students and staff; this survey is a pilot exploration of views from you, the first student group going through the programme. Your evidence will help in the evaluation and further development of the course and also looks to the future so that the BSc top-up programme addresses your needs, wishes and hopes.

As my job lasts until July 2011, I will be alongside you until you are in your final 'year' of study and research. I think the most relevant experience in a long academic career is probably my 7 years as Director of Student Affairs at Marjons, (or University College Plymouth, St Mark and St John, to give it its present title), in which I led and managed all elements of Student Services, including the Counselling team, until 2006.

I have the backing of all the relevant staff of the University and the College for this work and I guarantee that the findings of this survey will be anonymised, i.e. only presented in aggregate form to those involved with the programme's content and delivery ... and of course to any of you who are interested!

My contact details: [f.williamson@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:f.williamson@bristol.ac.uk) or 0117 3314223 (direct line)

The survey should only take about 15 minutes; **please return it, SEALED AND SIGNED in the envelope provided**, to your **tutor** today or next week, or to **Louise Chalice**, your new Programme Administrator at the College.

**Very many thanks, in anticipation of your help!**

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**Please tick** alongside the answer **closest to your views** for each question; **add** comments, where you wish, in the spaces provided or on the back sheet

**Before you began your course, in 2007 or just recently:**

1. Which source(s) of pre-course information did you see or attend?  
How helpful were they? Please **tick** at appropriate place 'on the dots'!

<b>Source</b>	<b>Very helpful.....Not helpful</b>
College prospectus	.....
University promotional event	.....
Website: College	.....
University	.....
Information session	.....
Promotional leaflet	.....
Other – please specify	.....



Please give reasons for your selections in 7, 8, and 9 ...

10 Are there any specific issues, positive or negative, you wish to raise, about the regulations, administration or delivery of your course so far?

11 How long do you now intend to study this subject? If this is different than your answer to Q 6 above, please explain

**If, and only if, you are planning to proceed to the BSc top-up:**  
(but please turn over for final question and provide name)

12 Would you regard it as 'a good thing' to study alongside students on other BSc programmes, for at least some elements of the teaching?

Yes

No

Why?.....

13 How long do you think the top-up should be? (N.B. At least half of the programme would likely be supervised research or written-up reflective practice, meaning that attendance requirements would be much less than for 'taught modules'; such independent study, however, could require a longer period for ideas to mature or for data collection). Please **tick one** of the options below.

2 semesters

3 semesters

4 semesters

14 Do you think there should be a minimum level of performance on the Foundation degree, say 50% average, to increase the likelihood of successful completion of the BSc? Please give reasons for your opinions.

15 Are there any particular themes or topics you feel should be included in the top-up programme? (Be as general or specific as you like)

Are there any other concerns or issues you wish to raise regarding any of the questions or topics covered in the survey? (Or any things I have not covered [well enough]!)

\*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\*\*\*Name.....Date.....\*\*\*\*\*

Space for comments or additions on previous answers:

## Foundation Degree Student Survey: Findings

**(25 responses – 37 distributed and 2 absentees)**

**Response rate**: approximately 68%

See attached survey form for questions asked

**Q1 : Pre-Course Information Sources**: (ticks on a scale-scored 4 3 2 1 0 according to placing on scale, with higher scores being more helpful).

	<b>Mentions</b>	<b>Average 'Score'</b>
College Prospectus	16	3.06
University Promotion Event	7	1.43
College website	9	1.88
University Website	10	2.10
Information session	12	2.59
Promotional leaflet	10	2.50
<b>Others:</b>		
University of Bristol staff	3	3.00
Course Tutor	3	3.33
Newspaper advert	1	4.00

The few 'free text' responses (4) were negative: college website-"inaccurate" regarding financial information; staff not helpful enough on Broadband, nor accurate about financial support either.

### **Q2 : Worries or Obstacles**

Three respondents ticked none of the options. Of the remaining 22, many ticked multiple options, summing to:

<b>Worries or Obstacles</b>	<b>Ticks</b>
Finance (often specified to "funding" applications)	16
Other commitments (frequently childcare/full-time job)	10
Fear regarding academic standards	13
So long since previous study	12
Time or travel constraints	6
Relevance to future work	5
Worries about interview	5
Appropriateness of previous qualifications/experience	9
No responses to "other" optional choice	0

### **Q3 : Responses to the interview process:**

Uniformly positive: even when “worrying” ticked, generally alongside positive words; frequently multiple ticks.

<b>Key words</b>	<b>Ticks</b>
Straightforward	9
Pleasant	10
Worrying	3
Reassuring	16
Informative	15

Free text additions – rare - but again uniformly positive:

- “not applicable - no worries”
- surprisingly positive
- “well-organised and professional”
- very ‘person-centred’

### **Q4 : On and pre-course information, paperwork and organisation**

More of a mixture – more responses were positive, (some extremely so), while a substantial minority found fault, organisationally and regarding paperwork, centred around being the first cohort, frequent changes, including a few vehemently expressed objections to changed deadlines or inaccurate or changing financial information; a small number felt more help could have been given regarding Blackboard.

Positive responses:

Excellent paperwork and handbooks (12); generally good (3); special thanks to administrator at CoBC (2).

More negative responses:

Three responses commented on apparently poor communication between the college and the university while a further two thought more help could have been given regarding applying for funding.

### **Q5 : Reasons for starting course**

Three-quarters of the responses were “to gain further (and professional) qualification in counselling”; other responses (usually mentioned by 3 or 4) were:

- Augmenting parallel work and/or experience.
- “Bettering myself for future”.
- Love learning about self and others.

Two respondents each stressed overcoming low self esteem and/or past issues, changing career path to counselling and the attractiveness of gaining a University of Bristol degree.

### **Q6 : How long did you intend to study?**

(This proved to be a badly phrased question as responses sometimes ticked multiple stages or gave mixtures of time and stage!)

Certificate only – 2 – (N.B. that approximately 10-15 starters have either stopped and/or taken certificate option OR have suspended their studies OR withdrew before the certificate programme ended).

FD only – 11;

BSc.or further 12, some of whom specified that this would be after a gap of 1 year or more.

Note, however, that five-sixths of all respondents answered questions 12-14, signified as being only for those proceeding to the BSc top-up!

### **On-course questions**

#### **Q7 : Which units most enjoyed?**

Almost all (22 of 25) implied or directly said that they had enjoyed all elements of the programme; even though a few had had worries about some elements (usually “academic”, “essays” and “theoretical approaches”), uniformly these were qualified with subsequent enjoyment and achievement!

Particular units/elements highlighted included

- Self-development/personal development (group) (11)
- Theoretical approaches (in total or specific) (8)
- Practical/skills/placement (8)
- Presentations (4)

#### **Q8 : Units/elements enjoyed least?**

Very few responses in this category, with only “essays or assignments or presentations were scary” receiving 4 responses; the remainder were interesting but dominantly idiosyncratic. Where these singular (or at most double) responses echo earlier concerns (not by the same respondent) they perhaps deserve mention – Blackboard availability and help; support for disability; disjointed timetabling generated by half-terms and videoing task.

#### **Q9 : Units/elements providing greatest benefit**

Echoing responses to question 7, but even more positive and praise-giving, especially to “all - but self-development notably”, “essays” and “theory basis”.

#### **Q10 : Regulations, administration and delivery of course - issues?**

Limited responses, again summing to an almost-equal share of positive and negative comments. The positive dwelt on “really enjoying” and “excellent

tutors and support”, while a wider range of negative responses generally received only 1 or 2 mentions. Exceptions here, receiving 4 or more mentions, (from the 25 respondents), highlighted frequent changes (as this is the first cohort through), and some consequent confusion. A plea for college help with finding placements, while from only a minority (3), perhaps deserves note.

**Q11 : Now, studying for how long** (Phrasing, as for question 6, may have been confusing).

Less than half respondents answered this, but of the 12 doing so, 5 had lengthened their intended study time, so that now almost all responses indicated intention to do the BSc top-up, albeit with caveats about workload, cost and/or deferment.

**Questions regarding elements of the BSc top-up (21 responses/25)**

**Q12 : Some study alongside others?**

People responded either ‘in principle’ – the great majority - or specifically to do with “small group work preferred”, all of the ‘negatives’ mentioning the latter.

Yes	13
No	3
Not Sure	5

**Q13 : Length of top up?**

2 semesters	2
3 semesters	13
4 semesters	5
Not sure	1

**Q14 : Should there be a minimum level of FD performance?**  
(50% average used illustratively)

Yes	13
No	5
Not sure	3

**Q15 Particular ingredients of top-up?**

Very few responses here. Of those who responded, only “continuation of personal development group”, and “more research papers” featured twice. Several responses to question 16 “other issues or concerns”, however, raised issues about the top-up, including – “no exams, please” (x4), “no more contact than now” (x7), “how much will it cost?” (x8), “likely deferment” (x4) and less frequent mentions (2-3) of “where at the University of Bristol, exactly” and “fears about the academic standards required”, from respondents who had

also argued for no minimum standard for BSc entry, other than passing the Foundation Degree.

### Commentary

1. The response rate, while reasonable, was disappointing for me as I had hoped for closer to a census of all the students. The overwhelming impression is of great satisfaction with all pre-course and ongoing teaching, materials and support, with only small minorities being able to articulate complaint or dissatisfaction - with a disparate range of issues.
2. There is, however, widespread uncertainty about the BSc top-up ranging from concerns about length, workload, standards and especially cost, with several of those intending to do it already considering taking time out before attempting it.

At least one (and perhaps all) of the groups had been briefed that I was attending to **give all relevant details** of the top up, rather than seek students' views as input to the decision-making process, so there may be an element of disappointment underlying the uncertainty!

FRANK WILLIAMSON April 2009